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# **Bodies, Selves and Spaces**

*Gendered Experiences of Milanese Urban Settings*

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## Abstract

Research consistently demonstrates that urban environments are neither neutral nor equally accessible to everyone, as they originate in uneven power relations and so are structured around exclusionary practices that disproportionately affect women's sense of safety, mobility, and belonging (Kern, 2020). Although feminist scholarship has long shown that women's fear of public space is socially produced and that gender-based violence predominantly occurs during the day, in familiar and populated environments, or behind closed doors, women continue to report heightened vulnerability primarily in unfamiliar public spaces and at night (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Condon, Lieber & Maillachon, 2007). Addressing this discrepancy between women's socially structured fears in public space and the actual circumstances under which gender-based violence occurs, this dissertation investigates how women experience public spaces in Milan, Italy, with a comparative focus on the areas surrounding Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi. Grounded in intersectional feminist theory and informed by multidisciplinary perspectives, the study adopts a participatory feminist methodology aimed at producing situated knowledges able to challenge dominant gender-space paradigms. Data collection involved one year of ethnographic observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews with 38 participants, and focus groups structured around participatory methods such as collective walks, photovoice, photo-elicitation, community and emotional mapping.

The dissertation shows that women's urban lives are shaped less by isolated episodes of violence than by ordinary, socially sedimented forms of anticipatory labour and embodied adjustment, including changes in routes, pace, timing, dress, and companionship. It further shows how discomfort and belonging are coproduced through infrastructures, temporal rhythms, surveillance regimes, moral economies, and embodied negotiations in highly securitised urban environments. Conceptually, the dissertation develops two principal formulations (bodies as portals and the self in motion) while treating fear as a transversal relational orientation that binds bodies, infrastructures, rhythms, and moral economies. Methodologically, it demonstrates both the value and the frictions of participatory feminist research. Its practical-political contribution lies in rethinking urban safety beyond surveillance and control, towards care-centred approaches attentive to reciprocity, legibility, presence, and shared responsibility.

In this research, "women" refers to all those who identify as women, were socialised as women, or were assigned female at birth.



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## Introduction: At the Threshold

The city is not a neutral space. It is a gendered terrain, shaped by power, structured through emotions, and navigated through embodied practices of resistance. For women, public space often feels like a contested field that must be tactically negotiated, emotionally managed, and physically endured. Our freedom of movement, especially when walking alone, is not restricted by formal laws, but by a web of invisible rules: we alter routes, stick to well-lit streets, carry keys in our fists, avoid distractions, forgo leisure activities, avoid listening to music, or simply stay home. These behaviours are not exceptional but habitual, embedded in the fabric of everyday life and rarely questioned. What many of us feel when accessing or crossing public spaces is so common and pervasive that it often goes unnoticed, normalized to the point of invisibility. As emphasized in the 2021 International Action Network for Gender Equity and Law (IANGEL) policy-oriented human rights report titled “Women, Cultural Rights, and Public Spaces”, public spaces are not only sites of transit or safety concerns, but central to cultural rights, civic belonging, and community participation. When women are constrained or excluded from accessing these spaces due to fear, violence, or urban design that disregards their needs, their ability to fully participate in public and cultural life is severely limited. This framing positions access to inclusive and safe public spaces not only as a safety issue, but as a human rights imperative.

A powerful illustration of this condition emerged in late 2020, when the prompt “What would you do if men didn’t exist for 24 hours?” began circulating widely as a social media trend, spreading rapidly across TikTok, Twitter and Instagram. The responses (e.g. walk alone at night, wear what one wants, go running with headphones on, spend time in nature, dance freely) were notable not for their peculiarity, but because they were among the most common and widely shared. They revealed how basic freedoms are regularly curtailed by the embodied awareness of potential male violence, pointing to an informal curfew that quietly governs women’s daily lives. The virality of the prompt underscored how fear is not exceptional but widely shared, highlighting the structural nature of gendered insecurity in urban life. This logic is starkly dramatized in the British dystopian TV series *Curfew*, broadcast on Paramount+ in 2024, in which men are subjected to a nightly state-imposed curfew to ensure women’s safety. The show exposes the extremes to which securitisation can be taken and raises critical questions about control, surveillance, and gendered governance of urban life, offering a dystopian mirror to the informal curfews that quietly shape women’s everyday routines. Though fictional, *Curfew* serves as a cultural lens through which to examine how the logics of gendered safety can reproduce systems of exclusion and control rather than dismantling them.

Strongly shaped by experiences of catcalling, surveillance and sexualization, and fuelled by a media climate saturated with stories of harassment and femicide, women’s relationship with public space is frequently compromised by discomfort and unease (Day, 1999). This pervasiveness should not, however, be read as evidence that women’s experiences of urban public space have gone entirely unstudied, nor that locally grounded efforts to render them visible are wholly absent. On the contrary, feminist, urban, and criminological scholarship has repeatedly shown that gender is one of the most recurrent dimensions shaping how public spaces are lived and perceived (Polko & Kimic, 2022), that women’s fear operates as a “gender specific tax” on mobility and everyday freedom (Bastomski & Smith, 2017), and that the masculinization of space remains largely normalized and insufficiently challenged (Siwach, 2020). At the same time, mapping projects, policy-oriented interventions, and local initiatives have increasingly sought to document women’s experiences and translate them into urban recommendations. Yet, as Criado-Perez (2019) reminds us, visibility does not necessarily amount to adequate knowledge: what persists is less a complete lack of information than a tendency for women’s experiences to be rendered partial, fragmented, or too easily dismissed.

Planned and built predominantly by men, and therefore deeply reflective of the social norms and values of the societies that produced them, cities cannot be understood as neutral environments



(Kern, 2020). Rather, they are sites marked by uneven power relations, oppressive socio-political structures, and exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021). They materially and symbolically display masculine power, reinforcing patriarchal cultures not only through spectacular forms of exclusion, but also through the ordinary spatial arrangements, institutional logics, and everyday expectations that shape who can move, linger, appear, and belong. The extent to which urban landscapes participate in the reproduction of gender inequality therefore demands further scrutiny, framed as a social issue embedded within a long-established history of cultural attitudes and spatial practices (Kern, 2020). Women's everyday urban experiences can thus be understood as unfolding at a threshold: a liminal condition marked by the constant negotiation of security and insecurity, belonging and estrangement, autonomy and constraint. As feminist geographers remind us, tensions are not only sites of restriction but also of potential opening: places where being "at the limit" can generate new ways of perceiving and knowing (Ahmed, 2004; Rose, 1993). The threshold is therefore both oppressive and generative, a lived space of tension that exposes the contradictions of urban life while also holding the possibility of inhabiting the city otherwise. Capturing how women's embodied presence in public space is suspended between restriction and possibility, exclusion and participation, is a key point of departure for the arguments developed in this dissertation and so will recur in the findings chapters.

These tensions also reveal the limits of dominant urban approaches to safety. Surveillance systems, lighting strategies, and policing practices may superficially address visible risks, yet they consistently fail to engage with the deeper, more insidious everyday dynamics that generate and sustain fear (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020; Pitch, 2004; Tulumello, 2017). Within neoliberal urban governance, safety is frequently conflated with security, privileging reactive and control-oriented measures over genuine social inclusion and recognition (D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Lysova, 2022)<sup>1</sup>. While women's fears often revolve around threats of male violence, the dominant frameworks through which urban safety is defined and managed remain shaped by historically male-dominated institutions, whose perspectives continue to neglect or misrepresent women's lived experiences (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Darke, 1998; Kern, 2020). Consequently, the very structures claiming to ensure protection often reproduce the forms of exclusion, invisibility, and misrecognition that engender fear in the first place (Siwach, 2020).

As Kern (2020) notes, fear is not simply a reaction to space but a way of being in it, a mode of sensing and surviving an urban environment that has not been designed with women in mind. This understanding of space as both material and affective highlights the need to view women's exclusion not only as a problem of access, but also as a problem of recognition. This becomes particularly evident when considering that gender-based violence does not occur exclusively in shadowy alleyways or so-called "unsafe" neighbourhoods. Several sociological and criminological studies have reported that women feel most vulnerable in public spaces, especially when alone, at night, or in unfamiliar places, while many gender-based crimes in fact occur during the day, in familiar and populated settings, or behind closed doors (Condon, Lieber & Maillochon, 2007; Pitch, 2004). What does this discrepancy between the social structuring of women's fears and the actual circumstances in which gender-based violence occurs reveal about the broader social production of discomfort in public space?

This dissertation departs from the assumption that women's experiences of urban space are shaped not only by discrete episodes of violence or fear, but by a broader spectrum of discomforts, negotiations, and spatial constraints that are socially produced and historically sedimented. Fear is

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between *safety* and *security* is analytically important throughout this dissertation, even though Italian does not provide an equally clear lexical separation. This linguistic void can be considered quite telling when looking at how questions of care, liveability, and recognition are repeatedly folded back into logics of control, surveillance, and responsabilisation.



therefore approached here not as a singular or isolated emotional reaction, but as a socially constructed and spatially mediated everyday affective condition encompassing embodied sensations, anticipations, and behavioural adaptations in response to gendered power dynamics. While fear may be an ordinary affective response to any setting, within gendered urban dynamics it acquires an almost punitive force, turning back on women by regulating movement, appearance, and access to urban life. Rather than quantifying fear, the research traces its spatial genealogies and entanglements with identity, visibility, and urban belonging, while attending to how race, class, migration status, and bodily normativity complicate the ways discomfort is lived and negotiated.

The term “women” refers to all those who identify as women, were socialised as women, or were assigned female at birth. The study engaged 38 participants ranging from their mid-twenties to early sixties, encompassing different occupational backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, and relationships to Milan, including long-term residents, newcomers, and commuters. While the majority were Italian, the group also included participants with mixed heritages or migrant backgrounds, as well as different embodied and relational positions from which public space was experienced and negotiated. These differences are treated not as secondary variations, but as constitutive of how discomfort, mobility, and belonging are lived in the city. Rather than treating women’s experiences as anecdotal, this dissertation follows feminist commitments to situated knowledge and care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), recognising them as epistemologically valuable and central to understanding the gendered city.

This research is situated in Milan, a global city renowned for its finance, fashion, and universities, yet also marked by uneven redevelopment, gentrification, housing precarity, and securitised urban planning. Historically shaped by deep socioeconomic divides, post-industrial transformations, and more recent dynamics of surveillance and control, Milan provides a critical setting in which to examine the gendered production of urban space. The deliberate selection of Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi enables a grounded, comparative analysis of how urban form, temporal rhythms, and institutional logics shape women’s embodied experiences in distinct yet interconnected ways. Although both stations serve as key mobility nodes, their divergent architectural histories, degrees of securitisation, and surrounding urban ecologies reflect broader tensions within Milan’s contemporary urban governance. Their centrality, high foot traffic, and symbolic resonance within Milan’s urban imaginary render them critical loci where visibility, mobility, and vulnerability converge. They exemplify the contradictions that animate the city’s transformation: the coexistence of beautification and marginalisation, intensified surveillance and infrastructural neglect, urban marketing, and feminist resistance.

## Questions Along the Way

In this dissertation, identity and self are not conceived as fixed attributes but as relational and processual constructs, continuously shaped through social interactions and spatial contexts. They are coproduced at the intersection of individual performances and broader structures of power, with space operating not merely as a backdrop but as an active medium of subjectification, negotiation, and resistance. Emotions and affective attachments are integral to this dynamic, binding experiences of belonging, exclusion, and recognition to specific sites. Identity and self thus emerge as dynamic and socio-spatially situated, reflecting and contesting intersecting hierarchies of gender, class, race, and ability. Space serves as the key orienting concept of this research, grounding both its theoretical framework and empirical analysis. Each research question is therefore derived from this spatial lens, interrogating how space shapes, produces, and mediates social life materially, symbolically, and affectively. More precisely, this inquiry is guided by the following overarching research question:

*How do women experience public spaces in Milan, Italy?*



This main question is explored in dialogue with four more specific and interconnected sub-questions that move from the body to the self, from practices of regulation to acts of resistance, with fear operating as a transversal thread linking experiences of mobility, visibility, and belonging in urban public space:

- How are women's everyday interactions with public spaces and their sense of self related?
- How are women's bodies implicated in their relationship with public spaces?
- In what ways do women adapt or resist societal expectations in public spaces?
- How and why do women experience fear in public spaces, and what role does it play in shaping their relationships with these spaces?

## Outlining the Path

Despite decades of feminist analysis exploring the intricate relationships between women, fear, violence, and public space, there remains an urgent need to reclaim urban spaces not only symbolically, but through the tangible and sustained presence of marginalised bodies. Beyond the act itself of walking the streets of Milan with the participants, central to this reclamation is a fundamental rethinking of dominant understandings of security that moves beyond frameworks reliant on control, surveillance, and visibility. To this end, this dissertation aims to unpack and critically engage with the complex interplay of power dynamics, spatial structures, embodied emotions, infrastructures, and everyday practices through which women's experiences of urban space are continuously negotiated and produced. A core ambition of this research is to bridge the persistent discrepancy between institutional perceptions of safety and women's actual experiences of navigating public environments. Institutional responses typically revolve around tangible measures (e.g. increased lighting, surveillance technology, intensified policing...) which, although superficially reassuring, frequently fail to resonate with women's lived necessities. Rather than simply critiquing this disconnect, the study seeks to articulate a deeper, more situated, and more holistic understanding of urban life through which safety may be rethought otherwise.

However, that women's experiences of fear, constraint, and self-regulation in urban environments have long mattered to feminist scholarship is indisputable, just as local initiatives have increasingly sought to render such experiences more visible and actionable. What remains less questioned is how fear, discomfort, and belonging are coproduced in everyday life through the intersection of infrastructures, temporal rhythms, surveillance regimes, moral economies, and situated embodied practices, especially within highly infrastructural and securitised urban environments. Thus, the contribution of this dissertation does not lie in adding yet more evidence that women fear public space but rather in shifting the terms of the debate: away from approaches primarily concerned with identifying unsafe places or the visible conditions through which women's safety is conventionally assessed, and towards the ways in which gendered insecurity takes shape, is learned and negotiated, and becomes sedimented in bodies, routes, rhythms, and urban relations.

In doing so, the dissertation also locates itself within a broader conversation in feminist geographies on fear, public space, and women's mobility. Within this field, fear has long been examined not simply as a reaction to crime, but as a gendered condition that shapes access to the city, bodily comportment, everyday navigation, and the boundaries of belonging (Kern, 2020; Pain, 1997; Valentine, 1989). Foundational work on women's fear of violence and spatial restriction has progressively been expanded by approaches attentive to affect, emotional geographies, visibility, surveillance, and the relational production of space, showing that fear is not merely an individual



feeling but a socially produced and spatially distributed mode of inhabiting urban life (Ahmed, 2004; Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Pain, 2001). More recent feminist work has further demonstrated how emotions can function as forms of political knowledge and as methodological resources for making visible the uneven architectures of urban power, particularly through participatory and intersectional mappings of everyday experience (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013; Serrano Santos, 2024). This project builds on that body of work while shifting the analytical focus toward the coproduction of fear, discomfort, and belonging in highly infrastructural and securitised urban environments, asking not only how fear limits women's mobility, but how it becomes embedded in rhythms, routes, embodied negotiations, and infrastructures of care.

These contributions unfold across four interconnected levels: at the core of the dissertation lies a conceptual-empirical argument, sustained by methodological innovation and extended through practical-political implications. Conceptually, the dissertation develops two principal formulations (bodies as portals and the self in motion) through which women's embodied negotiations of urban space become analytically legible. Across these conceptual and empirical threads, fear operates as a transversal relational orientation linking bodies, infrastructures, rhythms, and moral economies. Empirically, the study does not address "the city" in general terms, but focuses comparatively on two emblematic mobility nodes, Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi, read as dense and contradictory spaces in which visibility, mobility, surveillance, vulnerability, classed infrastructures, racialised encounters, and practices of care converge. This focus was therefore propaedeutic in investigating how insecurity is produced, inhabited, and negotiated within urban spaces that are symbolically central, intensely traversed, and governed through securitised and image-oriented logics.

Supporting this conceptual-empirical core there is also a methodological contribution. Guided by feminist epistemologies committed to relationality, reflexivity, situated knowledge, and care, this dissertation integrates one year of ethnographic fieldwork with semi-structured interviews, repeated focus groups, photovoice, photo-elicitation, emotional and community mapping, and other collaborative practices of inquiry. These methods are chosen not only for their capacity to generate detailed and context-rich material, but also for their potential to capture the spatial, affective, and everyday dimensions of urban life that more conventional approaches often flatten or overlook. Crucially, the dissertation does not present feminist participation as an uncomplicated methodological virtue. Rather, it critically reflects on the frictions, asymmetries, exclusions, adjustments, and temporal demands that participation itself entails, thereby contributing not simply an example of feminist urban methodology in practice, but also a reflection on what such methods make visible, what they cannot fully resolve, and what kinds of knowledge they enable when embodied experience and collective interpretation are taken into account.

Finally, the dissertation also makes a practical-political contribution. Through its exploration of women's embodied negotiations of urban space, the study seeks not only to generate nuanced academic insights but also to open a different horizon for urban policy and practice. Dominant responses to urban insecurity continue to treat safety as a problem of visible public disorder, to be managed through lighting, surveillance, and control, thereby obscuring the ways in which violence and fear are normalised across the porous boundaries of public and private life (Condon, Lieber & Maillochon, 2007). By foregrounding women's everyday tactics of negotiation, resistance, and imagination, this research expands the very notion of urban belonging and challenges us to rethink what a safe and inclusive city might look like. Its practical value lies not in prescribing more light, more surveillance, or more control, but in showing how women's ordinary spatial tactics may be read as design briefs for different urban futures in which safety emerges through reciprocity, legibility, presence, and shared responsibility rather than through intensified responsabilisation imposed on women themselves.



Milan matters here not only as the empirical setting of this research, but as a particularly revealing site within an Italian debate on gendered urban inequality that remains more unevenly developed, more fragmented across disciplines and initiatives, and less firmly institutionalised than the international scholarship from which this dissertation draws. It is within this partial and still consolidating terrain that the dissertation positions its contribution. In recent years, a range of locally grounded initiatives and applied projects on women's safety in Milan—including, for example, the work of *Sex & the City* (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021)<sup>2</sup>—have contributed to making women's mobility and safety in the city more legible, producing important diagnostic tools, mappings, and policy recommendations. This dissertation builds on that local ecology of feminist urban intervention, yet departs from it in scale, duration, and analytical purpose. Although partly inspired by those initiatives, it does not take the form of a short-term consultation, a citywide mapping exercise, or a survey-based assessment. Rather, it develops a long-duration, comparative, and interpretive inquiry that privileges depth over breadth, process over snapshot, and theory-building over consultation. In this sense, the project is concerned not only with intervention, but with theorising what shorter and more applied initiatives often cannot fully explore: the embodied, affective, infrastructural, rhythmic, and moral production of fear and belonging in everyday urban life.

These concerns are developed across seven chapters that guide the reader from theory to context, methodology, empirical findings, and conclusions. Following this introduction, Chapter 1 maps the conceptual relations between space, self, identity, and power in urban settings through dialoguing with interactionist and affective perspectives. Chapter 2 centres feminist spatial theory, elaborating how gendered embodiment and affect shape urban experience and how feminist counter-practices contest exclusionary urban orders. Chapter 3 situates the research in Milan, with a focus on Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi, tracing their architectural histories, governance logics, symbolic roles as mobility nodes and contested public realms, and their location within a broader local ecology of initiatives on gendered mobility and urban safety. Chapter 4 details the research design and epistemology, as well as the qualitative and participatory toolkit employed alongside questions of ethics, positionality, analysis, and the frictions of participation.

Chapters 5 and 6 develop the empirical findings in two movements centred respectively on bodies and selves. Chapter 5 examines how women's bodies become sites of hypervisibility and vulnerability, how internalised regulation disciplines routes, dress, and comportment, and how everyday tactics of negotiation and resistance reconfigure urban space, culminating in the notion of bodies as portals of urban epistemology and change. Chapter 6 advances a feminist rhythmanalysis of situated choreographies of the self as in motion, treating temporal boundaries, affective memoryscapes and conditional belonging as co-constitutive through classed infrastructures and moral geographies. Chapter 7 brings these threads together through the dissertation's two principal conceptual formulations (bodies as portals and the self in motion) while treating fear as a transversal relational orientation that binds bodies, infrastructures, rhythms, and moral economies across the study. It also reflects on the dissertation's methodological and practical-political implications, showing how the Milan case supports a rethinking of urban safety beyond surveillance and control, and towards care-centred approaches grounded in reciprocity, legibility, presence, and shared responsibility.

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<sup>2</sup> To deepen see “Ch.3-Research Background and Concept”



## Chapter 1

### Space, Identity and Power in Urban Settings: An Overview

Urban settings are intricate and dynamic tapestries woven from the interlacing threads of space, identity and power. These elements do not exist in isolation; rather, they interact to shape the lived experiences of individuals and communities. This inaugural conceptual chapter examines the relationships among these core concepts within the social world and provides the theoretical basis for the dissertation. In recent decades, the social sciences have increasingly foregrounded space as an active dimension of social life rather than as a neutral or passive backdrop, showing how it is continuously produced and reproduced through cultural practices, political forces, economic imperatives, and everyday interactions (Foucault, 1977; Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 1994). This reorientation has encouraged sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and urban scholars to investigate how inequalities become inscribed in the built environment, how affect and emotion shape lived spatial experience, and how acts of resistance may rework spaces once deemed fixed or unchangeable (Ahmed, 2004; Thrift, 1999; Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000).

The discussion unfolds through four interconnected moves that clarify how space, identity, and power are co-constituted in urban settings. It first clarifies the concept of space through Lefebvre's account of the production of space (1974), Foucault's understanding of space as a medium of power and discipline (1977), and Massey's relational and processual conceptualisation of spatiality (1994). It then turns to identity formation, drawing on Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) while bringing them into conversation with Foucault (1988) and Massey (1994) in order to show how selves are negotiated within spatial settings rather than outside them. If the third section examines power and governance in urban space through planning, zoning, and surveillance (Foucault, 1977; Harvey, 2006; Lefebvre, 1968), the final section narrows the focus to neoliberal urban transformations in the Global North, particularly where redevelopment, commodification, and selective inclusion reshape the conditions of access, comfort, and visibility (Bauman, 2005, 2006; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Harvey, 2006; Kern, 2020; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). Demonstrating how spatial experiences are integral to the construction, negotiation and contestation of identity and power, the chapter provides an overarching analytical lens attentive both to embodied and subjective experiences and to the socio-political structures that configure them. This integrated perspective not only deepens our understanding of urban spaces as arenas of both conformity and resistance, but also sets the stage for exploring the perception of public space through a gender lens.

#### On the Concept of Space in Social Sciences

Challenging any assumption of a purely neutral or static spatial backdrop, this section examines how the concept of "space" is charged with social meaning as it captures the interplay between social structures, power relations, and everyday lived experiences. To do so, "space" is first considered as a social construct and the argument will build on Lefebvre's demonstration of how economic and cultural practices are woven into the built environment (1974), Foucault's idea of power relations underlying the design and function of spaces (1977; Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986) and Massey's emphasis on the fluid, networked character of space showing how local realities emerge through global economic, political, and cultural flows (1994). In this way, the interplay of these theorists reveals that space is neither empty nor passive, but actively shapes (and is shaped by) social processes. In weaving these theories together, this section further clarifies why "space", rather than "place", is the primary analytic lens of the chapter. This conceptual choice matters for the dissertation because it allows belonging, exclusion, and everyday negotiation to be read not as secondary layers



added to space, but as part of the very processes through which urban space is made, inhabited, and contested (Ahmed, 2004; Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977).

Despite the longstanding conceptual distinction between “space” and “place”, for the purpose of this study, the term “space” is employed even while foregrounding questions of embodiment, belonging, and lived experience -concepts that are often associated with the term “place”. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) notes, “place” is typically seen as “space” infused with meaning, memory, or emotional attachment. In Tuan’s framework (1977), “space” can appear abstract or undifferentiated until it becomes charged with personal or collective significance, at which point it becomes “place”. This distinction sets up a dynamic interplay between the seemingly abstract concept of space and the more tangible, emotional sense of place. This division between “space” and “place” underscores that emotional and symbolic dimensions are central to understanding how individuals and groups relate to their environments (Day, 1999; Valentine, 1989). However, scholars such as Henri Lefebvre (1974) and Doreen Massey (1994) complicate this binary arguing that space is never merely a neutral, unformed, featureless container that only later takes on meaning. Instead, it is actively produced by social relations, power dynamics, and everyday practices. In other words, the experiences of belonging, attachment, or memory that scholars associate with place can be situated within a spatial framework without relegating them to a secondary layer.

Lefebvre’s seminal contribution (1974) lies in dismantling the notion of space as a static backdrop for social action. Contending that any examination of spatial phenomena must look at the broader social relations that define it, Lefebvre (1974) distinguishes between three different dimensions of space: the conceived space (*espace conçu*), the lived space (*espace vécu*) and the perceived space (*espace perçu*). Conceived space represents dominant ideologies and the abstract realm of planning, policy, and design. Not by chance, scholars have shown how urban design and planning often embed societal values and reinforce exclusionary norms -for instance, in feminist urban studies the city has been described as materially and symbolically organised through patriarchal logics that privilege male mobility and visibility (Darke, 1998; Kern, 2020; Spain, 1992). These accounts highlight how conceptions of space can intentionally or unintentionally codify social hierarchies, restricting access and shaping who is recognised as a legitimate subject of the urban. Lived space, by contrast, captures the subjective, emotional, experiential, affective and cultural dimensions of how individuals and communities experience and navigate their urban environments. This processual view is referred to as notion of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1974) and draws attention to the continuous reconfiguration of environments through macro-level structures such as global capitalism, nation-state power, political economies, cultural symbols, policies, architectural designs, and patriarchy as well as micro-level, everyday practices, interactions and routines such as commuting patterns, consumption habits and community gatherings.

Perceived space encompasses the physical and material aspects of a city (and of our lives), such as geographical boundaries, architectural forms, infrastructural layouts and the built environment, which reflect and enforce dominant socio-economic structures. At the same time, perceived space can also be understood not only in its material and sensory dimensions, but as entangled with the imagination of space and with the meanings ascribed by those inhabiting it. From a non-representational perspective, Thrift (1999) and Thrift & Dewsbury (2000) emphasise that space is continuously enacted through habitual sensibilities, atmospheres, and bodily routines. This lens foregrounds the imaginative and affective textures of “perceived space,” drawing attention to how power sediments through micro-practices and how such practices are tactically negotiated in the contingencies of everyday urban life. In this sense, perceived space exceeds the physicality of built environments, encompassing the subtle choreographies of movement, affect, and embodied disposition through which urban subjects sustain, reproduce, or resist dominant spatial orders.

Beyond its material and affective enactment, space is also symbolically inscribed and publicly represented, which is why questions of power remain central to its analysis (Foucault & Miskowicz,



1986; Vacchelli, 2016). Monuments, street art, memorial practices, and brand identities, for instance, function as visible markers of what is celebrated and who is excluded, showing how architectural and representational choices actively shape the social meanings of urban space (D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Vacchelli, 2016). In this framework, grassroots practices such as renaming streets or erecting alternative memorials actively reshape collective understandings of place by contesting dominant narratives and inviting the public to reimagine the cultural and political significance of an area. On this note, Foucault (1977) argued that architectural divisions and spatial arrangements facilitate surveillance and discipline, producing “docile bodies” oriented toward normative conduct. The symbolic dimension of space thus encompasses the narratives, representations, and cultural signs through which physical locations acquire social and political meaning (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). In this respect, Foucault and Miskowiec’s (1986) notion of heterotopias is useful insofar as it captures spaces that mirror, intensify, or unsettle dominant social orders. Through this concept, space therefore makes power visible precisely through such rearrangements of order, belonging, and legitimacy. Prisons, museums, cemeteries, or fairgrounds reveal how spatial arrangements may suspend, invert, or rearticulate ordinary norms of discipline, exclusion, and community.

Doreen Massey’s conceptualization of space (1994) further expands on the dynamic and processual aspects underscored by Lefebvre (1974) and Foucault (1991; 1998; 2002). While Lefebvre reveals how material conditions and ideologies produce space, and Foucault shows how power operates through spatial mechanisms, Massey (1994) contends that space is the product of simultaneous and multiple “interrelations”, of continuous interplays between local, regional, and global forces. Places are seen as “bundles of trajectories” or, better saying, points of convergence for diverse socio-spatial processes, flows of people, capital, technologies, and ideas (Massey, 1994). In other words, rather than viewing any space as isolated, Massey emphasizes its embeddedness in broader networks of social and economic relations and elucidates its physical and symbolic features. In other words, the broader context of transnational migration, uneven development, or media representations of safety and danger can all shape how individuals feel about the physical environments in which they live. Hence, personal or communal attachments are never separate from these larger socio-political and economic processes; rather, they are actively coproduced in tandem with them. This is to say that any given space is a site of negotiation and contestation, rather than a fixed or homogeneous entity, as seemingly discrete environments are actually nodes within networks of social relations, economic flows, and cultural exchanges that extend beyond any given boundary.

Embodied and meaningful experiences thus unfold within -and help to reshape- this relational dynamic, ensuring that no environment remains static or purely “local”. For example, this dynamism can be observed in patterns of urban change and gentrification, where longstanding residents may feel “out of place” in an environment once intimately familiar (Pitch, 2004). As neighbourhoods transform, memories and routines no longer resonate with new symbolic, economic, or aesthetic codes (Pasquali, 2012). Such feelings point to the emotional dimension of space, as well as to the power dynamics that determine who has the right to remain and define an area. Here, we see how the seemingly personal experience of “home” or belonging is entangled with broader forces of displacement and redevelopment. Brought into conversation with structural forces, ideological discourses, and transnational flows that shape local realities, emotions are central in the understanding of space. Embedding our most personal experiences of belonging, identity, and affect within broader power structures and material infrastructures, sensations such as fear, comfort, nostalgia, and pride reveal how feelings mediate human interactions with the environment (Barker, 2009; Craib, 2003). In this sense, the relational nature of space allows us to view emotional attachments, collective memory, and cultural narratives not as separate from the physical environment but as constitutive of it.



To conceptualise space as socially produced therefore means holding together its material, symbolic, affective, and political dimensions (Ahmed, 2004; Foucault, 1977; Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 1994). Space is made through everyday practices, institutional decisions, historical sedimentations, and unequal power relations; at the same time, it is through space that belonging, attachment, exclusion, and conflict become lived and felt (Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). Approached in this way, space is not a passive setting but an active medium through which social life is organised, sensed, and contested (Thrift, 1999; Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000).

## Space and Identity in Social Sciences

Having established space as socially produced and traversed by power, this section turns to identity as a socio-spatial formation. Rather than treating identity as fixed or interior, it is approached here as emerging through interaction, spatial positioning, recognition, and exclusion. In this dissertation, identity is used as the broadest term, while self refers to the situated and interactional sense of oneself, and subjectivity to the more embodied, affective, and power-laden formation of subjects in space<sup>3</sup>. Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) are especially useful for clarifying the interactional dimension of this process, while Foucault (1977; 1988), Massey (1994), and McDowell (1993; 1999) make visible that such negotiations always unfold within uneven spatial arrangements, gendered norms of presence, and relations of power. This perspective is central to the dissertation because it makes it possible to read belonging, discomfort, visibility, and marginalisation not as secondary effects of urban space, but as constitutive of how urban selves are inhabited, recognised, and regulated within it.

In contemporary sociological theory, questions of space and identity have gained renewed attention as scholars seek to unravel how individuals, groups, and societies experience, contest, and transform their environments. A central tenet within social theory is that identity is not fixed but rather formed through dynamic processes of interaction. Early symbolic interactionist approaches (Mead, 1934) emphasize that individuals negotiate their sense of self in relation to others, recognizing that social encounters are crucial for identity construction. Although Mead's (1934) foundational work preceded the explicit spatial focus of current debates, its core insights resonate deeply with how spatial experiences prompt continuous redefinitions of the self. When individuals occupy a particular environment -be it a workplace, a neighbourhood, or a recreational area- they engage with specific social norms and cultural symbols that inform their ideas of who they are and how they ought to act (Mead, 1934). Space thus becomes both an object of interpretation and a medium through which identities are expressed and renegotiated. For instance, individuals may adopt different modes of conduct depending on whether they are in a public park, a private home, or an institutional setting. Each spatial context brings certain expectations, rules, and emotional resonances that shape how people perceive themselves and how they interact with others. This cyclical exchange of meanings underscores Mead's (1934) insight that the self is continuously formed, negotiated, and revised

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<sup>3</sup> These concepts emerge from partly distinct theoretical debates and are not treated as interchangeable across the literature. Interactionist and dramaturgical approaches primarily theorise the self as relational and emergent through role-taking, impression management, and situated interaction (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). Foucauldian work, by contrast, is more centrally concerned with subject formation, subjectification, and, in later work, practices of the self within regimes of power (Foucault, 1977; 1988). Feminist geographical and phenomenological scholarship has further stressed that identities and subjectivities are spatially distributed, embodied, and differentiated through gendered relations of power and belonging (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). In this dissertation, identity is therefore used in a broader and pragmatic sense to designate the socially intelligible forms through which selves and subjectivities are lived, narrated, and recognised. Where the terms overlap, this reflects the conceptual orientation of the dissertation, which brings these debates into dialogue without collapsing their theoretical differences.



through social interaction, reinforcing the argument that space is not simply a backdrop but an active influence in the formation of social selves.

Building on iterative identity formation, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective further illustrates how individuals navigate spatial contexts through impression management, performing various 'selves' that align with the norms of specific environments. By likening social interaction to a theatrical performance, Goffman (1959) explains that individuals strategically manage setting, appearance, and manner to convey an identity that feels most advantageous or necessary within a given situation. While Mead (1934) focuses on how the self develops through long-term internalization of social norms, Goffman (1959) zeroes in on the immediate enactment of roles. Both perspectives, however, converge in highlighting that the self is in flux, shaped by ongoing feedback loops between the individual, their social context, and the space they inhabit. This ongoing performance varies depending on the social significance attached to the place. A "front stage" scenario such as a workplace lobby may demand a more polished self-presentation, whereas a "backstage" location like a private room in one person's home might allow a more relaxed expression of self (Goffman, 1959). Spatial boundaries thus delineate different conditions of self-presentation and social legibility, revealing how individuals constantly negotiate their sense of self in relation to external expectations.

Also Foucault's theorisation of subject formation is deeply entwined with spatial arrangements, insofar as architectures of visibility, partition, and surveillance participate in the making of subjects (1977; 1978; 1988). Through what he refers to as the "technologies of the self", Foucault (1988) further reveals how individuals internalize these spatial and discursive constraints, molding their sense of identity within both visible and invisible spatial boundaries. His classic example of the panopticon demonstrates how surveillance and discipline are inscribed into the built environment, producing "docile bodies" that internalize and reproduce normative behaviours (Foucault, 1977). In prisons, hospitals, and schools, for instance, architectural layouts and institutional routines become technologies of regulation, conditioning how individuals move, interact, and perceive themselves (Foucault, 1988). These spatial disciplines are not merely external controls but processes through which subjects come to inhabit particular identities. Moreover, Foucault contends that resistance and agency also take place within these spatialized domains, as individuals may appropriate or subvert structures designed to confine and categorize them (1978; 1988). Hence, from a Foucauldian perspective, space functions as a critical medium of subjectification: it is both a locus where hegemonic discourses manifest and a terrain where individuals negotiate, contest, and potentially reconfigure the boundaries of their identities (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986).

Moreover, space can nurture a sense of belonging and identification, helping individuals anchor their sense of self and collective identifications in both tangible and symbolic ways. Political struggles over land use, everyday claims to public visibility, and collective memories attached to particular sites are examples of the extent to which identity is tied to forms of belonging that emerge through the spatial arrangements, histories, and social relations within which everyday life unfolds. Space, in this sense, does not merely reflect social life, but participates in shaping the affective and symbolic conditions under which selves are lived, recognised, and contested (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). In turn, belonging is never simply emotional: it is socially organised and spatially distributed (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). Thus, as certain locations evoke emotional responses that become woven into an individual's self-concept, the affective dimension of space further deepens a socio-spatial understanding of identity (Massey, 1994). A hometown, a cultural centre, a community park, or a place of worship may sustain continuity, recognition, and attachment by connecting subjects to shared routines, memories, and histories. This contributes to an enduring sense of self, facilitates collective identifications, and consolidates emotional ties.

Yet these same spaces can also operate through tacit norms about who is expected to be present, comfortable, and legible within them. Spatial environments are therefore sites not only of



integration but also of differentiation, since they help organise who is seen as legitimate, familiar, and entitled to belong (Crenshaw, 1991; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). This is particularly visible in processes of spatial marginalisation, through which some groups experience public space as accessible and affirming, while others encounter scrutiny, discomfort, or restricted use. Spatial marginalisation does not concern physical exclusion alone, but also the uneven capacity to inhabit space with ease, legitimacy, and recognition (McDowell, 1999; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011). Urban redevelopment, surveillance, and informal social norms all contribute to the production of “insiders” and “outsiders” dynamics, shaping not only material access but also the affective conditions under which identities and subjectivities are negotiated (Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004). Indeed, repeated encounters with exclusion may erode comfort, confidence, and the possibility of claiming public presence as ordinary or legitimate (McDowell, 1999; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011). However, since spatial order is socially produced through repeated practices, norms, and relations of power, it can also be unsettled through them. Collective presence, neighbourhood organising, and the reclaiming of everyday routes matter analytically because they show that exclusion is not only imposed discursively but negotiated, inhabited, and at times reworked (Kern, 2020; Lefebvre, 1968; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011). The same spaces that stabilise exclusion may therefore also become sites of contestation, recognition, and partial reconfiguration (Kern, 2020; Lefebvre, 1968; Massey, 1994).

Put differently, the distinction drawn here is one of analytical emphasis rather than of separate domains: the self foregrounds situated interaction, subjectivity the embodied formation of subjects within relations of power, and identity the more socially intelligible form that these processes assume. None of these dimensions unfolds outside space but rather each takes shape through situated encounters, spatial norms, uneven recognitions, and affective attachments (Foucault, 1988; Goffman, 1959; Massey, 1994; Mead, 1934). Belonging and marginalisation, in turn, are lived not only as structural positions but as everyday embodied conditions that orient movement, visibility, comfort, and self-regulation in urban life (Crenshaw, 1991; McDowell, 1999). Route selection, calibrated visibility, tactical companionship, discomfort, and exclusion can thus be read not as secondary reactions to the city, but as part of the ordinary negotiation of selves in urban space (Kern, 2020; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011; Pitch, 2004).

### Power and Governance of Urban Spaces in Social Sciences

Building on the previous discussion of socio-spatial formation, this section examines how power and governance organise urban space through planning, zoning, and surveillance (Foucault, 1977; Harvey, 2006; Lefebvre, 1968). Here, power is understood as a dispersed set of relations that structures access, visibility, movement, and legitimacy (Foucault, 1977; Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). The aim is not to provide an exhaustive account of urban governance, but rather to isolate the mechanisms most relevant to this dissertation: the spatial distribution of inclusion and exclusion, the disciplining effects of surveillance, and the way safety, order, and decorum become political rationales for unequal urban arrangements (Bauman, 2005; Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004).

Urban planning and zoning decisions are foundational to the governance of urban spaces, profoundly influencing patterns of inclusion and exclusion. By delineating zones for commercial, residential, or industrial activities, zoning laws can facilitate the creation of marginalised enclaves or affluent districts, thereby reproducing existing power hierarchies (Pitch, 2004). For example, zoning high-end commercial properties in historically working-class neighbourhoods can accelerate displacement through rising property values, effectively pushing lower-income residents to peripheral zones with fewer resources and public services. This process illustrates that spatial governance transcends technical land allocation; it is a deeply political endeavor shaped by economic interests



and institutional values (Foucault, 1977). Moreover, zoning decisions often reflect and reinforce societal biases while the deliberate placement of amenities and services, or their absence, can create environments that either empower or disenfranchise specific communities. Exclusionary zoning practices, for example, can limit affordable housing availability, perpetuating socioeconomic segregation and restricting upward mobility for marginalised groups (Lefebvre, 1968). Obscuring the underlying intentions -such as attracting investment and preventing perceived “undesirable” uses of public space, these decisions are frequently justified under the guise of “urban revitalization”, for “safety” “aesthetic” and “decorous” purposes (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Pitch, 2004).

Closely aligned with zoning and planning is the increasing prevalence of surveillance in urban contexts. Surveillance technologies range from closed-circuit television (CCTV) to more advanced forms of data collection, such as facial recognition software and geo-tracking via smartphones. Foucault (1991) theorised surveillance as both a technology of power and a means of discipline, encouraging self-regulation by instilling a sense of perpetual observation. The exponential growth of CCTV networks in many cities, coupled with advanced image-recognition software, creates an atmosphere of pervasive monitoring that disproportionately impacts marginalised groups (Lysova, 2022). Surveillance in urban settings serves multiple functions beyond the purported goal of crime prevention. It demarcates who “belongs” in a space and who does not, often along lines of race and class (Pitch, 2004). Disproportionate policing and monitoring of certain demographics reinforce spatial inequalities and perpetuate social stigmas. In neighbourhoods deemed “risky” or “unsafe,” heightened surveillance fosters an atmosphere of distrust, making long-time residents feel unwelcome even in historically central community spaces (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024; Foucault, 1977). Conversely, affluent areas may experience less intrusive policing based on the assumption that these neighbourhoods are inhabited by “model citizens” (Lysova, 2022). This inequitable distribution of surveillance creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: heavily monitored areas are seen as inherently problematic or deviant, justifying even more stringent measures and deepening social divides (Goffman, 1959).

In the last two decades, technological innovations have dramatically reshaped how urban spaces are managed and experienced. Smart cities leverage digital platforms, sensors, and data analytics to streamline transportation, energy distribution, and public services, introducing new layers of governance often mediated by private technology firms (Kern, 2020). Proponents argue that data-driven governance leads to more efficient and responsive cities, ostensibly improving residents’ quality of life by reducing traffic congestion, optimizing waste management, and monitoring environmental conditions in real time (Lysova, 2022). However, these technological transformations also raise significant concerns about data privacy, surveillance overreach, and the intensification of socio-spatial inequalities (Kern, 2020). The deployment of facial recognition software and geo-tracking via smartphones, for example, not only aims to deter criminal activity but also reinforces social hierarchies by demarcating who is deemed worthy of protection and who is surveilled as potential threats. Contributing to a heightened sense of being constantly watched, these technological innovations *de facto* exacerbate feelings of anxiety and vulnerability, particularly among marginalised communities who are disproportionately targeted by surveillance measures (Fusco, 2021; Lysova, 2022).

Another example could be given by predictive policing which, as a salient component of technological governance, leverages algorithms and big data to forecast crime hotspots. This practice extends Foucault’s (1991) notion of surveillance by rendering discipline omnipresent, rational, and data-driven. Although often framed as neutral or purely technical, data collection in predictive policing is subject to biases in both design and interpretation. Historical crime data, riddled with systemic biases, leads to over-policing in marginalised communities and underinvestment in social services or community-led solutions (Kern, 2020). Consequently, algorithms used in predictive policing can reinforce racial biases and concentrate police presence in already stigmatized areas,



perpetuating a self-reinforcing cycle of marginalization and fostering distrust between residents and authorities (Crenshaw, 1991; Kern, 2020). Furthermore, the technical infrastructure supporting surveillance is frequently governed by opaque public-private partnerships, complicating accountability and blurring the lines between municipal authorities, corporations, and security forces (Kern, 2020). This lack of transparency and accountability exacerbates mistrust among residents, particularly in marginalised communities, and undermines democratic governance (Foucault, 1977; Lefebvre, 1968). Taken together, these developments exemplify what Zuboff (2019) terms surveillance capitalism: datafied infrastructures fold everyday mobility into circuits of behavioural prediction, recoding ‘urban safety’ as a commodity and deepening asymmetries of visibility and control.

Consequently, while emerging technologies are marketed as solutions to urban insecurity, they simultaneously undermine public trust and contribute to the stigmatization of vulnerable populations, highlighting the complex and often contradictory impact of technology on perceived and actual safety in contemporary cities (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Furedi, 2018). As Zuboff (2019) demonstrates, these datafied infrastructures increasingly fold everyday mobility into circuits of behavioural prediction, recoding urban safety as a commodity and intensifying asymmetries of visibility and control. However, technology in urban governance serves not only surveilling and constraining functions, but also offers tools for resistance and democratization (Wang & Burris, 1997) because, as articulated by Foucault: “where there is power, there is also resistance” (1978: 95). This resistance is not merely oppositional but is embedded within the power relations themselves, creating a dynamic interplay between domination and opposition (Foucault, 1977). In the context of urban governance, in response to entrenched power structures and surveillance practices, resistance manifests through various forms of activism, community organizing and grassroots initiatives. Despite structural constraints, these initiatives challenge traditional top-down governance by fostering more inclusive and democratic forms of spatial governance.

Community-driven projects, such as “counter-mapping” platforms and open-data initiatives, contest official narratives about urban spaces and expose the biases and exclusions inherent in zoning laws (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). By creating alternative tools that inform residents about proposed zoning changes, city council votes, and policing practices, these groups democratize knowledge production, challenge the official delineations of urban spaces and empower residents to influence policy (Chakma, 2016; Wang & Burris, 1997). Indeed, through these forms of resistance communities can exercise agency by reshaping the spatial narratives in their localities. Grassroots movements also engage in “*sousveillance*” or watching the watchers, using mobile phone cameras and social media to document police misconduct and hold authorities accountable (Altheide, 2002; Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009). By reclaiming the means of surveillance, residents turn the tools of power back onto their wielders, creating a reciprocal form of accountability (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009). This not only challenges the legitimacy of surveillance practices but also empowers individuals by giving them agency over their own representation and visibility in public spaces. This form of counter-surveillance subverts the unidirectional gaze described by Foucault (1991) and transforms surveillance technologies into tools for social justice.

Zoning, planning, and surveillance are governance strategies that structure who can occupy what space and under what conditions, frequently reproducing and reinforcing social inequalities. Through Foucault’s (1991) lens of disciplinary power, these strategies cultivate forms of self-regulation that normalize exclusionary practices in the name of security or economic development. Simultaneously, the advent of new technologies within city infrastructures has reshaped citizens’ perceptions of safety and transformed the landscape of spatial governance, turning cities into arenas of pervasive control, deepening forms of racial profiling and imposing additional layers of surveillance on already marginalised communities (Kern, 2020; Lysova, 2022). Despite these challenges, urban residents are not merely passive subjects of governance but active agents capable



of resisting and reimagining their surroundings. However, practices of counter-surveillance and community-driven data projects showcase how technology can be harnessed for social justice ends, amplifying voices that traditional governance models may marginalize (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Seen in these terms, power and governance shape urban space not only through laws, plans, and infrastructures, but through the everyday organisation of access, visibility, and legitimacy (Foucault, 1977; Harvey, 2006; Lefebvre, 1968). Zoning, surveillance, and security rationalities are more than city-managing solutions: they distribute comfort, exposure, and suspicion unevenly, shaping who can move with ease, linger without explanation, and appear without being marked as out of place (Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004). Yet these disciplining arrangements are inherently porous: residents contest them, reinterpret them, and at times redirect them through collective and participatory practices, showing that urban space is a terrain of struggle rather than order (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Lefebvre, 1968; Wang & Burris, 1997). Under neoliberal urbanism, however, these dynamics are often exacerbated as public space is increasingly enclosed around redevelopment, control, and selective inclusion (Bauman, 2005; Harvey, 2006; Kern, 2020).

## The Neoliberal Transformation of Urban Spaces in the Global North

The urban landscapes of the Global North have been profoundly shaped by economic, social and political forces, resulting in significant transformations over the centuries. These shifts, deeply embedded in the neoliberal framework, have redefined the relationship between individuals and urban spaces, often intensifying issues such as socio-spatial inequality, segregation and isolation. As Harvey (2006) argues, neoliberal urbanism produces uneven geographies in which market logics reorganise governance and redistribute opportunity and risk across the city. This final section narrows the discussion to the neoliberal transformation of urban space in the Global North by focusing on three dynamics that are especially relevant for the chapters that follow: securitised redevelopment, the commodification of public space, and selective forms of inclusion through which diversity itself becomes a marketable asset (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Kern, 2020; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). Read together, these processes help explain how contemporary urban environments intensify uneven access, differential belonging, and the unequal distribution of comfort, visibility, and risk (Bauman, 2006; Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020).

Neoliberal cities prioritize market-driven agendas, commodifying public space and intensifying socio-economic divides (Bauman, 2005; Bauman, 2006; Harvey, 2006; Lefebvre, 1974). For Lefebvre (1974), the privileging of conceived space under capitalism transforms urban environments into commodities, where the production of space is increasingly dictated by profit-driven imperatives rather than by social cohesion or inclusivity. Harvey (2006) similarly shows how neoliberal urbanism redistributes opportunity and risk unevenly across the city, while Bauman (2005; 2006) highlights how urban policies increasingly favour efficiency, profit generation, and private property over communal life. In this sense, neoliberal urban transformation is not simply an economic process, but a socio-spatial one, since market rationalities reorganise who can access, inhabit, and feel legitimate in urban space. At the core of this transformation lies not simply neighbourhood improvement but a broader restructuring of urban space through redevelopment, gentrification, and selective legitimacy. As Lees, Slater, and Wyly (2008) argue, gentrification is best understood not as a neutral process of urban renewal but as a class remake of the urban, operating through policy, finance, and aesthetics. In this view, central areas are re-coded around consumption, respectability, and investment, often displacing existing residents and narrowing the range of legitimate urban presence. This dynamic intensifies the divide between centres and peripheries, as affluent individuals and businesses are drawn to revitalised districts while marginalised communities are pushed towards



less desirable or less resourced areas (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Kern, 2020; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008).

A second dimension concerns the commodification and securitisation of public space. Spaces traditionally associated with interaction and inclusivity are increasingly reorganised around safety, decorum, circulation, and consumption (Bauman, 2006; Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020). In neoliberal cities, public spaces are often “sanitised” under the guise of order and protection, while narratives of safety can frame spatial governance as neutral and value-free even when it operates through selective exclusion (Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Lysova, 2022). Forms of hostile architecture and defensive design exemplify what Foucault (1977) described as the micro-physics of power, insofar as subtle spatial modifications regulate behaviour and differentiate legitimate from illegitimate presence. Graham (2011) extends this argument by showing how contemporary urban design is often embedded within wider logics of anticipatory control, sorting, and exclusion. Privatized plazas, restricted-access parks, shopping malls, and gated environments make this shift especially visible: rather than functioning as open civic spaces, they privilege the figure of the “model consumer” and discourage activities that exceed the logics of circulation and purchase (Bauman, 2005; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023). What appears as neutral revitalisation may therefore function as a selective redistribution of comfort and legitimacy, rendering some bodies welcome and others out of place and disposable (Foucault, 1977; Fusco, 2021; Graham, 2011; Kern, 2020). Rather than transforming the material conditions of access and belonging, inclusionary rhetoric, curated multicultural events, and aestheticised representations of difference may be mobilised to enhance place value while leaving underlying distributions of risk and exclusion intact. In feminist urban accounts, this appropriation turns racialised and gendered difference into a symbolic asset for middle-class consumption, producing forms of selective inclusion that do not undo exclusion but rather repackage it (D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; De Martini Ugolotti, 2017; Kern, 2020; Leslie & Hunt, 2013; Vacchelli, 2016). This is especially clear when marginalised groups are “re-included” only insofar as they become legible as cultural value, urban spectacle, or evidence of cosmopolitan diversity rather than as subjects entitled to stable access and spatial justice (De Martini Ugolotti, 2017; Leslie & Hunt, 2013; Vacchelli, 2016).

These transformations also contribute to broader forms of fragmentation and social isolation. As shared spaces are reduced, privatised, or reorganised around consumption, opportunities for spontaneous encounter and weak social ties are weakened (Bannister & Fyfe, 2001; Bauman, 2006). Suburbanisation and urban sprawl intensified these processes by privileging car-dependent mobility and private over communal space, while surveillance technologies and gated arrangements created physical and symbolic boundaries that segregate populations under the language of safety and security (Bannister & Fyfe, 2001). Bauman's analysis of liquid modernity (2006) frames these developments not simply as changes in urban form, but as part of a broader individualising logic through which stable social bonds and collective infrastructures are eroded. Under neoliberal urbanism, access to space, services, and visibility becomes increasingly stratified, while collective life is reorganised around privatisation, self-sufficiency, and differential exposure to surveillance and exclusion (Bauman, 2006; Kern, 2020). Investment is channelled towards flagship spaces of consumption rather than towards the ordinary infrastructures that sustain everyday safety, waiting, and mobility, with important consequences for who can remain present in the city without disproportionate effort (D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023).

Together these dynamics suggest that neoliberal urbanism operates not only as an economic project but as a spatial reorganisation of urban life, redistributing access, visibility, comfort, and risk through redevelopment, commodification, securitisation, and selective inclusion (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024; Bauman, 2006; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Harvey, 2006; Kern, 2020; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). What is progressively eroded in this process is not only affordability, tenure, or access as such, but the ordinary conditions of co-presence and belonging through which public life



is sustained. Bringing into view what neoliberal restructuring hides, spatial justice becomes analytic and political counterpoint more than a normative horizon (Fainstein, 2010). In this scenario, grassroots and participatory practices represent the collective capacity to shape the uses and meanings of space beyond market imperatives, keeping open forms of presence, claim-making, and sociality that redevelopment, securitisation, and commodification tend to thin out or foreclose (Kern, 2020; Lefebvre, 1968; Tulumello, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997).

### Conclusions

This chapter has argued that urban space must be understood as socially produced, relational, and traversed by power. Drawing on Lefebvre (1974), Foucault (1977), and Massey (1994), the discussion has shown that space is never a neutral container of social life, but a material, symbolic, political, and affective arrangement through which access, belonging, and exclusion are organised and made durable. Read in these terms, urban space does not simply host social life; it participates in shaping the conditions under which subjects become recognisable, comfortable, exposed, surveilled, or marginalised (Ahmed, 2004; McDowell, 1999). The chapter has also shown that selves and identities do not pre-exist these arrangements as fixed interior qualities. Rather, they take shape through situated interaction, embodied experience, affective attachments, and unequal relations of power (Foucault, 1988; Goffman, 1959; Massey, 1994; Mead, 1934). Questions of belonging, discomfort, visibility, and exclusion therefore cannot be understood apart from the environments through which they are produced, recognised, and contested (Ahmed, 2004; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). Finally, the chapter has located these dynamics within broader relations of governance and urban restructuring: planning, zoning, surveillance, and neoliberal redevelopment discipline who can move, linger, appear, and belong, and under what conditions (D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Harvey, 2006; Kern, 2020; Lefebvre, 1968). Seen in this light, route selection, calibrated visibility, tactical companionship, discomfort, and exclusion appear not as reactive responses to the city's material conditions, but as ordinary modalities through which selves are negotiated in urban space: an aspect of everyday life that the next chapter develops through a feminist lens.



## Chapter 2

### Gender and Space: Theorizing Women's Experiences in Urban Settings

Public space has long been imagined as the paradigmatic site of openness, encounter, and democratic visibility. Feminist scholarship has persistently unsettled this abstraction, showing that the city is neither equally accessible nor equally habitable, and that movement through it is patterned by gendered norms of propriety, safety, care, and legitimacy (Kern, 2020; McDowell, 1999; Pain, 1997, 2001; Spain, 1992; Valentine, 1989). What appears as shared, public, and available is in practice organised through historically sedimented distinctions between public and private, autonomy and dependence, production and social reproduction, exposure and protection. Women's urban presence is therefore shaped not only by spectacular episodes of violence or exclusion, but also by ordinary infrastructures of regulation: timings, transit arrangements, surveillance practices, moral expectations, and tacit spatial codes that organise who can linger, who must justify their presence, and whose discomfort is rendered unremarkable. From this perspective, gender is not an additional layer placed upon an already constituted urban world, but one of the modalities through which space becomes ordered, sensed, and contested. In this setting, fear, discomfort, and belonging are woven into the affective and material textures of urban life, and into the embodied adjustments through which subjects learn to inhabit streets, stations, crossings, and other spaces of passage (Ahmed, 2004; Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2005; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The city thus emerges as an arena in which visibility and vulnerability, mobility and restraint, exclusion and claim-making are continuously negotiated. It is precisely within these negotiations that feminist and transfeminist critiques have made legible both the endurance of gendered urban hierarchies and the possibility of inhabiting space otherwise.

#### Approaches to Gender, Space and Identity Formation

Sociological and urban studies perspectives on space and gender have long recognized that both public and private environments are not neutral arenas of social life, but terrains deeply inscribed with norms regarding masculinity, femininity and other dimensions of identity. Indeed, the relationship between gender and space has been extensively discussed, highlighting how gendered bodies are actively shaped and policed in public space and emphasizing that space is not neutral but socially constructed through power relations, social norms and historical processes (Kern, 2020; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999; Spain, 1992; Valentine, 1989). Spatial organization shapes and is shaped by dichotomous gendered expectations -of what a woman (or a man) should look like or how they should behave- that influence access, mobility, and degrees of agency (McDowell, 1999; Spain, 1992). This interplay is central to understanding not only how space reinforces gender hierarchies but also how gender shapes spatial interactions, as urban subjectivities are materially and affectively organised through geographies of work and respectability, where comportment, dress and occupational routines determine who is recognised as legitimately "at home" in public space (McDowell, 1999).

Further extending his dramaturgical framework to the performative aspects of gender roles, Goffman (1977) argued that gender, like other aspects of identity, is a socially constructed performance that individuals enact according to societal norms and expectations. This performative aspect of gender emphasizes the idea that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are maintained through a series of repeated behaviours, social practices, rituals, and presentations of the self that individuals adopt to align with culturally prescribed gender roles, often reinforced by institutional structures and everyday interactions. Importantly, Goffman (1977) highlighted how these gendered



performances are not separate from other social roles, such as work, but deeply intertwined with them. The expectation for women to “be women before their job” suggests that women are often required to remain recognisably feminine even at work, so that professional competence is read through appearance, demeanour, and interactional style rather than allowed to displace gendered expectations (Goffman, 1977).

Feminist phenomenology further clarifies how gendered power becomes sedimented at the level of bodily motility. Young’s account of “inhibited intentionality” and “ambiguous transcendence” (1990) shows that normative femininity is not merely a set of roles but a lived modality that restricts reach, stride, and spatial projection, cultivating self-containment and caution in everyday movement. Brought into conversation with Goffman’s dramaturgy (1977), Butler’s performativity (1990, 1993), and Bartky’s analysis of disciplinary femininity (1990), Young’s account (1990) helps illuminate how gendered norms are sedimented in mundane bodily adjustments (e.g. a shortened step, contracted posture, careful occupation of seats or pavements) through which caution, propriety, and self-surveillance become spatially enacted. As Bartky argues, femininity is produced through diffuse disciplinary practices that fashion “docile bodies” via minute penalties of posture, gait, ornamentation and self-surveillance (1990). This corporeal regimen does not simply reflect danger; it manufactures the felt necessity of self-containment and propriety, aligning with risk scripts and cultivating shame as a routine affect that polices visibility in public space (Bartky, 1990).

Along similar lines, Simon and Gagnon’s (2003) concept of “sexual scripts” offers a valuable framework for understanding how cultural and social narratives shape expectations around gender, sexuality and spatial behaviour. Sexual scripts operate at three levels: cultural scenarios, which define societal norms regarding sexuality; interpersonal scripts, which govern interactions between individuals in social and sexual encounters; and intrapsychic scripts, which internalize these norms, shaping personal desires and self-perceptions. These scripts not only regulate sexual behaviours but also extend into broader spatial practices, influencing how individuals are expected to navigate and experience urban environments. Simon and Gagnon’s (2003) concept of sexual scripts aligns with Butler’s (2007) theory of gender performativity in illustrating how identities are not innate but are instead continuously shaped through repeated social practices and expectations. Butler (1990) indeed challenges the notion of gender as a fixed identity, arguing instead that it is constituted through ongoing performances that conform to dominant social norms:

*“Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.”*

These performances, which include bodily comportment, speech and behaviour, are especially visible in public spaces, where the regulation of gender is heightened. Public spaces thus function as arenas where gender is performed, monitored and reinforced through both explicit rules and implicit social expectations. Individuals are compelled to enact gendered behaviours that align with societal norms, reinforcing a binary system that privileges heteronormativity while marginalizing those who do not conform. Butler’s (2011) analysis further highlights how non-binary and transgender identities experience systematic marginalization in public spaces, as their existence challenges the very structures upon which normative gender performances are built. Urban environments, through legal, architectural and cultural mechanisms, often fail to accommodate those who do not conform to binary gender expectations, rendering them invisible or forcing them into predefined categories. The built environment itself becomes an active participant in sustaining gendered hierarchies, as spatial organization dictates who is seen, who is heard and who belongs. Corporeal feminist theory, however, reframes the body not as a passive container but rather as an interface where space and subjectivity co-compose each other.



Indeed, everyday embodiment in cities is shaped not only by normative pressures but also by subtle acts of subversion. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) notion of "situational improvisation", these moments of embodied adjustment—whether walking faster, avoiding eye contact, or modifying posture—reveal how individuals continuously negotiate gendered expectations in real time. Similarly, Grosz's account of volatile bodies (1994) emphasizes their openness to inscription and affective intensities: the city writes on bodies even as bodies, through movement and sensation, rewrite urban textures. Moreover, this body–space interface helps explain why design, lighting and crowding are lived as visceral prompts to contraction or expansion. Butler's (2011) theory of performativity underscores how the repetition of gender norms in public space can be interrupted or reconfigured through alternative dress, deviant gestures, or collective visibility. Such disruptions expose the socially constructed nature of gender and open up space for contestation. In this light, urban space becomes not just a site where gender is regulated, but also where it can be challenged—through both micro-resistances and broader practices of reclaiming safety, accessibility and visibility.

Masculinity is often inscribed into urban spaces through planning and architecture that prioritize male-centred needs, reinforcing traditional gender roles and so divisions between the public and private spheres (Connell, 1995; Darke, 1998; van Hoven & Hörschelmann, 2005; Kern, 2020). Public spaces, including streets, parks and transportation hubs, have historically been designed to facilitate male mobility and occupation, while women's spatial practices have been more regulated or restricted (Darke, 1998; Kern, 2020). This normalization of male presence in urban spaces means that men can typically navigate public environments without their presence being questioned or contested, whereas women often have to justify or adapt their behaviours in response to spatial constraints (Goffman, 1977). Van Hoven and Hörschelmann (2005) precisely examine how urban sites reinforce hegemonic masculinity, legitimizing male-dominated subcultures through architectural design, policing and social norms that marginalize others who do not conform to dominant spatial behaviours.

On the other hand, women's presence in public spaces has historically been subject to regulation and contestation shaped by broader social structures that, reflecting broader societal expectations regarding femininity, vulnerability and respectability, dictate their roles and expected behaviours (Gardner, 1995; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011; Skeggs, 1997). Urban environments often impose constraints on women's mobility, safety and autonomy, reinforcing spatial exclusions that reflect underlying gendered power imbalances (Kern, 2020; Valentine, 1989). For instance, the act of walking alone at night is rendered "risky" for a woman precisely because public spaces remain coded as masculine, especially after dark. These expectations manifest in various ways, influencing not only how women behave in urban environments but also how their presence is perceived and regulated. Implicit social norms dictate modifications in behaviour, including adjustments in clothing, posture and movement patterns, all of which contribute to the gendering of space (Kern, 2020; Pain, 1997). Along these lines, Longhurst's work (2001) demonstrates how pregnancy, menstruation and lactation make bodily boundaries conspicuous, exposing the gendered politics of public toilets, seating and transport as infrastructures that tacitly expel non-normative embodiment from civic life.

Several other studies have documented and investigated that, compared to men, women tend to be socially disproportionately targeted for harassment (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Bowman, 1993; Gardner, 1995; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Sadeghi Fasaei & Mirhosseini, 2015). Women thus develop specific coping strategies and tactics to navigate urban landscapes, such as spatial restriction, altering travel routes and/or schedules, self-isolating or self-excluding to protect themselves and often relying protective social networks to mitigate perceived risks and dangers (Cobbina, Miller, & Brunson, 2008; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011). Among these practices, Kern (2020) specifically highlights "defensive dressing," defined as deliberate sartorial choices aimed at reducing bodily visibility to minimize vulnerability in urban settings. Demonstrating how space is actively negotiated rather than passively crossed, such adaptations, however, are not merely personal choices but are embedded



within dominant cultural narratives that frame women's spatial practices through the lens of safety and self-preservation. As Simon and Gagnon (2003) highlighted, these behavioural expectations are deeply ingrained in cultural and social narratives that dictate appropriate gendered behaviours, particularly in relation to risk and vulnerability. Women's presence and movement in urban settings are often constructed through implicit scripts that define certain places and times as "unsafe," leading to the normalization of avoidance behaviours and spatial limitations. In other words, rather than being neutral sites of free movement, urban environments become arenas of negotiation where women's mobility is conditioned by social expectations and risk perceptions.

As women's spatial practices are dictated by intersecting expectations of safety, propriety and respectability, the ways in which women adjust their movement, attire and use of space -whether avoiding dark streets, walking with purpose to deter harassment, or modifying their appearance to blend in- demonstrate how gender is both regulated and reiterated through daily practices (Butler, 1990; 1993). Behavioural psychologists have also observed how men crowd women's personal space in public places, how all-male groups take up more pavement space and how men make more noise in public transportation than women (Condon, Lieber & Maillochon, 2007). Some other studies further shown how gender differs in the perception of public spaces, especially when it comes to ideas of safety (Polko & Kimic, 2022), unpleasant encounters (Bastomski & Smith, 2017) and fear of crimes (Sadeghi Fasaee & Mirhosseini, 2015; Tandogan & Ilhan, 2016). This interplay between gendered norms and spatial behaviour has tangible consequences for women's relationship with public life. Williams Reid and Konrad (2004) demonstrate how perceived risk translates into real behavioural modifications, with women disproportionately altering their daily routines, avoiding professional and social opportunities and restricting their participation in urban life to mitigate potential threats. Such self-imposed limitations reflect a deeply embedded culture of fear and regulation that operates through both overt constraints and subtle social cues. By framing public space as a site of constant negotiation, these dynamics underscore the performative nature of gender in urban environments, where movement, visibility and engagement are dictated by intersecting social scripts of danger, respectability and control.

Feminist geographers extend the discussion beyond individual-level adaptations by showing how urban infrastructures, representations, and planning processes reflect and reproduce patriarchal relations. Valentine's (1989) "geography of women's fear," Gardner's (1995) and Bowman's (1993) analyses of street harassment, and Spain's (1992) critique of male-centred planning all show that women's mobility is shaped not only by interpersonal encounters but also by the material organisation of the city itself. Massey's (1994) point is important here because it locates these exclusions in ordinary urban governance: even apparently mundane zoning decisions and building designs presuppose ideas about which bodies properly occupy which spaces. Intersectional theories deepen this analysis by showing that such spatial norms are never organised through gender alone, but through the simultaneous workings of race, class, sexuality, and other axes of power (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000).

However, public space is organised not only through movement and access, but also through uneven regimes of visibility that mark some presences as ordinary and others as excessive, improper, or suspect. In this regard, Garland-Thomson's analysis of staring shows how the normative gaze disciplines bodies deemed out of place, producing hypervisibility for some and erasure for others (Garland-Thomson, 2009). hooks reminds us that these regimes of looking are racialised: black women are simultaneously over-exposed to scrutiny and under-recognised as authoritative subjects (1992). Her notion of the oppositional gaze names practices that refuse objectification and reclaim the right to look back, interpret, and appear otherwise (hooks, 1992). Public spaces, therefore, emerge once again as critical arenas where societal power structures are both imposed and resisted. Theoretical approaches to gender and space reveal a complex interplay of social norms and relations, power structures and dynamics together with embodied experiences that actively shape urban



environments. Intertwined with broader structures of power that regulate bodies and behaviours, space has been largely considered as “the silent language” and the “hidden dimension” shaping gender identities and human interactions (Wrede, 2015; Siwach, 2020).

## Public and Private in Neoliberal Cities

Historical analyses of the public/private divide reveal the patriarchal foundations of spatial segregation. The distinction between the public sphere of work, politics and civic participation and the private sphere of domesticity, care and reproduction has long organised gendered expectations about who belongs where (De Beauvoir, 1949; McDowell, 1999; Spain, 1992). In Western urban modernity, this division has been one of the most explicit ways through which space became gendered, associating legitimate public presence with masculinity while casting women’s appearance in public as morally ambiguous, exposed, or in need of justification (Kern, 2020; Massey, 1994; Siwach, 2020). As Kern (2020) notes in relation to Victorian London, women’s increasing visibility in the city generated recurrent moral panics, and the figure of the “public woman” became entangled with sexual suspicion and impropriety. What matters here is not only the historical separation itself, but its afterlives: the public/private divide continues to shape women’s mobility, caregiving obligations, and everyday negotiations of legitimacy in urban space. Rather than natural or neutral distinctions, these spatial divisions are socially produced and continuously reinforced through planning decisions, infrastructural omissions, and cultural narratives that regulate women’s access to, visibility within, and participation in public life (Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Massey, 1994). They are materialised, in other words, in the thresholds, amenities, routes, and absences through which urban space quietly privileges some forms of presence while rendering others effortful, exceptional, or out of place. Here, a decolonial reading further reminds us that these boundaries have never been organised through gender alone, but through racialised and classed hierarchies of urban citizenship (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lugones, 2010).

Feminist urban scholarship has shown that these legacies are not only symbolic but materialised in the planning and design of cities. From Spain’s (1992) demonstration that architecture and urban form encode gendered exclusions, to Darke’s (1998) critique of the city as a patriarchal construct organised around the male breadwinner, scholars have shown how transport routes, services, amenities, and everyday infrastructures have been historically planned around masculine norms of mobility and productivity rather than around care, interdependence, and reproductive labour. Jacobs’s (1961) defence of mixed, walkable, socially dense neighbourhoods already challenged urban logics that sacrificed everyday liveability to abstract redevelopment. Although not framed in explicitly feminist terms, her insistence on dense, mixed, and inhabited streets remains important here because it foregrounded the ordinary urban conditions through which safety is socially sustained rather than merely enforced. Later feminist work makes visible what such perspectives often left implicit: cities continue to be planned around linear, productivity-oriented mobilities, while women’s everyday routines are more often organised through trip-chaining, waiting, caregiving, accompaniment, and the need for proximate services and basic facilities such as public toilets and places to sit (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Criado-Perez, 2019; Darke, 1998). Read in these terms, patriarchal urbanism is sustained not only by explicit exclusion, but by the routine omission of the infrastructures through which women move, wait, accompany, rest, and care. These exclusions are inscribed not only in large-scale planning, but in the micro-geographies of urban form: the location of services, the design of thresholds and waiting areas, the scarcity of public toilets and resting spaces, and the organisation of mobility around uninterrupted commuter logics rather than care and interdependence (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Criado-Perez, 2019; Darke, 1998; Jacobs, 1961; Spain, 1992).



Under neoliberal urbanism, these older distinctions are not displaced so much as reorganised. The erosion of shared public infrastructures, the privatisation of urban amenities, and redevelopment oriented toward investment and consumption narrow the conditions under which public presence is recognised as legitimate (Bauman, 2005, 2006; D’Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023; Kern, 2020; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). For women, this does not simply mean reduced inclusivity in an abstract sense; it means that access to the city becomes increasingly mediated by the ability to consume, by the uneven availability of transit and care infrastructures, and by temporal regimes that reward uninterrupted mobility while devaluing waiting, accompaniment, and dependence. In this sense, the public/private divide survives within neoliberal cities not only through ideology but through the unequal distribution of services, comfort, and legitimacy across times, routes, and bodies. Neoliberal urbanism, in other words, does not dissolve the public/private divide but rather embeds it into the temporal and infrastructural organisation of everyday life, making autonomy increasingly contingent on access to transport, money, accompaniment, and time.

Securitisation further compounds these exclusions by translating safety into surveillance, filtering, and behavioural control. As Bannister and Fyfe (2001) and Bauman (2006) note, fear is readily mobilised within urban policy to justify regulation, yet feminist scholars have shown that these strategies often do not expand women’s spatial agency so much as discipline the terms of their presence (Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004). This is particularly significant because the over-identification of danger with public space obscures a central feminist insight: many threats to women’s safety occur within private settings, even as public visibility continues to be treated as the primary site of risk (Pitch, 2004). Respectability and decorum are crucial here, not as abstract moral categories, but as everyday filters through which women’s urban presence is made more or less legitimate. As Skeggs (1997) argues, respectability functions as a moral economy through which women, especially working-class and racialised women, are judged as worthy or unworthy of protection, while discourses of urban decorum mark certain bodies, comportments, and appearances as improper, excessive, or out of place (Fusco, 2021; Pitch, 2004; Skeggs, 1997). In this sense, securitisation does not simply promise safety; it often redefines safety as the capacity to recognise, contain, or exclude those deemed disruptive to the desired urban image. Women are thus not consistently addressed as full urban citizens, but as conditionally legitimate presences whose mobility remains tethered to propriety, self-control, and the ability to appear non-disruptive. Intensified surveillance, policing, and “safety-first” interventions can therefore produce a paradoxical effect: they offer protection at the level of discourse while reinforcing the scrutiny of those already most exposed and leaving untouched the structural conditions that make urban life unequally habitable. Structural omissions in transport, lighting, seating, toilets, and care infrastructures are, in this sense, not minor inconveniences but part of the everyday architecture through which women learn whether to move through the city with ease, caution, or withdrawal (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Criado-Perez, 2019; Fusco, 2021; Pitch, 2004; Skeggs, 1997; Valentine, 1989).

The persistence of the public/private divide matters not simply as historical backdrop but as an ongoing urban logic that continues to organise women’s temporal autonomy, mobility, and access to care. In contemporary cities, the devaluation of social reproduction is translated into uneven transport schedules, poorly designed waiting areas, hostile or non-resting infrastructures, and moral expectations about when women can be out, with whom, and for what purpose. Read from the vantage point of stations, underpasses, late-night transfers, waiting areas, and everyday commuting, the public/private split appears not only spatial but rhythmic: it structures whose time can extend into the evening without sanction, whose movements require justification, and whose safety is still imagined as best secured through retreat, accompaniment, or self-limitation rather than through sustained and legitimate presence in public space.



## The Affective Dimension of Urban Spaces

At the heart of this discussion lies the idea that cities are not emotionally neutral. They are materially organised and affectively lived arrangements of infrastructures, norms, atmospheres, and encounters through which power becomes sensible, embodied, and unevenly distributed (Ahmed, 2004; Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Kern, 2020; McDowell, 1999). Feelings such as fear, discomfort, ease, exclusion, or belonging are therefore not secondary reactions to an already constituted urban order. They are integral to the ways in which urban environments are inhabited, interpreted, negotiated, and sometimes resisted. What is at stake here is not simply that women and other marginalised subjects “feel differently” in the city, but that these feelings register unequal distributions of exposure, recognition, legitimacy, and support across public space. This relational variability helps explain why the same underpass, square, or station platform may be lived as reassuring in one moment and threatening in another (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Simonsen, 2005). Within feminist geographies, fear has been especially important in showing that access to public life is not only formally granted or denied, but affectively mediated through anticipatory knowledges, bodily calibrations, and routinised adaptations that shape where one goes, when, with whom, and under what conditions (Pain, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 1989).

Rose’s critique of the limits of geographical knowledge (1993) calls for situated and accountable forms of analysis that take embodiment and positionality seriously. This matters here because emotions become analytically meaningful not when they are treated as private residues, but when they are understood as relational ways of registering how bodies encounter space (Ahmed, 2004; Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005). Emotions are relational and situated, generated through the encounter between embodied histories, social scripts, material arrangements, and temporal rhythms (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Simonsen, 2005). This is why the same underpass, square, or station platform may be lived as reassuring in one moment and threatening in another, depending on time of day, co-presence, prior experience, and the degree to which one feels recognisable or exposed (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Simonsen, 2005; Valentine, 1989). From this perspective, emotions become epistemic resources: fear can diagnose infrastructures and norms that silently produce exclusion, discomfort can trace the boundaries of belonging and respectability, and ease or joy can illuminate conditions under which space becomes more habitable. Moreover, treating emotions as epistemic resources directly challenges masculinist traditions of urban theory that privilege abstraction, statistics, and detachment over lived, embodied knowledge (Rose, 1993).

Following Thrift (2004) and Anderson (2009), urban life unfolds through diffuse yet tangible atmospheres emerging from light, sound, rhythm, density, architecture, and co-presence. These atmospheres exceed individual feeling while still being lived through bodies. Ahmed’s (2004) account of affects as “sticky” sharpens this point, showing how orientations of nearness and distance sediment through repetition, while Anzaldúa’s (1987) notion of *la facultad* names the anticipatory attunement through which marginalised subjects become skilled at sensing threat, tension, and openings before these stabilise into clearly recognisable facts. All these perspectives suggest that urban affect is neither purely personal nor fully environmental, but emerges in the relation between bodies, spatial arrangements, and prior histories. This is especially important for feminist urban analysis because it allows fear to be understood not simply as a punctual response to danger, but as a situated mode of attunement shaped by unequal conditions of inhabitation (Ahmed, 2004; Anderson, 2009; Anzaldúa, 1987; Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Pain, 1997; Thrift, 2004).

The spatial expression of these dynamics has been most influentially theorised through Valentine’s (1989) formulation of a “geography of fear”. Her intervention remains foundational precisely because it demonstrated that fear in public space cannot be reduced to crime statistics or immediate danger. Women’s fear is shaped by the possibility of threat rather than by direct victimisation alone, and is reproduced through warnings, media narratives, peer accounts, past



experiences, and everyday pedagogies of caution. Pain (1997; 2001) further elaborated this point by showing how fear becomes internalised as a form of self-regulation that curtails autonomy while appearing as prudence or common sense. In practice, this fear materialises through ordinary forms of self-regulation, spatial avoidance, and embodied vigilance, through which movement in the city becomes conditioned by anticipation and risk management. The city thus becomes a terrain of emotional labour in which ordinary movement is saturated by anticipation, risk management, and the effort of appearing sufficiently alert, respectable, and not vulnerable. Fear, in this sense, does not simply keep women out of space; it reorganises the terms under which they can inhabit it. As Kern (2020) also notes, fear is intensified by urban environments designed around masculine norms of comfort and mobility, so that women's alertness is not simply psychological but structurally patterned by the built environment.

Thien's (2005) warning against collapsing "emotion" into an undifferentiated field of affect is useful because it allows a clearer distinction between named emotions and the broader atmospheres in which they take shape. This matters in feminist analyses of public space because fear is rarely the only emotion at stake. It is often entangled with shame, embarrassment, and self-consciousness, especially where public presence is mediated by expectations of visibility, decorum, and propriety. Bartky's (1990) account of disciplinary femininity and Garland-Thomson's (2009) work on staring are particularly helpful here, since they show how vulnerability in public space is produced not only through the anticipation of violence, but also through the anticipation of scrutiny, misrecognition, ridicule, and social sanction. Skeggs (1997), in turn, makes clear that respectability operates as a moral economy through which women are differentiated as proper or improper, worthy or unworthy of protection. What this clarifies is that women's relation to fear in public space is mediated not only by the possibility of harm, but by the need to remain legible as legitimate occupants of urban space. Read together with Pain's work on geographies of fear (1997, 2001) and Pitch's critique of the cultural and political production of women's insecurity (2004), these perspectives broaden fear into a wider emotional field structured by power, in which subjects are oriented not only by what might happen to them, but by how they may appear, be read, or be judged in public space.

If the previous discussion broadens fear into a wider emotional field structured by shame, scrutiny, and respectability, its governmental function becomes clearer once fear is approached as a social relation rather than a private feeling. Feminist scholars have shown that the problem is not simply that women fear the city, but that cultures of fear relocate responsibility for safety onto women themselves, requiring them to self-monitor, plan ahead, remain vigilant, and adapt their bodies to unsafe environments rather than demanding that those environments be transformed (Pain, 2001; Pitch, 2004). More broadly, work on the cultural and political production of fear shows how media sensationalism, institutional discourse, and public narratives amplify certain risks while obscuring others, thereby shaping not only what is feared but how fear becomes socially reasonable (Altheide, 2002; Glassner, 1999a, 1999b; Tulumello, 2017). This also helps explain the persistent gap between fear and recorded crime: perceptions of danger often exceed immediate statistical probability because they are sedimented through mediated narratives, prior encounters, cautionary tales, and everyday pedagogies of vulnerability through which people learn to inhabit public space as conditionally accessible (Altheide, 2002; Pain, 1997; Valentine, 1989). This is especially significant in gendered terms, since the over-identification of danger with women's public presence can obscure the fact that many threats to women's safety occur within private settings, even as public mobility continues to be coded as the privileged site of danger (Pitch, 2004). What appears as caution, then, is often evidence of unequal conditions of inhabitation; what appears as individual prudence is, in fact, the privatisation of urban injustice. In this sense, fear operates not only as an emotion but as a governmental technology through which autonomy is reduced, mobility becomes conditional, and exclusion is normalised as adaptation.



However, feminist scholars have also treated fear as a generative and diagnostic form of political knowledge. Approaches such as Rodó-de-Zárate's relief mapping (2013) and Serrano Santos's participatory emotional cartographies (2024) make visible that the same spaces may wound and shelter, exclude and connect, constrain and be reworked while allowing fear, discomfort, and even fleeting ease to be read as situated knowledges of how urban power is materially and affectively organized. By allowing emotions to be approached as political resources, these approaches render what is often privatised as individual unease collectively legible as spatial knowledge and therefore available for intervention, reclamation, and collective reimagination. To take emotions as situated forms of knowledge when discussing gender and public spaces is to read how infrastructures, norms, and atmospheres are lived as vigilance, shame, discomfort, ease, legitimacy or belonging. In this sense, feminist urban analysis treats affective life as one of the terrains through which inequality is organised, negotiated, and potentially contested.

### Sketching The Feminist City

Feminist urban scholarship has long treated the city as a terrain on which patriarchal orders are organised through norms of visibility, mobility, propriety, and access. Within this conversation, the feminist city emerges less as a finished model than as a critical and practical horizon from which to read how safety, social reproduction, symbolic recognition, everyday use, urban memory, and care are unevenly organised across public space. As Weigel (2021) argues, patriarchy is not only narrated but materially sedimented in the built environment, written into monuments, naming practices, and the spatial hierarchies through which cities remember some subjects while rendering others marginal. What comes into view, then, is not only whether women can access the city, but under what material, affective, and political conditions they can remain in it without their presence being rendered exceptional, burdensome, or conditionally legitimate. Read in these terms, feminist city-making concerns not simply inclusion within an unchanged urban order, but the partial reworking of the terms by which urban life is organised, inhabited, and valued (Kern, 2020; McDowell, 1999; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). To sketch the feminist city is to move beyond an abstract ideal towards the spatial realization of a long-standing simple yet radical foundational premise: that "a woman's place is in the city" (Wekerle, 1985).

If fear, gender and everyday spaces are mutually constitutive, then understanding how individuals and communities push back against these dynamics becomes vital. Scholars have emphasized that such resistance operates at multiple scales, from micro-level gestures in daily routines to extensive collective actions that aim to alter urban policies and design (Chakma 2016; Frisby, Maguire & Reid 2009). Drawing on de Certeau (1984), these improvised manoeuvres can be read as "tactics": mobile, situated appropriations that subvert the logics of spaces planned by strategic actors. Detours, lingering in places where women are not expected to remain, or buddying-up for safety and solidarity thus become not trivial adjustments but modes of feminist spatial authorship. Positioned this way, everyday tactics illuminate how resistance is enacted through the ordinary-how women's embodied practices re-signify urban space and carve out micro-territories of autonomy within environments structured by patriarchal and commercial imperatives. At this level, Foucault's notion of counter-conduct (1991, 1998) and Lefebvre's right to the city (1968) become analytically productive, since they allow these practices to be read not as isolated gestures, but as situated challenges to the norms that regulate who can inhabit urban space, how, and with what degree of agency.

The first line of feminist city-making focuses on reappropriation through collective presence: night walks, loitering sessions, public performances, and other practices of space-occupation assert the right to occupy and re-imagine public venues typically deemed dangerous for women at certain



times or under certain social circumstances. Phadke et al. (2011) describe how public festivals, night walks and “loitering sessions” (staying outdoors without a defined purpose) in Mumbai serve as a radical act of resistance against gendered spatial constraints. Occupying space without an explicit purpose directly challenges restrictive norms about when and where women should be out that can be further inflected by caste and religious hierarchies. These findings illuminate why blanket statements about “women’s safety” can inadvertently mask the experiences of those coping with layered forms of marginalization, such as racism, xenophobia, or transphobia (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). They also repurpose hooks’ oppositional gaze (1992) as a collective practice of looking back and re-seeing the city on one’s own terms. By interrupting the presumption that safety requires female absence or concealment, these actions legitimise women’s and queer presence as a condition of spatial justice.

Similarly, Alouti (2017) detailed protest marches across several European capitals, where women seize spaces reputed for high harassment rates, thereby confronting the narrative that relegates them to daytime hours or male-escorted outings. The author also described how public marches or “take back the night” events become performative embodiments of collective counter-conduct, visibly contradicting the notion that women ought to avoid certain neighbourhoods after dark (Alouti, 2017). These overt performances of visibility undermine the premise that safety requires female absence or concealment, revealing instead that collective occupation can erode an area’s fearful reputation. Lefebvre’s (1968) advocacy for the right to the city endorses precisely this ethos of collective reclamation, whereby marginalised groups do not merely demand safety as consumers of space but assert their agency as co-producers of space, with the power to re-signify and re-structure the urban landscape. Indeed, initiatives such as those described by Alouti (2017) and Kern (2020) that involve women actively reclaiming public spaces through marches, protests and other forms of collective action are crucial in challenging the gendered power dynamics that govern public spaces in order to create environments that provide relief from external threats and hostile conditions (Lewis et al., 2015).

A second line of feminist city-making shifts the focus from reclaiming visibility to reconfiguring the material and institutional conditions of urban life. Scholars, organizers and grassroots activists have developed a range of interventions contending that reclaiming and reimagining public spaces requires more than occupying the city and merely tackling physical safety. It rather necessitates addressing patriarchal urbanism and its fundamental rethinking in terms of use and design, through feminist toponymy, gender-sensitive urban planning and participatory design processes, such as participatory walks, where women are active decision-makers and so subjects capable of redefining urban priorities instead of residual users in need of protection (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Darke, 1998; Jacobs, 1961; Kern, 2020; Wang & Burris, 1997). A corporeal and care-centred perspective extends this user-centred logic further in treating variable forms of embodiment (such as pregnancy, caregiving, fatigue) as design premises and so remaking the city’s affective atmospheres (Grosz, 1995; Longhurst, 2001). These embodied design premises do more than alter the city’s emotional texture; they validate the presence of diverse bodies in public space, thereby grounding safety in a sense of shared legitimacy (Kern, 2020). Within this framework, safety ceases to be a matter of surveillance and becomes an infrastructural expression of care. In this register, *la ciudad cuidadora* names a reorganisation of urban priorities around social reproduction, bodily diversity, and shared responsibility, moving care from a private burden to a public principle of city-making (Valdivia, 2018).

Kern (2020) and Fusco (2021) precisely argue that safety must be reconceived as a communal undertaking that addresses root causes such as inequality, lack of accessible services and the perpetuation of patriarchal myths—rather than narrowing public space through policing. A feminism of urban spaces, therefore, involves both recalibrating cultural narratives validating women’s right to linger, to exercise, or to socialize after dark while also transforming the infrastructures that have



historically sidelined them (Criado-Perez, 2019; Kern, 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Valentine, 1989). This approach intersects with critiques of neoliberal governance that reduce safety to a commodity marketed to wealthier patrons, often via private guards and curated pedestrian zones. Moreover, communal ownership and participatory governance models foster a sense of genuine belonging (Kern, 2020; Fusco, 2021). For example, by cultivating spaces such as community gardens or organizing mutual aid networks, residents seek to mitigate the conditions of anonymity and alienation often associated with urban environments (Chakma, 2016). Likewise, cooperative housing projects can shield renters from speculative markets, fostering social trust and day-to-day reciprocity (Jacobs, 1961). Counter-conduct can be therefore seen in the creation of feminist spaces, community gardens and cooperative housing projects that defy traditional zoning and planning norms (Chakma, 2016; Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009). These initiatives not only provide alternative models of urban living but also serve as sites of resistance against the commodification and privatisation of public spaces. In these frameworks, fear becomes a catalyst for solidarity rather than an impetus for private enclaves or aggressive policing.

Within this wider conversation, the Italian debate is best understood not as absent but as unevenly institutionalised and cross-disciplinary. It is a field in formation whose dispersion is itself revealing of how feminist urban questions have circulated in Italy: through projects, campaigns, planning debates, and activist infrastructures as much as through academic theory. A first strand addresses insecurity, decorum, and securitarian discourse, examining how fear is mobilised to govern women's and marginalised bodies in public space and how victimisation is narrated, managed, and normalised (Calabresi, 2002; Favarin, 2020; Fusco, 2021; Pitch, 2004). A second strand focuses on the symbolic order of the city, asking how public memory, naming, indecorous presences, and feminist toponymy shape who is recognisable as part of an urban lineage and whose presence remains marginal or contested (Belingardi, Castelli & Olcuire, 2019; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2018; Vacchelli, 2016). A third, more recent strand shifts attention to reconfiguration, care, and situated urban knowledge, asking how cities might be redesigned starting from women's everyday practices, embodied needs, and forms of expertise rather than treating women as a marginal target within an otherwise unchanged urban order (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021, 2024; Ferraro, 2024; Granata, 2023; Pecorelli, 2023).

This section has demonstrated that feminist urbanism is not solely about improving safety or access for women but about fundamentally reshaping the structures, logics, narratives and policies around which public spaces are imagined, built and governed. By engaging in grassroots activism, participatory planning and counter-conduct strategies, feminist city-making challenges patriarchal urbanism and reclaims the right to the city as a collective, inclusive process (Kern, 2020). As feminist geographers and activists illustrate, urban fear and exclusion are not fixed conditions but social constructs that can be contested and transformed through spatial interventions such as feminist night walks, community-driven mapping, co-curated toponymy and participatory gender-sensitive design (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013). Rather than relying on defensive architecture, fortress-like gating, selective police enforcement or top-down securitisation, feminist interventions foreground care, accessibility and mutual visibility as the foundations of safer, more just cities (Ferraro, 2024; Fusco, 2021; Granata, 2023; hooks, 2000; Kern 2020). Moving from diagnosing exclusion to rethinking the city from experiences, needs, and ways of knowing, the feminist city is an ongoing process of contestation, negotiation and re-imagination, wherein women and marginalised groups assert their right to co-produce urban life.



## Conclusions

This chapter has argued that gender is not an external variable imposed upon an otherwise neutral urban order, but one of the modalities through which public space is materially organised, symbolically coded, affectively lived, and politically contested. Drawing on feminist phenomenology, performativity, feminist geography, and affect theory, the discussion has shown that women's experiences of the city are shaped not only by explicit exclusion or spectacular violence, but by ordinary infrastructures of regulation: norms of propriety, public/private divisions, uneven conditions of care, expectations around visibility and respectability, and the anticipatory adjustments through which bodies learn how to move, wait, linger, or withdraw (Ahmed, 2004; Bartky, 1990; Butler, 1990, 1993; Kern, 2020; McDowell, 1999; Pain, 1997, 2001; Skeggs, 1997; Valentine, 1989; Young, 1990). Read in these terms, fear, discomfort, shame, and belonging do not appear as merely private responses to urban life, but as socially produced and spatially distributed ways of inhabiting the city through which unequal conditions of exposure, legitimacy, and support become sensible and knowable (Ahmed, 2004; Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Pitch, 2004; Rose, 1993). The chapter has also shown that the gendering of urban space cannot be separated from broader processes of neoliberal restructuring, securitisation, and symbolic ordering. Public and private remain unevenly distributed through the infrastructures of everyday life, while safety is too often recoded through surveillance, decorum, and self-regulation rather than through care, reciprocity, and shared responsibility (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004). Within this horizon, the feminist city emerges not as a finished model but as a contested process of reappropriation and reconfiguration, unfolding through collective presence, participatory practices, counter-conduct, care-centred planning, and struggles over symbolic recognition and urban memory (D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2018, 2023; Ferraro, 2024; Granata, 2023; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Vacchelli, 2016). The city, in this sense, is not merely a backdrop that happens to disadvantage women, but a material and symbolic order that can be reworked from the standpoint of care, everyday use, spatial perception, and the political value of situated experience. It is precisely this double movement -of reclaiming space and reconfiguring its conditions- that prepares the transition from the theoretical debates of this chapter to the Milanese context and to the empirical chapters that follow.

*Feminist City is an ongoing experiment in living differently, living better, and living more justly in an urban world.*

*(Kern, 2020: 19)*



## Chapter 3

### Research Background and Context

Beginning with the significant influence of Sarah Everard's murder on conversations about women's safety worldwide, this chapter explores the contemporary reasons why we need to continue researching women's fears within public spaces particularly in urban settings like Milan, Italy. The 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021 at 9 pm, in Clapham, London, signs an unprecedented turn in our society. Extensively covered by international media, including Italian news outlets, the murder of Sarah Everard remained prominent in public discourse across different countries for a rather extended period of time crystallizing "fears that many women experience as a background hum" (Hewitt, 2021). As a secondary result, articles reporting cases of gender-based violence, from rape to femicide, drastically increased in Italian media coverage (Siviero, 2021). From London to Milan, the case resonated deeply, sparking public outrage and solidarity gatherings, vigils and protests in the name of women's rights to be safe and protected at home as well as in the streets (Moro, 2021). The number of men interested in the matter rose with many more male-individuals asking what they can do to help women feel better and safer (Campbell, 2021); ongoing feminist movements in Italy, such as *Non Una Di Meno*<sup>4</sup>, saw increased participation and support (Siviero, 2021); many schools, universities and public institutions increased efforts to educate on the matter while Italian businesses and organizations reviewed workplace policies, providing training on gender sensitivity, and supporting campaigns against gender based violence (Moro, 2021).

The rapid proliferation of activism following Everard's murder also revealed the entanglement between digital visibility, safety awareness, and lived urban experiences (Hewitt, 2021). Social media timelines filled with hashtags related to women's safety, prompting many Italian users to share personal stories of harassment and fear and thereby illustrating how digital spaces can amplify and render visible forms of discomfort that often remain private (see Pain, 1997; Valentine, 1989). Many users joined these global conversations by sharing experiences of everyday harassment and assault, and calling for stronger action against gender-based violence (Moro, 2021). In the post-Covid period, several Italian social media accounts have also emerged to denounce urban decay, crime, and social problems in cities such as Rome and Milan, with, for example *Welcome to Favelas*<sup>5</sup> and *Milano Bella da Dio*<sup>6</sup>. Although often presented as efforts to document everyday urban realities, these accounts circulate information through a mix of user-generated content and on-the-ground reporting that may lack journalistic verification or institutional accountability, at times encouraging questionable forms of engagement, from hate amplification and witch-hunting to calls for informal justice in the name of social safety (see Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020).

Everard's case has therefore helped crystallise calls for a different response to gender-based violence, reopening debates about the effectiveness of police and judicial institutions in protecting women and prosecuting offenders, and exposing once again the limits of securitarian and justice-centred approaches (Siviero, 2021). In the Italian context, these debates have taken a particularly recognisable form through the dyad *decoro/degrado*<sup>7</sup>, which functions not merely as a descriptive language of urban disorder but as a governmental technology of prevention and control in the name

<sup>4</sup> Transfeminist movement born in Argentina in 2015, arrived in Italy in 2016 <https://nonunadimeno.wordpress.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/welcometofavelas> 4k/

<sup>6</sup> Trad. Lit. "Milan Beautiful as God" -<https://www.instagram.com/milanobelladadio/>

<sup>7</sup> Trad. Lit. "decorum/decay," though the terms carry a broader meaning in Italian urban and political discourse. Here, "decoro" refers not simply to cleanliness or order, but to a normative ideal of urban respectability, propriety, and visual control; while "degrado" refers not only to physical deterioration, but to a politically charged designation of disorder, decline, and unwanted presence. Used together, the dyad functions as a classificatory language through which spaces, practices, and bodies are judged, problematised, and governed.



of women's safety. In this scenario, Italian institutions since 2019 have intensified lighting and visibility measures, strengthened police training, introduced new legal and reporting dispositifs such as *Codice Rosso*<sup>8</sup>, expanded CCTV infrastructures and emergency call buttons, and deployed police forces to remove what is framed as disorder, obscenity, danger, or crime (Fusco, 2021; Moro, 2021). Yet feminist scholarship has repeatedly shown that such interventions, while often producing an immediate sense of reassurance, frequently leave untouched, or even exacerbate the deeper forms of embodied insecurity rooted in everyday gendered exclusions (Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004).

Also technological solutions aimed at women's safety proliferated rapidly in response to this climate of heightened fear. One of the most peculiar goes under the name of *DonneXStrada*<sup>9</sup> and was initially an Instagram initiative that rapidly gained over 70,000 followers by offering live accompaniment calls to women feeling unsafe. The project subsequently launched *Punti Viola*<sup>10</sup>, a network of safe spaces created in shops and businesses across Italy where women can stop, ask for help, and feel protected in case of harassment or fear in public space. Counting now 240K followers, the team of *DonneXStrada* moved the service onto a dedicated safety App called *ViolaWalkHome*<sup>11</sup>. Many others created Apps related to issues of safety and gender based violence. To cite a few: *SecurWoman 2.0*<sup>12</sup>, providing an instant connection to a response centre and alerts emergency contacts with the user's real-time location in case of emergencies; *Where Are U*<sup>13</sup>, connecting users directly to the 112 European emergency number and provides their location to emergency responders; *YouPol*<sup>14</sup>, allowing users to report sexual abuses and domestic violence directly to the Italian State Police; *Wher App*<sup>15</sup>, offering a map based on user experiences of streets' safety, and the latest launched (2025) *Pink Road*<sup>16</sup>, initiative of participatory mapping aimed at identifying and marking safe, inclusive routes. The development of safety apps, emergency alert systems and improved communication networks can indeed empower women and non-binary individuals in taking control over their. However, while useful in the short term, these initiatives built on the idea that female bodies are perceived as "foreign" to the public space and so may foster the idea that women should discipline themselves and change their behaviour when crossing the urban space laying the groundwork for perpetual systemic discrimination against women (Kern, 2020).

In Italy, one of the least committed European countries when it comes to gender equality measures<sup>17</sup>, cultural norms, which often emphasize traditional gender roles, also play a significant role in shaping women's experiences in public spaces (Pasquali, 2012). Reports by Istat<sup>18</sup> (2018; 2020) stated that one in three women have been a victim of harassment and that 88% of women using public transportation have been victims of sexual harassment at least once in their life. In 2020, Censis and Federsicurezza published the 2<sup>nd</sup> report on the safety supply chain in Italy<sup>19</sup> stating that 75,8% of women were afraid of walking in the streets and taking public transport while 83,8% were scared of crowded places. More recently, Istat (2024) published a new report on safety perception for 2022/2023 stating that, while 76.2% of the overall population reports feeling very or fairly safe

<sup>8</sup> Trad. Lit. "Red Code" -Italy, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2019, Law N°69, enhanced in November 2023

<https://temi.camera.it/leg19/temi/violenza-contro-le-donne.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://donexstrada.org/>

<sup>10</sup> Trad. Lit. "Purple Points"-<https://donexstrada.org/punti-viola/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.violawalkhome.com/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.agi.it/innovazione/news/2016-05-18/securwoman\\_lapp\\_che\\_fa\\_da\\_guardia\\_del\\_corpo-784937/](https://www.agi.it/innovazione/news/2016-05-18/securwoman_lapp_che_fa_da_guardia_del_corpo-784937/)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.greenme.it/scienza-e-tecnologia/mobile/where-are-u-app-112-emergenze/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/youpol--l-app-per-il-contrasto-alla-violenza-di-genero>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/wher\\_app/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/wher_app/?hl=en)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.pinkroad.it/>

<sup>17</sup> See the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 of the World Economic Forum: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/>

<sup>18</sup> Istat is the Italian National Institute of Statistics, acting as the main source of official data in Italy.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.censis.it/sites/default/files/downloads/Rapporto%20finale.pdf>



walking alone in their neighbourhood at night, only 69.1% of women feel this way, compared to 83.6% of men. This gender gap extends to behavioural responses: 28.9% of women avoid going out alone at night due to fear, in contrast to just 10.2% of men. Similarly, 31.5% of women avoid certain places or situations perceived as risky, while only 13.1% of men report the same. Fear of theft or assault influences the behaviour of 27.6% of women (versus 16.9% of men), and a further 13.9% of women explicitly cite fear of sexual violence in public spaces, a concern not mirrored in the male population. Perceptions of insecurity are further heightened in areas marked by urban degradation (e.g., graffiti, litter, poor lighting), where the proportion of women who feel safe drops to below 55% (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024).

These findings illustrate how gendered experiences of fear and vulnerability are deeply embedded in the spatial and social fabric of Italian cities, influencing women's everyday navigation and relationship with public space. However, general crime data does not support such high levels of gendered fear (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024). In other words, while Italian women are statistically "safer" and less affected by many types of crime compared to men, they often report higher levels of fear, danger and insecurity (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024). And it is precisely this paradox, this discrepancy, that further brings into question the cause and consequences of the structuring of women's perceptions and experiences of public spaces. This discrepancy reveals how perceptions of fear and insecurity are deeply embedded within the spatial and affective fabric of Italian cities, shaped by affective atmospheres, historical narratives, and mediated representations of urban violence (see Massey, 1994; Pain, 1997).

### Why Milan?

Milan, with its mid-scale and polycentric character, offers a particularly fertile site for theorising gendered urban experience. Adopting Robinson's (2006) "ordinary cities" lens, and following Roy's call to provincialise global-city narratives (2003; 2009), allows Milan to be approached not as a derivative case measured against metropolitan archetypes, but as a generative urban context in which relations between space, power, and gender are actively negotiated. Relative to Italy's smaller cities and rural settings, Milan's density, intense mobility, and live night-time economies magnify gendered frictions around routes, timings, and visibility, particularly in transit corridors and mixed-use redevelopment zones. Moreover, Milan is one of the urban sites where dispersed lines of inquiry regarding gender and urbanism intersect with particular visibility. Vacchelli's work (2016) for example, places feminist spatial reappropriation within longer temporalities of organising and intergenerational transmission, showing that feminist presence in the city is not episodic but sedimented across different waves of activism. D'Ambrosio Clementelli, in turn, makes visible how contemporary interventions in Milan confront both the gendered effects of neoliberal restructuring and the symbolic order of the city itself, whether through critiques of securitisation and selective redevelopment or through struggles over naming, representation, and feminist toponymy (2018; 2023).

Several studies have precisely examined the nature and extent of women's fear in Milan. For instance, Pasquali's paper (2012) explores the intersection of gender dynamics and urban development in Milan. The study examines how historical contexts and contemporary urban planning practices impact the experiences of different genders in the city of Milan concluding that historical urban planning and societal norms have traditionally marginalised women, creating male-dominated public spaces that limited women's access to public spaces and resources. These historical legacies persist in contemporary Milan, influencing gendered experiences of safety, mobility and accessibility (Pasquali, 2012). A study by Ceccato and Loukaitou-Sideris (2020) found that women's fear in Milan is primarily associated with certain urban areas that are perceived as unsafe due to poor lighting, lack



of surveillance and social disorder. This perception is exacerbated during the evening and night-time particularly in transit settings, due to the risk of sexual harassment and assault. Significantly impacting women's mobility and travel behaviour, often leading to the avoidance of certain routes or times, Milanese women's fears are shaped not only by crime incidents, but also by perceived inadequacies in safety measures, environmental cues signalling danger, and transit designs that fail to account adequately for women's security needs (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020). Investigating urban insecurity and the use of video surveillance as a mitigating measure in Budapest and Milan, Lysova (2021) found out that local legislation views urban security as a public good and promotes the spread of CCTV while experts and NGO representatives consider video surveillance to be only a partial solution, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches that include social interventions and community engagement.

By exploring how urban spaces in Milan reflect and reinforce gender norms, Pecorelli (2023) reported that activists and feminist movements have employed "odonomastic guerrilla warfare" to symbolically rename streets to honour women and LGBTQIA+ figures, challenging patriarchal and colonial narratives. The study also reveals a significant gender imbalance in Milan's street names, with only 3% honouring women. This reflects broader issues of gender inequality in public space representation and highlights how urban spaces often privilege male experiences, with Milan's figures slightly below but consistent with national and European trends where the percentage of streets named after women generally remains below 10%. Pecorelli (2023) also mentioned how progressive city councils in Milan have supported gender-inclusive initiatives, aiming to create more inclusive urban spaces. To mention, for example, *Milano Città delle Donne*<sup>20</sup>, an ongoing initiative aiming at making the city of Milan more inclusive and reflective of women's contributions to society by addressing gender imbalances in urban toponymy through increasing the number of streets and public spaces named after women and by hosting public art installations, educational programs and events that celebrate women's historical and contemporary contributions to the city and the world.

Mostly known for its economic prosperity and cultural heritage, in the last few years, Milan serves also as a particularly instructive case for examining gender equality in urban spaces due to its pioneering efforts and initiatives aiming to address and reduce gender-based disparities. The scientific research project *STEP UP -Walkability for Women in Milan*<sup>21</sup>, for instance, addresses women's perception of safety when traveling on foot in Milan. Carried out in 2023 in collaboration with the Department of Civil, Construction and Environmental Engineering of the University of Naples Federico II, the association *Sex and the City* and the *Walk21* foundation, this initiative triangulated data from *Comune di Milano*, their own online survey and Geographic Information System (GIS) models to map areas obtained from *Wher\_App*. Specific settings within Milan, such as neighbourhoods, squares, commercial spaces and parks were selected either because they are reported as highly dangerous across multiple datasets or because there is a significant discrepancy in the perception of safety. Investigating the constructed dimensions of fear and the factors that contribute to the disparity between perceived and actual safety, focus groups on these areas were carried out aiming at providing policy recommendations for the creation of safer urban environments through inclusive planning.

While numerous initiatives and planning tools have been recently developed to address gender-based insecurity, during the time in which this research was carried out, between 2022 and 2025, several episodes of street harassment occurred both in central and peripheral areas of the city. These included collective sexual assaults during New Year's Eve celebrations in Piazza Duomo (2022 and again in 2024), where groups of women were surrounded and assaulted. Additional cases

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<sup>20</sup> Trad. Lit. "Milan City of Women" - <https://www.comune.milano.it/web/milano-citta-delle-donne>

<sup>21</sup> presented in the framework of the Cariplo Foundation tender "INEQUALITIES RESEARCH -Generating knowledge to reduce inequalities"



included the molestation of a 14-year-old on public transport in early March 2025 and the public groping of a university student at a bus stop in April 2025. As a response to these ongoing forms of violence, feminist collectives such as *Non Una di Meno* organized *Passeggiate Arrabbiate*<sup>22</sup>: symbolic night walks that assert bodily presence in public space as a form of resistance and collective care, reclaiming the right of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals to inhabit the city without fear-practically enacting feminist theoretical insights about embodied resistance to spatial oppression (see Kern, 2020). Other episodes involving unwanted sexual contact in streets, parks and clubs were also widely reported by local newspapers and the Instagram account *Milano Bella da Dio*, intensifying the perception of danger in Milanese public space and exposing the structural gaps in existing safety measures.

Moreover, Milan stands out as the first Italian city to commission and publish a *Gender Atlas*, a comprehensive tool developed by Andreola and Muzzonigro (2021) that critically examines the urban environment through a gender lens and provides a theoretical and practical framework for inclusive urban planning. This *Atlas* not only maps the city but also offers a detailed analysis of symbolic and practical uses of the city, shedding light how different spatial dynamics affect women and gender minorities and examining how spatial arrangements can either perpetuate or mitigate feelings of insecurity (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021). Tools like Milan's Gender Atlas align with broader international efforts to build sustainable gender-responsive cities, such as the *Cities for Women Framework: An Urban Assessment Framework Through a Gender Lens* and *Women-Friendly Urban Planning Toolkit* (Cities Alliance, 2022; 2023), which offer a range of participatory, intersectional and empowering strategies to identify, analyse and address spatial inequalities also in cities of the Global South. If the first one offers a structured methodology to assess cities in terms of how they serve the needs of women and girls methodologically identifying five key domains (mobility, built environment, social infrastructure, economic empowerment and governance), the toolkit provides practical guidance for integrating gender equality into urban planning processes across a variety of local contexts.

With regard to integrating women's everyday experiences of urban settings in city planning, Andreola and Muzzonigro, through their association *Sex & the City*, also promoted an initiative called *HER Walks* in collaboration with the city administration. Aiming at enhancing the presence and role of women in public spaces, the project consisted in an exploratory community walk of the area of Niguarda (9<sup>th</sup> Municipality of Milan) with local women to identify factors that affect safety and usability, such as lighting and accessibility. Originally, the idea was to repeat these walks at least in an area for each Municipality but since December 2022 that was the only one carried out. *Sex and the City* and *Comune di Milano* worked again together in 2024 on the project *Per Strada Più Libere*<sup>23</sup> relatively short-term participatory listening processes rather than as longitudinal qualitative inquiries. Across the city, the project involved fifteen territorial listening groups (each corresponding to a different NIL<sup>24</sup>), received 409 applications, and ultimately engaged 172 participants, while explicitly attempting to compose heterogeneous groups in terms of age, gender, citizenship, and disability. A similarly grounded, participatory initiative developed in 2022 in Brussels and called *Girls Make the City*<sup>25</sup> with young women who co-designed spatial interventions to reclaim a skate park where they felt unsafe. The project generated suggestions ranging from better lighting and sidewalk maintenance to clearer signage, benches, and resting areas. This comparative example reinforces the importance of designing "with" rather than "for" women, and highlights how small-scale, situated knowledge can inform meaningful urban change.

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<sup>22</sup> Trad. Lit. "Angry Walks"

<sup>23</sup> Trad. Lit. "on the road more free"

<sup>24</sup> "Nucleo di Identità Locale" which translates as "Local Identity Node"

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.zijkant.be/girls-make-the-city-eng/>



Most recently, in June 2025, the association *Sex & the City* and *Comune di Milano*, in collaboration with lighting designers, launched the project *Per Strada Più libere-La notte. Una nuova luce per Stazione Centrale*. The project invited local women who regularly live in or transit through the around Viale Brianza and the Central Station underpass to share their experiences and insights during a listening session. Illustrating how feminist praxis can effectively integrate affective and embodied insights into urban planning (see Valentine, 1989), the participatory initiative directly responded to a recurring need voiced by participants in the earlier *Per Strada Più Libere* project, where improved lighting had emerged as a key demand for feeling safer in public space after dark. The aim was to inform a co-designed lighting intervention that reflects real needs and embodied knowledge of urban discomfort and safety at night. Notably, Milan served as the pilot city for these early initiatives. Since then, the association *Sex & the City* has expanded its gender-sensitive urban work to other Italian cities, including Roma, Bologna and Parma, developing further tools such as the *Gender Atlas* in some of these cities, *HER Walks* and even *HER Maps*, demonstrating the transferability of Milan's participatory model to diverse urban contexts.

The women-led community listening project *FrancaLab*, initiated by a Member of Parliament, further illuminated women's experiences in Milanese transit spaces through an online survey investigating women's use of public transportation where 60.6% of respondents reported experiencing discomfort on public transportation in Milan in the past three years<sup>26</sup>. The survey also revealed that even with extensive camera surveillance, significant proportions of women still reported discomfort. This highlights the persistent gap between institutional security measures and women's embodied experiences, affirming feminist critiques of institutional reliance on visibility and surveillance as insufficiently addressing deeper social and affective dynamics of fear (see Kern, 2020; Pain, 1997). Last but not least, Milan's active participation in international initiatives like UN Women's *Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces*<sup>27</sup> further demonstrates its commitment to addressing gender-based violence and promoting urban inclusivity on a global scale as the program involves collaborations with local governments, civil society and grassroots organizations to improve safety in public spaces through community engagement, policy advocacy and infrastructure improvements. Flip side of the coin, the United Nations' advocacy for safer and gender-inclusive urban spaces<sup>28</sup>, which precisely began in 2022, reinforces the need to reframe public space not only as a site of transit or commerce, but as a fundamental right and space of belonging for women and gender minorities.

### A close-up on Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi

Inaugurated in 1931, Stazione Centrale stands as a monumental example of Fascist architecture, embodying the regime's aspirations for power, grandeur and nationalistic pride. Designed by architect Ulisse Stacchini, the station's imposing façade and expansive interiors were intended to project Milan as a modern, globally connected city. Over the decades, Stazione Centrale has evolved into one of Italy's largest and busiest railway stations, symbolizing both the historical legacy and the contemporary dynamism of Milan (Colombo & Navarini, 1999). Opened in 1961, Stazione Garibaldi reflects instead post-war modernism and functional architectural trends. Designed to accommodate the burgeoning demands of regional and high-speed trains, Garibaldi represents a shift towards efficiency and integration within Milan's transportation network. The station's subsequent role in the redevelopment of the Isola district, culminating in significant urban renewal

<sup>26</sup>

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1r6xyv0btUuHbmHB\\_2qE\\_iOJSkMUONbAiRFqUm24HOck/edit?ts=64f8b241&pli=1#responses](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1r6xyv0btUuHbmHB_2qE_iOJSkMUONbAiRFqUm24HOck/edit?ts=64f8b241&pli=1#responses)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces>

<sup>28</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129752>



projects by 2018, underscores its importance as a node of economic and social transformation (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024). The architectural divergence between the two stations not only highlights different historical periods but also mirrors shifts in urban planning philosophies: from the monumentalism of the Fascist era to the functional modernism of the post-war period. This historical layering makes Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi essential for understanding how Milan's architectural and urban planning decisions reflect and influence its socio-political landscape. Read as a heterotopia of transit and surveillance (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986), Milano Centrale also sedimented local histories of bordering and control (Colombo & Navarini, 1999), making it a privileged threshold where visibility, regulation and belonging are continuously negotiated.

Train stations, by their very nature, are socio-economic crossroads that bring together diverse social groups, economic activities and cultural interactions. Stazione Centrale exemplifies this by hosting a mix of luxury hotels, significant institutions (e.g. *Regione Lombardia*<sup>29</sup>), large offices and upscale retail outlets alongside areas frequented by young skaters, homeless individuals and migrants. This juxtaposition creates a vibrant yet complex socio-demographic composition, where long-term residents interact with transient visitors and daily commuters, highlighting Milan's global connectivity and internal social stratifications (Colombo & Navarini, 1999). Stazione Garibaldi, situated in a gentrified district, integrates regional trains, high-speed trains and urban metro lines, serving as a critical node in Milan's transportation network. The surrounding area, characterized by residential, commercial and office spaces, reflects the neoliberal transformation of urban spaces that prioritizes economic growth, real estate development and social exclusivity. The socio-economic diversity surrounding both stations underscores how these spaces serve as focal points where global influences meet local realities and encapsulate broader urban trends of economic prosperity at the expense of local communities, social stratification, and the tension between inclusivity and exclusivity (see Kern, 2020). Framed as urban borderlands, these stations function as thresholds that both separate and connect; they sharpen the faculty and attune oppositional gazes that read power in the everyday (Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1992).

While these macro-level transformations shape access, security and belonging in urban transport infrastructures, historical visual archives from *Intensa Sanpaolo*<sup>30</sup> and from *Regione Lombardia*<sup>31</sup> offer a counterpoint that foregrounds the embodied presence and agency of women within these very spaces. Depicting women on strike at Garibaldi Station demanding housing rights and resisting eviction, or working as train conductors within its transit infrastructures, these images construct a visual counter-history that challenges dominant narratives of female vulnerability and passivity in public space as they assert that women have long inhabited, worked in, and moved through railway stations. In doing so, they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of urban transit spaces not only as hostile sites, but also as arenas of presence, agency, and spatial resistance (see Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005; Valentine, 1989).

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<sup>29</sup> The regional governing body for the entire Lombardy region.

<sup>30</sup> <https://asisp.intesasanpaolo.com/publifoto/detail/IT-PF-FT001-003012/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/fotografie/schede/IMM-5w050-0000160/>



1967, Simonetta Appolloni e Laura Lo Prieno, Donne capostazione, Archivio Storico Intesa Sanpaolo

The redevelopment of areas surrounding Stazione Garibaldi, particularly the Isola district, exemplifies the neoliberal transformation of urban spaces in Milan. The reorganization of public spaces around Garibaldi Station, Isola District, which included the intensification of commercial enterprises, the creation of the shopping mall “Porta Nuova Shopping District,” and the privatisation of Gae Aulenti square and its park “Biblioteca degli Alberi,” has transformed the area into a hub for affluent residents, tourism, and commerce, limiting access for non-affluent users and neglecting the needs of local communities. In this context, gentrification has therefore redefined the urban fabric, attracting investment and influx of affluent residents and businesses, driving up property values and so displacing long-term inhabitants, thereby dismantling long-standing communities. This socio-spatial polarization not only deepens economic disparities but also limits opportunities for social integration and mobility, further entrenching socio-spatial divides and reinforcing broader societal inequalities (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024; Kern, 2020). Demonstrating how recent market-driven redevelopment prioritizes aesthetic appeal and investment potential, Andreola and Muzzonigro (2024) emphasize that these dynamics reflect broader patterns in Milan, where “urban revitalization initiatives” often consist in turning open public areas into privately managed ones, curtailing spaces for social and political expression.

Historically a hub for transportation and commerce, and thus a site of intersection for diverse populations and activities, the district of Stazione Centrale has also experienced socio-spatial shifts driven by gentrification and neoliberal policies. Stazione Centrale’s vast and massive architecture creates a sense of grandeur that could lead to sense of alienation and vulnerability. Already at the end of the last century, researchers noticed the strong presence of law enforcement and surveillance devices at Stazione Centrale, establishing a power dynamic that influences the behaviour and perceptions of those frequenting the station (Colombo & Navarini, 1999). While redevelopment projects aim to modernize the space, surveillance (both through an increment of police presence and CCTV cameras) and privatisation were introduced to “clean up” the area (Colombo and Navarini, 1999). This bordering through security folds everyday informality into governance, consolidating a regime where circulation and presence are differentially sanctioned (Roy, 2009). The coexistence of upscale commercial enterprises and marginalised communities within its vicinity illustrates the contradictory nature of urban revitalization, promoting economic growth while perpetuating social exclusion. This duality underscores how neoliberal urban policies commodify public spaces, prioritizing market-driven agendas over social cohesion and inclusivity (see Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020). Andreola and Muzzonigro (2024) critique these practices of modernization precisely



highlighting how they once again disproportionately impact marginalised users, such as migrants and homeless people, who rely on the station's public areas for shelter and connection.

Despite several urban regeneration projects and increased security measures, Milan's Central Station area remains a contested and ambivalent space. Volunteer-based associations such as City Angels continue to highlight persistent concerns about safety and vulnerability in this transit hub, particularly during night-time hours and, in their 2023 annual report, they describe the area as still being "at risk" despite general improvements in the city<sup>32</sup>. This reinforces the notion that urban insecurity is often spatialised and unequally distributed, persisting even in areas targeted by official interventions. Analysing data from 2015-2016, a crime mapping project based on reported incidents and conducted by 32 students from the Politecnico di Milano identified Stazione Centrale as one of the most dangerous area of Milan<sup>33</sup>. Again, in 2023, Arnaldo Liguori created a crime map of Milan identifying the area around Stazione Centrale as one of the a major hotspots<sup>34</sup>. Still today, the area is a priority for public administration and authorities when it comes to security and safety, which has led over time to intensification of surveillance and a heightened police presence<sup>22</sup>. Petty crimes such as pickpocketing, bag snatching and scams are relatively common due to the high turnover of people often in rush or unfamiliar with the setting. In 2023, at least three known cases of rape have been documented at Milan's Central Station even though the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Piantedosi, stated that, compared to 2019, the number of sexual assault cases in the area has decreased by 39% due to a constant and dynamic police presence around the station<sup>23</sup>.

Garibaldi is often perceived as safer compared to Stazione Centrale as its recently redeveloped, modern, aesthetically curated and pleasing surroundings may foster a false sense of security stemming from ideological decorum (Fusco, 2021). This illusion of safety at Garibaldi is the practical example of how urban beautification often serves to mask socio-spatial inequalities, rendering certain bodies out of place. Indeed, Garibaldi's high turnover of unfamiliar individuals together with the vibrant nightlife that characterize the area introduce safety and security concerns, particularly for women navigating these spaces at night (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020). Moreover, the renovation brought new long tunnels, a relatively large ungated park inside a wide pedestrian area which is the gateway to two very popular neighbourhoods (Isola and Moscova districts) and is not well lit at night. In one way or another, whether it is brand new or historical, to the eyes of public administration the station remains a priority area for security measures. The securitisation of these stations not only reflects neoliberal urban policies prioritizing economic interests and public image, but also perpetuates a sense of unease among marginalised bodies reinforcing the notion that public spaces are inherently unsafe for them (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024). Such dynamics reflect the ambivalent nature of securitisation where "safety" becomes a contested and political construct: whose safety, and at what cost?

As mentioned, recent research initiatives such as *Next Stop*, *Step Up*, and *Per Strada Più Libere* have begun to shed light on the spatial dynamics and gendered dimensions of safety and connectivity in Milan's transit corridors. Although *Next Stop* is still in its pilot phase and specific quantitative data are forthcoming, preliminary insights indicate that Stazione Centrale is earmarked as a critical nexus for future interventions to redefine transit nodes, improving accessibility and enhancing multimodal sustainable connectivity. *Step Up* data from a survey on women perceptions of public spaces reported that a high proportion of respondents are feeling unsafe when walking alone at night, especially in the area of Stazione Centrale, and some women actively avoid night outings. To be more precise, within the dedicated "Stazione Centrale -Ponte Seveso" group, 57% of respondents reported feeling unsafe when walking alone at night, with 20.2% stating they do not go

<sup>32</sup> <https://cityangels.it/press-1/city-angels-milano-migliorata-ma-la-stazione-centrale-sempre-a-rischio/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.milanotoday.it/cronaca/mappa-criminalita.html>

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.datawrapper.de/\\_1beSE/](https://www.datawrapper.de/_1beSE/)



out at night. The spatial regression analysis further correlated these heightened perceptions of insecurity in the area with inadequate public lighting and infrequent night-time transit services. Qualitative narratives emerged from another listening group dedicated to the area (NIL10: Stazione Centrale -Ponte Seveso) within the project *Per Strada Più Libere* complemented these findings, portraying Stazione Centrale as an area that, despite its daytime vibrancy and high foot traffic, transforms into a desolate space after a certain hour. The territorial report records the participation of ten women aged between 19 and 73 also describes the station area as a major spatial rupture, marked by barrier-like streets and underpasses perceived as insecure, unhealthy, and lacking escape routes.

Although *Step Up* did not establish a separate listening group solely for Stazione Garibaldi, the broader dataset covering the Isola district shows moderately better -but still suboptimal-safety scores especially during the day. Also *Per Strada Più Libere* did not set up a listening group specifically for Stazione Garibaldi but rather for Isola district. Delving deeper into the personal and communal experiences that underlie these statistics, *Per Strada Più Libere* qualitative data identified the reasons why the areas surrounding Stazione Garibaldi are perceived as safer during day time. This is because of a mixed-use environment that blends residential, commercial and leisure activities creating pockets of safety. However, during their focus groups it emerged that at night the absence of consistent active elements (like continuously operating businesses and sustained community presence) as well as consistent infrastructural maintenance can lead to feelings of vulnerability and engender a sense of insecurity among women-passing pedestrians. These findings highlight the disconnect between lived experience and contemporary aesthetic approaches to urban representation. The Garibaldi underpass, for instance, is publicly promoted -on platforms such as *Zero.eu*<sup>35</sup>-as a luminous, culturally vibrant corridor animated by curated lighting and artistic interventions, yet for many women, it remains an ambivalent or even unsafe space, especially during off-peak hours, exposing the limits of beautification strategies and design-led revitalization.



Foto di Valentina De Zanche per Zero Milano

Both indicating that a significant portion of the women-passing population in Milan experiences a heightened sense of insecurity in certain areas, the qualitative insights from *Per Strada Più Libere* complemented *de facto* the quantitative data from the *Step Up* project. If one quantified the extent of the problem and correlates it with specific environmental factors, the other one emphasized the subjective, emotional dimensions of urban insecurity rather than numerical prevalence. These findings underscore the complex interplay between urban connectivity,

<sup>35</sup> <https://zero.eu/en/luoghi/174140-sottopasso-garibaldi.milano/>



infrastructural quality and gendered perceptions of Milan's transit hubs but also the necessity to further employ a participatory qualitative approach that captures the nuanced lived experiences of women. Moreover, further illustrating how night-time transforms gendered experiences of urban space, Garibaldi and Centrale's findings echo with ones from the UK, where nearly half of women had ceased traveling in London during certain times due to personal safety concerns<sup>36</sup>. And again, a survey including over 1000 participants and a focus group of young women highlighted that almost 75% of respondents perceived post-10 pm travel as particularly unsafe in London<sup>37</sup>. These 2022 studies from London Travel Watch or EU initiatives of research, training and advocacy such as the *Sexism Free Night*<sup>38</sup>, emphasize how nightlife environments can become sites of exclusion and vulnerability, demonstrating the importance of considering urban temporality when addressing safety through a feminist lens.

Beyond its role as a contested site of surveillance and urban inequality, the area surrounding Milan's Central Station can be also considered as a terrain of feminist resistance, cultural expression, and collective care. Piazza Duca d'Aosta, situated just in front of the station's monumental façade, has long served as a key gathering point for political mobilisations, becoming a familiar stage for feminist and anti-racist struggles. Since the beginning of my research, I have witnessed numerous demonstrations held here by the feminist network *Non Una di Meno* reclaiming public space through collective presence and care, aligning with theories highlighting embodied practices as strategies of spatial resistance (see Ahmed, 2004). This symbolic reappropriation of urban space was echoed in the nearby exhibition *Essere Donna. Il corpo come strumento di creazione e atto di ribellione*<sup>39</sup>, hosted by Galleria Fumagalli located in Via Bonaventura Cavalieri, which featured works by artists such as Marina Abramović and Shirin Neshat. Through the use of their own bodies as sites of expression and disobedience, these artists articulated a feminist visual language that resonates with the struggles taking place outside the gallery walls.



Route of Non Una Di Meno march for the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, respectively 2025 and 2024

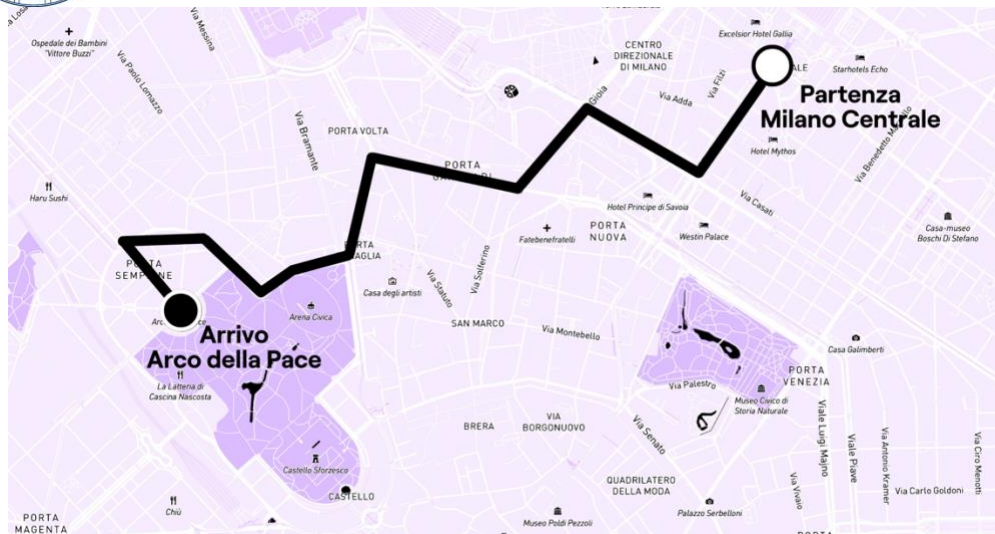
<sup>36</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/travelwatch-survey-women-travel-night-safety-concerns-sarah-everard-sabrina-nessa-b978649.html>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/opinion/personal-safety-women-s-experiences-of-being-alone-after-dark/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://sexismfreenight.eu/>

<sup>39</sup> Trad. Lit. "Being a Woman. The Body as a Tool for Creation and an Act of Rebellion"

<https://galleriafumagalli.com/mostre-ongoing/essere-donna/>



Usual Pride Route

The square is not only the traditional departure point of the Milan Pride parade, which each year reclaims public space through celebratory forms of queer visibility, but has more recently become a stage for broader political mobilization. Since October 7th, 2023, it has served as the gathering point for weekly pro-Palestinian demonstrations held every Saturday, demanding an end to the ongoing genocide. In March 2025, during the month of *Ramadan*, Piazza Duca d'Aosta also hosted a collective *Iftar*, the evening meal to break the fast, organized by a network of Muslim associations and local activists. The event brought together residents, commuters, and passersby in a moment of shared public conviviality and interfaith solidarity. These multiple and overlapping uses of the square gesture toward its potential as a contested yet generative urban space—one that, despite its securitised and ambivalent character, can be reimagined as a site of encounter, resistance, and situated co-presence (see Massey, 1994). The area also hosts established services such as the *AIED counselling centre*<sup>40</sup>, a long-standing secular public site providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, including gynaecological, psychological, and educational support. Alongside, newer initiatives like *Punti Viola*, which can be found at the *Ostello Bello Grande*<sup>41</sup> and the TIM store located inside the Central Station. Together, these diverse nodes may anchor forms of everyday care and resistance within a zone otherwise dominated by transit, surveillance, and market-driven dynamics.



March of the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, personal photos

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.aiedmilano.com/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://ostellobello.com/en/hostel/milan-central-station/>



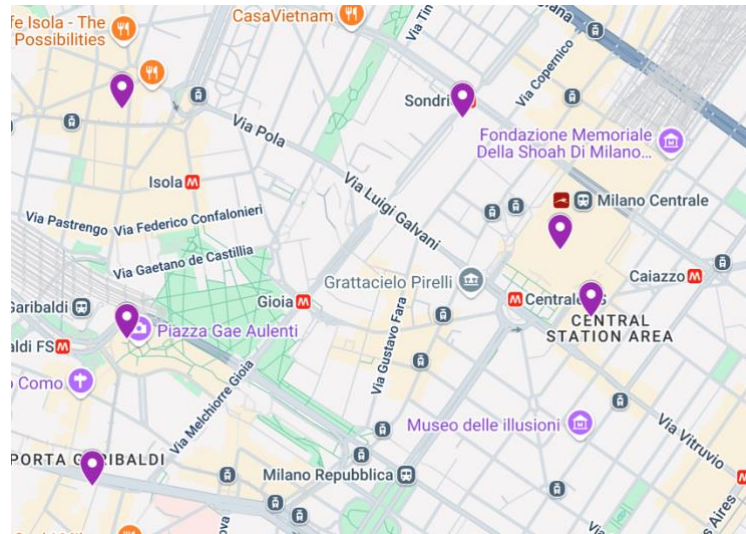
March of the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, photo source [ansa.it](https://www.ansa.it)



Iftar, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025, photo-credits to Ziad Abou Aly

A similar, though perhaps less immediately visible, dynamic of resistance and care unfolds in the area surrounding Stazione Garibaldi. Often associated with processes of gentrification and aestheticized urban redevelopment, the district nonetheless hosts spaces that actively nurture feminist solidarity, safety, and cultural participation. As in Centrale, we can observe the coexistence of both longstanding and emerging interventions: from the iconic *Casa delle Donne di Milano*<sup>42</sup>-a well-established feminist hub providing services, workshops, and spaces for political organising and dialogue-to the more recent establishment of two *Punti Viola*, located at the TIM point in Piazza Gae Aulenti and within the Anteo Spazio Cinema.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.casadonnemilano.it/>



Close up on the interested areas of the Punti Viola Official Map<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

Starting from the global resonance of Sarah Everard's murder, this chapter has traced how fear has been intensified, mediated, and politicised through news coverage, social media testimony, digital safety initiatives, and renewed feminist mobilisations. In the Italian context, these dynamics intersect with longstanding cultural norms, uneven gender relations, and with the logic of *decoro/degrado*, through which insecurity is often addressed by means of surveillance, visibility, policing, and emergency dispositifs. Yet, as the chapter has argued, such responses frequently leave untouched the deeper social, spatial, and affective conditions through which gendered insecurity is produced and lived. Women's fear, in this sense, emerges not as an individual reaction or an irrational excess, but as a historically and geographically structured experience, shaped by mediated narratives, urban atmospheres, embodied memory, and unequal relations of access, mobility, and belonging.

Within this broader frame, Milan has been approached as a particularly fertile site for examining how gendered urban insecurity is organised, negotiated, and contested in contemporary cities. Precisely because of its polycentric form, dense mobility networks, ambitious redevelopment agenda, and active feminist and institutional experimentation, Milan makes visible many of the tensions that define women's everyday relationship with public space. The chapter has shown that the city offers a rich landscape of gender-sensitive initiatives, participatory projects, and planning tools, while at the same time exposing a persistent gap between planning instruments, securitarian responses, and embodied experiences of safety: between what is measured, mapped, illuminated, secured, or represented as safe, and what is actually felt, navigated, avoided, endured, or reclaimed in everyday urban life. In this sense, the initiatives and debates discussed throughout the chapter position Milan as an important site of experimentation in gender-sensitive urbanism, while also clarifying why a longer-term and more situated qualitative inquiry remains necessary. It is precisely here that the present research positions itself. While much of the recent work developed in Milan has remained project-based, policy-oriented, or tied to short-term listening sessions, walks, and surveys designed to inform interventions, this study develops a longer-term, multi-method qualitative inquiry across two transit areas.

Against this broader backdrop, the areas surrounding Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi emerge as especially revealing case studies as they clearly illustrate how neoliberal urban

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Zhai-SORuqYFmOMTLwcCZNizdEHBkQo&femb=1&ll=42.25817807365352%2C11.839074527773974&z=5>



planning in Milan often privileges market-driven agendas over social cohesion, deepening exclusion through gentrification, privatisation, and securitisation (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2024; Colombo & Navarini, 1999). Positioned within an “ordinary cities” frame (Robinson, 2006), these sites foreground Milan as a generative context through which to analyse how space, power, and identity co-produce gendered (in)securities. While numerous urban sites in Milan -from peripheral neighbourhoods to parks, shopping districts, and transport infrastructures- could serve as significant entry points for exploring women’s experiences of fear and vulnerability, the areas surrounding train stations offer particularly dense intersections of spatial, social, and affective dynamics. Their centrality within the urban fabric, the continuous flow of diverse populations, and their symbolic resonance render them especially productive locations through which to interrogate questions of visibility, mobility, belonging, and embodied insecurity.

In this context, the deliberate selection of Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi enables a comparative exploration of how urban form, temporal rhythms, and institutional practices distinctly shape women’s everyday experiences. Although both function as vital transit hubs, their varied historical legacies, differing degrees of securitisation, and contrasting urban ecologies create nuanced yet complementary lenses through which to examine how gendered (in)security is produced, managed, navigated, and resisted in contemporary urban settings. Centrale foregrounds the relationship between monumental infrastructure, marginality, and securitised governance; Garibaldi, by contrast, reveals how redevelopment, aesthetic order, and nightlife may also generate ambivalent forms of vulnerability. Read together, the two sites illuminate the interplay between infrastructural interventions, surveillance strategies, socio-economic transformations, and grassroots practices of resistance, making them especially effective vantage points from which to analyse contemporary urban governance. From this perspective, Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi are not only relevant empirical sites, but analytical thresholds through which broader questions of gender, mobility, belonging, and urban governance in contemporary Milan can be explored.



## Chapter 4

### Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methodological framework through which the dissertation investigates women's embodied and situated experiences of public space in Milan. Positioned within feminist qualitative and participatory traditions, the study understands knowledge as situated, relational, and coproduced through embodied encounters, social interaction, and unequal power relations (Haraway, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2015). Key to this methodological orientation is a political and epistemological commitment to centring women's diverse lived realities, taking seriously forms of knowledge often marginalised in mainstream urban discourses, and critically interrogating dominant narratives of urban safety and public space. The chapter therefore sets out the rationale for the study's multi-method participatory design, details the main methods employed, and reflects on positionality, ethics of care, co-interpretation, and the methodological limits and adjustments that shaped the research in practice.

#### Philosophical Underpinnings and Epistemological Position

Rejecting the idea of a single universal experience or a singular, monolithic reality, this research is grounded in an interactionist ontology, a constructivist epistemology, and a feminist methodological orientation. Drawing on feminist epistemologies and social constructivism (Hesse-Biber, 2014), I understand knowledge not as an entity waiting to be uncovered, but as a situated, partial, and relational phenomenon actively coproduced through embodied encounters, contextual interactions, and historically contingent positionalities. In this sense, I draw on Haraway's (1991) formulation of situated knowledges and on Yuval-Davis's (2015, 2016) articulation of situated intersectionality and the politics of belonging, both of which foreground how categories such as gender, race, and class do not operate as fixed or discrete axes of difference, but emerge relationally within specific socio-spatial contexts. From this perspective, "facts" do not exist in a *vacuum*; rather, they take shape through historically, culturally, and socially situated processes of interpretation. Such a position resists claims to objective, value-free inquiry and instead insists that researchers and participants alike are implicated in the production of knowledge. Because this dissertation investigates gendered inequalities in urban environments, acknowledging the contingent, constructed, and unequal character of social reality is not simply a philosophical preference but a necessary condition for asking whose voices are heard, whose experiences count, and how forms of knowledge often excluded from mainstream urban discourse can reshape our understanding of public space.

Bringing together interactionist ontology, constructivist epistemology, and feminist methodology also means recognising that power is not external to the research process but constitutive of it, shaping how meanings are produced and whose accounts come to matter. Following Lefebvre (1974), space is approached here not as a neutral backdrop but as socially produced through the interplay of material practices, social relations, and representational orders. In dialogue with Foucault's (1998; 2002) account of the mutual constitution of power and knowledge, the objective of this study is therefore not merely to document women's experiences in public space, but to interrogate the discursive, institutional, and spatial arrangements through which those experiences are rendered intelligible, normalised, or marginalised. Power, in this framework, is emergent and relational, structuring every stage of the inquiry, from access and participation to interpretation and circulation. Rather than attempting to eliminate bias, I approach reflexivity as an essential methodological practice through which to acknowledge and work through my own positionality, recognising that my presence, questions, and analytical decisions all exert forms of influence while striving to keep



participants' accounts central to the interpretive process (Arthur & Guy, 2020). This orientation is further informed by feminist participatory traditions and by participatory action research scholarship, which challenge hierarchical researcher–participant relations and frame knowledge production as inseparable from political and ethical commitments to collaboration, reflexivity, and accountability (Chakma, 2016; Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). In this sense, the philosophical and epistemological commitments of the project do not sit outside the methodology as abstract premises; they shape the methodological architecture itself, informing how participants are approached, how knowledge is generated, and how research is understood as a relational, contested, and potentially transformative practice.

## Overall Methodological Approach

Investigating women's emotional and embodied experiences of urban space calls for methodological choices capable of illuminating both the tangible dimensions of the built environment and the less visible dynamics of embodiment, emotion, and perception (Day, 1999; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). Because subjectivity and embodiment are central to how participants inhabit and interpret public space, conventional quantitative metrics would have been insufficient for uncovering the interplay between material environments, lived experiences, and the broader social narratives through which danger, discomfort, and belonging are produced (Ahmed, 2000; Valentine, 1989). The methodological challenge, therefore, was not simply to document women's experiences, but to render visible the relational, affective, and embodied processes through which they take shape in everyday urban life.

Methodologically, feminist scholars and activists have long employed participatory research to bridge critical analysis with possibilities for urban transformation (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009). Chakma (2016), for example, advocates Feminist Participatory Action Research as a way of enabling women to investigate and map their own spatial anxieties while building collective strategies to address them. Drawing on this broader feminist participatory ethos, and on its emphasis on collaborative and reflexive knowledge production, this study adopted a plural qualitative design in order to attend to everyday embodied experiences and, in doing so, to move away from hegemonic and often masculinised ways of knowing public space (Kern, 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Pitch, 2004). Methodological pluralism was therefore not simply a matter of variety, but a way of engaging the situated forms through which power relations are embodied and negotiated, in line with intersectional work in feminist geography (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Moreover, the methods were combined because each illuminated a different dimension of gendered urban experience, making visible how women's embodied perceptions interact dynamically with the institutional, discursive, and infrastructural forces that shape urban environments.

Feminist participatory methods, in this sense, offered a particularly fertile ground for investigating the nexus between women's bodies, public spaces, and emotions, precisely because they foreground how power enters into the construction of knowledge and the interpretation of reality (Maguire, 1987; Naples, 2003). Ethnography and interviews yielded rich, in-depth understandings of daily practices, routines, and coping strategies, while participatory techniques such as emotional mapping and photovoice made visible less tangible dimensions of fear, safety, and belonging (Wang & Burris, 1997). Focus groups and collective walks proved especially valuable in fostering dialogic encounters and encouraging participants to map their own emotional landscapes of inclusion, exclusion, and vulnerability. These collective moments were not only methods of data collection, but also situated spaces of shared reflection and emotional negotiation, often generating relational knowledge that could not have emerged in individual settings alone. Taken together, the methods



were not conceived as isolated tools, but as a layered architecture through which the material, social, and affective dimensions of urban life could be apprehended in relation to one another.

The overall design of the research was also shaped by an abductive logic rather than by a predetermined hypothesis. I was guided by a set of ideas and themes derived from both the literature and my own lived experiences, but these did not dictate the outcomes of the research; rather, they served as provisional orientations to be continually revised through engagement with the field (Naples, 2003). This meant moving back and forth between theoretical frameworks, my own embodied and emotional insights, and participants' reflections, allowing categories of analysis to emerge, shift, and be refined throughout the process. Such abductive navigation was not simply methodological but also ethical and affective: it required remaining open to contradiction, discomfort, and disruption as constitutive dimensions of knowledge-making rather than as obstacles to it. In practice, this meant iteratively revisiting fieldnotes, transcripts, and participant-generated data in order to notice emergent themes (such as the temporal variability of safety perceptions) and to reconsider assumptions about the interplay between space, gender, and fear. Ethically, this iterative and affectively charged methodology also required ongoing negotiation of participants' comfort, informed consent, confidentiality, and emotional well-being, situating ethical reflexivity at the very core of the research practice (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

While I was building the rationale of the project and shaping its methodological architecture, I also drafted an online questionnaire (Appendix: 151), which was distributed through personal, political, and feminist networks. The questionnaire explored various aspects of women's experiences of public space, including preferred routes, choices in clothing, and instances of discomfort, and served multiple purposes within the research. Above all, it functioned as a preliminary scoping tool: many respondents spontaneously highlighted the contrast between daylight and darkness, even where this was neither explicitly required nor prompted, underscoring the social dimension of night in women's perceptions of urban safety. The survey also brought into view the coexistence of conflicting emotions (such as feeling "relaxed" yet simultaneously uneasy) as well as the importance of social context, particularly the difference between being alone and being in company. Loneliness, in particular, emerged as a recurring theme that later reappeared in both focus groups and interviews. Proving politically and epistemologically significant, loneliness as it reflected not only the emotional cost of gendered urban exclusion (Wilkinson, 2022), but also the conditions under which women felt able, or unable, to engage in collective practices of narration. In practical terms, the questionnaire also assisted in identifying potential participants for interviews and focus groups, and generated the opening activity for the first focus group, where a word cloud based on responses to the open-ended question "Can you name the sensations of uneasiness you experienced in public spaces?" was used as an icebreaker (Appendix: 161). Beyond these initial insights, the survey also revealed critical limitations in intersectional reach, especially concerning race and (dis)ability, which led me to adapt subsequent interview and focus-group prompts so as to more explicitly invite participants to reflect on their own social positions. In this sense, the questionnaire did not function as a central research method in its own right, but as a preliminary and reflexive device that helped orient the broader participatory design.

The design of the study also remained responsive throughout fieldwork. Initially, I had planned to conduct at least two, ideally three, cycles of focus groups in each setting, followed by interviews carried out only with participants drawn directly from the focus groups. However, as the research progressed, practical and ethical considerations made clear that the methods had to adapt to participants' lived realities, daily constraints, and availability rather than vice versa (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025). Recognising the barriers posed by the time-intensive character of the original design, I ultimately conducted three full cycles of focus groups in the Stazione Centrale area and one cycle in Stazione Garibaldi, while simultaneously broadening the interview sample beyond those who had attended focus groups. In addition, because all previous participatory walks had taken place during



the post-work rush hour of the focus-group sessions, I organised further evening walks in both areas in order to better account for the temporal dimensions of women's urban experiences. Some participants also brought friends who had not previously engaged with the research, thereby widening the field in unexpected ways and enriching the process with additional perspectives. These methodological adjustments did not weaken the participatory design; rather, they underscored the importance of situated flexibility, responsiveness, and negotiation within feminist research practice.

Taken together, these participatory strategies contributed to a richer and more embodied understanding of women's lives in Milan's public spaces. The synergy of collective walks, photovoice, photo-elicitation, and community mapping underscored how intangible feelings of security or vulnerability intersect with concrete spatial features, social norms, and symbolic power relations (Maguire, 1987; Wang & Burris, 1997). By adding interactive elements such as maps and photographs, the research shifted discussion from purely verbal exchange to a more immersive engagement with public space, transforming focus groups into crucial sites for co-producing knowledge about the complexities, contradictions, and coping strategies that women mobilise as they traverse urban environments (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Hooks, 2000). By amplifying participants' perspectives, this multimodal approach also challenged conventional researcher-participant hierarchies (Mertens, 2007), affirming women's roles not merely as informants but as active agents in conceptualising and reshaping the narrative of public space. Participation, in this light, is not a fixed achievement but an ongoing and situated effort to create conditions of trust, reciprocity, and presence through which knowledge may be collaboratively produced.

### (Auto-)Ethnography

A longstanding body of scholarship has shown that ethnographic methods are particularly well suited to examining how gendered experiences of space and place shape women's perceptions of risk, safety, and belonging in public environments (Barker, 2009; Day, 1999; Massey, 1994; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Sadeghi Fasaei & Mirhosseini, 2009; 2015). Ethnography makes it possible to generate textured and situated accounts of everyday life that would be difficult to access through more quantitative approaches, while foregrounding women's voices, practices, and embodied negotiations in participant-centred ways attentive to intersectional complexity (Maguire, 1987; Naples, 2003). As I argue elsewhere (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025), ethnography in this project is not merely a technique of observation but an epistemic and ethical practice of attunement to presence, rhythm, and relation. In my case, this meant spending extended periods in public spaces not only to observe behaviours, but to feel on my skin what it means to inhabit and navigate the chosen settings as a woman who was not fully familiar with those locations. My positionality granted me heightened sensitivity to phenomena and interactions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed, while my gaze functioned as an epistemological vehicle, enabling an embodied perception of the city not only through clearly observable events but also through atmospheres, emotions, and subtle details often invisible to a detached observational stance.

Predominantly drawing on Berker (2009) and Naples (2003), I adopted an in-depth, structured approach to field observation and analysis, including systematic note-taking, iterative interpretation, and a commitment to uncovering cultural meanings as defined by participants themselves. While deliberately choosing a multi-sited ethnography offered insight into the subtleties of urban design, surveillance, and routine practices that reinforce or resist patriarchal notions of femininity (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Condon, Lieber & Maillachon, 2007), the decision to adopt a participant-observer stance also came with affective, bodily, and ethical implications. Throughout fieldwork, I paid particular attention to micro-power dynamics: how women adapted their routes to avoid unwanted attention, the interplay between private security forces and police patrols, and the subtle ways in which passerby interactions could generate comfort or tension. I documented how women engaged



with urban infrastructure (such as poorly lit pathways or visibly surveilled waiting rooms) and how they made on-the-ground decisions, for example by altering speed, seeking company, or switching exits in response to perceived threats. I also observed temporal rhythms (such as rush-hour density versus late-night emptiness, summer versus winter patterns, weekday versus weekend routines) in order to understand how density and visibility intersect with perceptions of fear and safety. Embracing slow ethnography allowed me to capture not only what women did, but how they inhabited, sensed, and endured space. Research downtimes, or rather the hours spent simply being present, waiting, and returning, were not empty intervals but spaces of learning through proximity and repetition. Through situated presence and a form of epistemic waiting that honours relational time, I gained access to less immediate yet deeply resonant insights, such as the gradual shift of emotional intensities with the onset of evening or the subtle bodily signals through which adaptive strategies in response to discomfort become perceptible (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025).

Ultimately, my fieldnotes captured nuanced, embodied interactions and highlighted the relationship between an individual's sense of safety and a station's physical, social, and political environment (Pain, 1997; Siwach, 2020). Throughout the field, I remained cognisant of my own social location as a woman conducting research in these very spaces, reflecting on how my presence, appearance, and emotional responses shaped both the data I collected and the ways participants responded to me (Reinharz, 1992). Rather than attempting to disappear from the field, I embraced a reflexive practice that foregrounded my partial view, affective entanglements, and embodied solidarities. Writing itself became a crucial method, serving as a reflective and analytical tool that not only captured empirical material but also revealed my own embodied and emotional experiences in the field. Given my positionality and personal engagement with specific episodes or sites, this reflective writing occasionally crossed into autoethnographic territory, allowing deeper introspection into how my subjectivity intertwined with participants' narratives and urban atmospheres. The resulting ethnographic data provided crucial insights into how spatial and social factors intermingle, reinforcing the idea that women's strategies for coping with or resisting fear cannot be separated from the everyday realities of navigating patriarchal urban settings

### Focus Groups with Community Mapping, Participatory walk and Photovoice

Building on insights gained from the questionnaire and ethnographic observations, I conducted three cycles of focus groups for Stazione Centrale (two consisting of five participants each and one of six participants) and one cycle for Stazione Garibaldi, involving six participants. The focus groups were multi-session and composed of three distinct meetings (Appendix: 161-162). The first meeting, lasting slightly under two hours, invited participants to collaborate on a printed map of the designated area (84.1 x 118.9 cm in size) using markers and stickers to mark places they frequented most and those they avoided. While the previously mentioned ice-breaker exercise helped initiate conversation (Appendix: 151), it also allowed participants to reflect on perceived risks, strategies for risk mitigation, and the influence of urban design on their feelings of safety. The second meeting, approximately an hour in duration, consisted of an exploratory group walk during which participants took photographs and notes, paying particular attention to sites highlighted on the map in the previous session. The third and final meeting, again lasting about an hour, focused on collectively evaluating the territory under study and the experiences stemming from the previous meetings, also through the sharing of photographs and notes.

At a practical level, the use of three successive focus-group sessions allowed for a gradual, layered inquiry: the first session introduced participants to the community mapping exercise and set the tone for open discussion; the second session involved an on-site walk, reinforcing the link between personal narratives and the physical environment; and the final session returned to a reflective group setting to synthesise insights, incorporating both emotional and visual feedback from previous stages.



Each iteration thus built upon the last, solidifying a more comprehensive picture of how participants interact with, interpret, and potentially transform their environments. This cyclical process resonates with the idea that focus groups can illuminate emergent patterns of shared or contested experience, offering nuanced windows into how women conceptualise fear, navigate perceived dangers, and envision potential improvements to station areas (Day, 1999; Valentine, 1989).

Focus groups were selected not only because they allow participants to articulate shared and divergent experiences of urban life, but because their collective setting fosters forms of dialogical reflection and situated comparison that are particularly important when investigating gendered emotions, norms, and spatial practices (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Valentine, 1989). Their interactive dimension makes visible both convergence and difference, illuminating how age, class, race, sexuality, and familiarity with place shape women's perceptions of safety, discomfort, and belonging. In this sense, focus groups were conceived not simply as moments of data collection, but as collective spaces of reflection through which participants could compare routines, negotiate interpretations, and co-produce knowledge about their everyday experiences of urban space (Hooks, 2000; Maguire, 1987; Naples, 2003). The format also fostered reflexivity on the diversity of experiences and positionalities, ensuring that differences, divergences, and even conflicts of vision were acknowledged rather than masked by a quest for consensus. While group settings may sometimes hinder the open expression of dissent, the emphasis on a safe and empowering atmosphere helped mitigate such risks. Throughout each cycle of focus groups, ground rules encouraging mutual respect and confidentiality were established, and particular care was taken to ensure that participants felt comfortable contributing: quieter participants were actively invited to share their insights and the dynamics were monitored so as to avoid domination by any single voice (Mertens, 2007). During focus groups, my role was therefore mainly that of a mediator, balancing light guidance with participants' autonomy and the maintenance of a safe environment.

The integration of collective walks, photovoice, photo-elicitation, and community mapping further extended this participatory logic by enabling participants to engage public space through verbal, visual, spatial, and embodied registers. Exploratory walks made it possible to follow participants' perceptions in real time, linking narratives of fear, avoidance, familiarity, and adaptation to the specific materialities of the urban environment (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). Photovoice and photo-elicitation, in turn, placed cameras and interpretive authority in participants' hands, foregrounding perspectives often marginalised within top-down urban research (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Wang & Burris, 1997). Community and emotional mapping allowed participants to externalise tacit, affective, and often non-verbal dimensions of urban experience, making visible the spatial distribution of safety, discomfort, loneliness, familiarity, and care in ways that conventional research tools often fail to capture (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013; Serrano Santos, 2024). Taken together, these methods were intended not only to document women's urban lives, but to create situated spaces in which urban discomfort, belonging, and exclusion could be collectively narrated, visualised, and interpreted.

Arthur and Guy (2020) highlight the utility of participatory action methods in exploring and addressing gender-specific urban experiences, making them particularly well suited to understanding the nuanced fears women face. Within this research, I adopted walks, photovoice, photo-elicitation, and community mapping as collective tools that enriched the process (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Maguire, 1987; Wang & Burris, 1997). Based on relational interactions and activating bodies and identities in space through memory, history, politics, and perception, these techniques enhanced the understanding of the social, spatial, and embodied dimensions of fear (Massey, 1994). As experiential approaches that foreground women's everyday realities (Kern, 2020), they were chosen to empower participants and keep their voices at the centre of analysis. This combination of verbal and non-verbal communication proved particularly effective in addressing topics such as fear, as it allowed for alternative, often more expressive, ways of engaging with sensitive or complex issues. Gender-based



community mapping, for instance, is frequently employed in City Development Strategies or baseline studies to deepen knowledge of how local women utilise and perceive urban spaces (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Valentine, 1989). More recently, Serrano Santos (2024) has shown how participatory emotional cartographies in contexts of everyday violence in Mexico City bring to the surface tacit knowledges, routes of avoidance, and practices of care. While my study was conducted in a different socio-urban context, this methodological resonance underscores how community mapping can reveal both structural dimensions of fear and the relational strategies women mobilise to navigate and re-signify urban environments. For this reason, each workshop began with a A0 printed map of the chosen area, on which participants were encouraged to note shared experiences and concerns. This choice fostered collective discussion and comparability, while the exploration of imaginaries and more subjective geographies was subsequently pursued through interviews, where participants could develop more personal and imaginative accounts of space.

By offering participants a space to visually and narratively document how they inhabit and traverse the urban landscape, participatory walks fostered a collaborative research environment in which real-time engagement illuminated context-specific anxieties and coping mechanisms (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). First organised by the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) in Toronto in 1989, these walks have evolved into a feminist participatory research-action practice, exposing how women's avoidance strategies or heightened vigilance may be overlooked in conventional urban planning (Alouti, 2017; Di Meo, 2012). As Dominique Poggi, a French sociologist specialising in women's safety audits, has argued, exploratory walks can enhance inclusivity and proactively reduce gender-based violence by enabling women to re-appropriate public spaces<sup>44</sup>. Walking can also be conceptualised as a form of embodied reading, as an action through which one provides a new interpretation of the world that lends a sense of rootedness and belonging. As Solnit (2001) writes:

*“Walkers are ‘practitioners of the city,’ for the city is made to be walked. A city is a language, a repository of possibilities, and walking is the act of speaking that language, of selecting from those possibilities. Just as language limits what can be said, architecture limits where one can walk, but the walker invents other ways to go.”*

Navigating and reclaiming urban spaces through walking also has a longer artistic lineage (Manzini, 2022). Elkin's (2016) work on the *flâneuse* demonstrates how the historical exclusion of women from public life can be challenged by strolling through cities as a feminist assertion of space, identity, and autonomy. Writers such as Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys, alongside artists such as Sophie Calle, have likewise employed walking to confront social norms and claim intellectual, personal, and public freedoms (Elkin, 2016).

With the intention of foregrounding women's agency, my approach to every participatory walk was to start with a baseline plan ensuring that key sites of interest emerging from the first activity were included. Once in the field, however, both during focus-group walks and during the later night-time ones, I invited participants to take control of the route, sharing my ideal itinerary but allowing them to decide where to go and what to emphasise. Ensuring that the process remained flexible and responsive to emerging insights, this method not only guaranteed that critical locations were covered but also empowered participants to shape the journey according to their own experiences and priorities (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). By creating, curating, and interpreting their own visual and spatial narratives, participants not only told their stories but reclaimed their right to define what matters, how space is felt, and whose knowledge counts. These coproduced materials thus functioned also as epistemic interventions-tangible acts of spatial re-signification from below.

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMr\\_JzT-OIk&ab\\_channel=EITUrbanMobility](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMr_JzT-OIk&ab_channel=EITUrbanMobility)



On one occasion, a last-minute “Plan B” due to my personal health issues meant that a research assistant led a walk in my absence. I later learned about the experience during the final focus-group meeting, where participants recounted their journey in detail. I had provided a structured itinerary outlining key sites of interest, yet the group chose to explore unexpected areas that I had not anticipated covering. This unplanned deviation exemplifies what I define as epistemic contingency: a space where knowledge is shaped not by rigid planning, but by participant-led processes of open collaboration, responsiveness, attentiveness, and trust in collective sense-making. Leading to discoveries about often-overlooked yet socially relevant spaces such as public toilets, this moment embodied the generative potential of non-linearity in feminist participatory research (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025). In another instance, I found myself overwhelmed by grief during a participatory walk, struggling to give clear direction and process inputs. In that critical moment, the group collectively stepped in, gently taking the lead. Their spontaneous intervention not only offered me emotional relief but also underscored the transformative potential of a self-directed, participant-led approach. Together, these experiences reinforced the idea that allowing participants to shape the route enhances the depth and authenticity of the data, revealing both individual vulnerabilities and collective resilience in navigating urban spaces (Chakma, 2016).

Focusing on “listening to and learning from women’s own portrayal of their lives” (Wang, 1999: 187), photovoice aligned seamlessly with the participatory ethos of these group walks by empowering participants to become “representative experts” of their environment and “knowledge bearers” who can catalyse change (Wang & Burris, 1997). In combination with more conventional ethnographic approaches, photovoice offered visual depth to women’s experiences of public space, allowing participants to produce and circulate images documenting where and why they feel (un)safe (Li, 2009). By capturing images that spoke to personal concerns or communal resilience, participants documented the daily realities of the studied area, whether highlighting unlit underpasses or moments of supportive solidarity among women. These pictures were then printed out and shared anonymously with the group during the third and final meeting, allowing participants to decide freely whether to identify themselves as the author of an image or to keep their contribution anonymous. Drawing on established principles of collaborative inquiry and photo-elicitation methods (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009), participants used these images as prompts to rekindle earlier impressions and spark collective dialogue around shared or divergent perspectives. As the photographs often revealed intangible layers of meaning surrounding urban design, safety, and identity, face-to-face discussion allowed participants to expand on, refine, or even challenge one another’s interpretations, transforming a static and individual photographic act into a communal interpretive practice (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Wang, 1999).

### Interviews

I conducted a total of 37 semi-structured, one-to-one, in-depth interviews: 15 in Stazione Garibaldi, 20 in Stazione Centrale, one with a participant working across both areas, and one with a participant living in Garibaldi and working in Centrale. Among these interviewees, 21 had previously participated in focus groups; notably, only one focus group participant did not take part in the interviews but joined one of the night-time walks. Lasting approximately forty-five to sixty minutes each, the interviews offered a more intimate and detailed lens for capturing personal histories, reflections, and emotional responses, complementing the collective dynamics of the focus groups (Fusco, 2021). As in-depth interviews have long been recognised as particularly well suited to exploring people’s everyday realities, cultural practices, emotional registers, and social relations (Naples, 2003), they enabled a rich understanding of how gendered experiences intersect with urban design, moral perceptions, and the use of public space (Sadeghi Fasaie & Mirhosseini, 2015; Valentine, 1989). In this study, they functioned not as straightforward instruments for extracting



information, but as situated encounters in which meaning was jointly produced and participants could elaborate, in their own terms, on routines, vulnerabilities, forms of agency, and themes that had not or had partially surfaced in group settings (Fujii, 2018).

The theoretical framework underpinning this research understands identities as both constructed and enacted in discourse and, as embodied performances, shaped by the intersection of gender, class, race, and generation (Yuval-Davis, 2015, 2016; Valentine, 2007). This perspective informed both the design and the execution of the interviews, aligning with questions that explored how participants plan their movements, choose their clothing, or respond to incidents in public space. The interviews thus examined how social expectations intersect with personal choices and their semi-structured format was particularly suited to tracing how everyday habits, memories, moral evaluations, and embodied responses intersect in women's negotiations of public space, while leaving room for participants to shape the direction, tempo, and emotional depth of the exchange (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Valentine, 1989). This open narrative format, combined with the affective presence of the researcher, contributed to building a space in which epistemic authority could be more actively redistributed.

Acknowledging the co-constructed nature of interviews (Fujii, 2018), I sought to position participants as active collaborators as much as possible. Participants were empowered to choose the location, date, and time of their interviews, while retaining the right to skip questions or respond entirely on their own terms (Sadeghi Fasaei & Mirhosseini, 2015). Moreover, through the prompt "How do you think women's bodies, fear, and urban public space relate to each other? Could you visually represent this relationship?" (Appendix: 179-181), participants were invited to express themselves using whichever medium felt most resonant. The responses varied considerably: some used AI-generated compositions, others produced drawings, took photographs, or crafted conceptual maps. This diversity underscored how urban emotions are not only experienced differently, but also expressed through distinct semiotic registers shaped by participants' access to tools, aesthetic preferences, and sensory orientations. Multimodal openness was thus not merely decorative but epistemological, creating space for plural forms of knowledge and embodied ways of seeing, and situating visual methods as genuine practices of feminist meaning-making rather than mere illustration. By enabling participants to represent their experiences in personally meaningful ways, the interviews also extended the study's commitment to shared authority and to the amplification of women's subjective narratives.

As Pain (1997) observes, interviews provide a space in which participants can articulate fear in their own words, revealing how it is shaped by social, cultural, and environmental factors. In this study, the interviews revisited themes introduced in earlier stages of the research, particularly participants' experiences of (un)safety in public spaces, while leaving room for unexpected issues and more intimate reflections to emerge (Appendix: 173). They afforded participants space to elaborate on vulnerability, solidarity, and shifts in perception triggered by lighting, crowd density, spatial familiarity, or prior incidents of harassment. In this sense, interviews functioned as sites of situated witnessing, where the emotional cartographies of the city could unfold at the pace and rhythm of the speaker.

By beginning with everyday habits and gradually moving into more sensitive questions related to safety and agency in public space, the interview guide was designed to foster trust and collaborative exploration. Drawing on a dialogical framework and participatory principles (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009), this structure was chosen in order to respect participants' comfort levels while encouraging increasingly candid reflections. Open-ended prompts, such as "Do stories about incidents that happened to other people influence your perception of a space?" (Appendix: 173), created a relational dynamic in which interviewer and participant jointly shaped the content of the exchange. Other questions, such as "Do you think you have ever engaged in self-protective behaviours or acted in support of other women in public spaces?" or "Are there any issues that did



not come up in the focus groups, or that you did not feel comfortable sharing in a group setting, that you would like to tell me about?" (Appendix: 173), encouraged reflection on personal agency, communal support, and the limits of collective settings. In this sense, the interviews were conceived not simply as opportunities to elicit information, but as dialogical encounters in which participants could articulate how space, gender, fear, and selfhood became entangled in everyday urban life.

For those participants who had previously attended the focus groups, the interviews concluded with a creative mapping exercise designed to let the articulate the route we travelled during their second focus group (Appendix: 174-179). Drawing on Maria Rodó-de-Zárate's (2013) relief mapping concept, participants were given a blank space on which to visually illustrate their experiences of walking together in specific urban areas through colours, symbols, or sketches. By enabling them to depict where and how different social identities intersected with emotional states, this exercise captured the nuanced ways oppression and privilege shift across physical and social environments. These emotionally charged mappings revealed how fear is co-constructed by spatial characteristics such as poor lighting or neglected maintenance and by social factors such as racial profiling, neighbourhood stereotypes, or normative judgements around women's clothing and behaviour after dark. Because this activity took place after the focus-group cycles, it also allowed participants to reflect more deeply on the difference between collective and solitary presence in urban space, enabling earlier emotions and insights to settle and crystallise.

### Sampling and Setting

This section addresses the sampling strategy and settings employed during fieldwork, describing how participants were identified, recruited, and engaged in the research process, while highlighting both the practical considerations and the feminist ethical principles that guided these decisions. By elaborating on participant selection criteria, recruitment challenges, and commitments to consent and care, this part of the chapter also illustrates the situated and relational character of the research encounter.

My sampling strategy focused on individuals who were assigned female at birth, socialised as women, or identify as women, were over eighteen years old, and had either lived, studied, or worked in the designated areas for at least one year. Rather than imposing an upper age limit, I sought to avoid reproducing mechanisms of silencing, segregation, and exclusion that can marginalise older women in urban settings (Olesen, 2000). Research on gender dynamics often privileges women of reproductive age, seen as more socially active and "desirable", thereby neglecting the lived realities of older women whose access to and use of urban space may be more constrained. The sample was instead spatially delimited: participants had to be users of the selected public areas. Over the course of one year, I spent a total of 250 hours in Stazione Centrale and 250 hours in Stazione Garibaldi, observing at various times of day and night in order to capture the site-specific rhythms of social interaction. My field sites ranged from station platforms and waiting areas to adjacent streets, parks, cafés, bookshops, and other commercial or communal spaces both within and around the stations. Opening the sample to women of varied ages and life situations allowed for a more complex understanding of how experiences of public space are shaped not only by design features or lighting, but also by deeply embedded social norms and positionalities that govern everyday interactions. In this sense, the sampling strategy was grounded in a feminist ethics of presence and recognition: rather than pursuing statistical representativeness, it sought to foreground the textured, situated knowledges that emerge from lived experiences in specific urban ecologies.

All three focus groups in the Stazione Centrale area were held at the Off Campus NoLo space, part of the Politecnico di Milano. In the Stazione Garibaldi area, the focus group took place at the Chiesa del Sacro Volto in Via Sebenico 31. Given its religious connotation, I am aware that this



location cannot be considered entirely neutral; however, it was the only available venue that permitted me to conduct the research in that area without having to pay a high fee. As the church is a well-established institution within the neighbourhood, all participants were already familiar with it and had visited it independently, including those who were not religious or who adhered to different beliefs. Moreover, we used a private and isolated room at the third floor of an annex, thereby minimising potential influences on participants' comfort and behaviour. Seeking to reduce spatial, emotional, and social barriers to participation, interview settings were instead chosen by participants themselves. Individual interviews were therefore conducted in participants' homes, quiet cafés, parks, university rooms, and occasionally over the phone, accommodating their needs and preferences. The commitment to create a "safe space" shaped not only the selection of settings but also the way in which interviews and focus groups were conducted. By setting up a relational environment (Fujii, 2018), I sought to foster trust and mutual respect while mitigating potential distress.

Calls for participation were disseminated through multiple channels. I first contacted local public institutions and administrations -specifically Municipio 2 and Municipio 9 of the *Comune di Milano*- requesting that they circulate the call within their networks and suggest local associations for potential collaboration. I also reached out via email to a variety of local religious, social, and political institutions, as well as associations of volunteers, traders, and activists, asking them to distribute the call to their users and assist me in identifying practical, accessible, safe, and neutral spaces for data collection (Appendix: 149). The call was further disseminated through my broader networks via text and social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram; see Appendix: 149-150). Through this online circulation, it was reposted on various Social Street community pages and within the Gruppo Mamme NoLo, resulting in the recruitment of a few new mothers. People who had taken part in the preliminary survey were also contacted and invited either to participate, if they identified with the sample, or to circulate the call among their networks. Due to concerns around positionality, power dynamics, and the potential influence of pre-existing relationships on the research encounter, individuals from my direct social circle were not considered as potential participants.

As online dissemination proved faster and more immediate than institutional channels and local associations, the study initially began with a pilot group in Stazione Centrale composed mainly of women close to my own age and social milieu, providing useful preliminary insights that informed subsequent adjustments to the design. As the research progressed, however, it became clear that these entry points alone were insufficient to achieve a more heterogeneous sample encompassing different ages, abilities, sexual orientations, national origins, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural backgrounds. To address this, during ethnography the call was also disseminated in situ through flyers and posters placed in bars, restaurants, gyms, hotels, and other businesses (Appendix: 150), containing either my email address or a QR code linking to an online registration form. I also broadened the interview sample beyond those who had previously attended focus groups, once it became evident that the time-intensive nature of the original design constituted a significant barrier to participation.

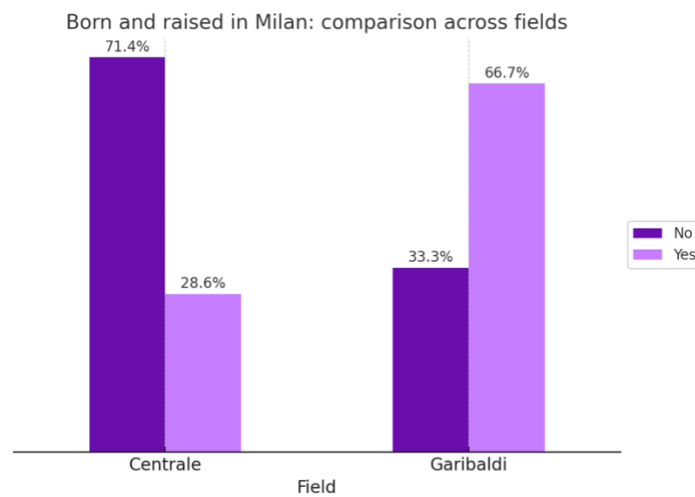
Field	<25	25–35	36–50	50+
Centrale	0	15	4	2
Garibaldi	1	10	3	1
Both	0	0	1	1

In total, I engaged with 38 participants, ranging from 24 to 60 years old. As shown in the following table, the majority were between 25 and 35 years old (25 participants), followed by 8 participants aged 36–50 and 4 participants over 50, while only one participant was under 25. In terms of nationality, the majority of participants identify as Italian, with several individuals reporting mixed



heritage (specifically Italo-Greek and Italo-American), one participant identifying as a second-generation Italian of Moroccan origin, and one participant of Somali nationality. Regarding sexual orientation, the majority identified as heterosexual, but the sample also included participants identifying as lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual. In terms of gender identity, most participants self-identified as women, while one participant was transgender and one identified as non-binary.

Participants’ relationships with Milan varied considerably, ranging from long-term residents to newcomers and commuters. As shown in figure below, those born and raised in Milan were more represented in Garibaldi (66.7%) than in Centrale (28.6%), suggesting that familiarity with the city differed across the two fields. The following table further distinguishes whether participants lived, worked, or studied in the neighbourhoods. In Centrale, 12 participants lived in the area, 8 engaged with it primarily for work or study, and 1 combined residence with work or study. In Garibaldi, 8 participants resided in the neighbourhood, 4 worked or studied there without living locally, and 3 both lived and worked or studied in the area. Two participants reported hybrid forms of engagement across both fields: one worked in Centrale and lived in Garibaldi, and another worked in both sites.

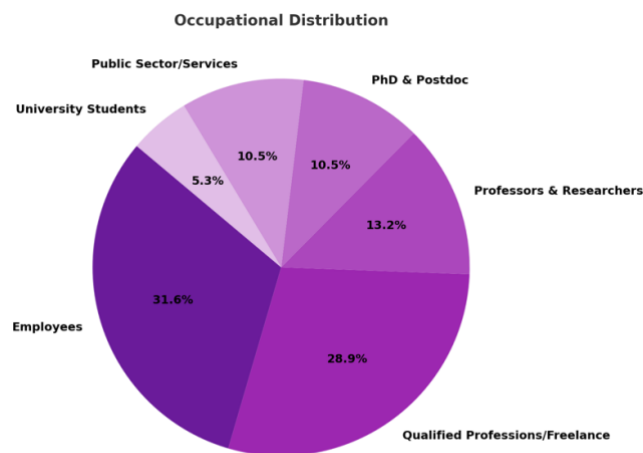


Field	Lives	Works or Study	Lives and Works or Study
Centrale	12	8	1
Garibaldi	8	4	3
Both	0	1	1

It is also worth noting that one participant who now works in Centrale reported having lived there in the past, while another who now lives in Centrale reported working in Garibaldi until 2021. These distributions resonate with the different urban profiles of the two sites: Centrale, while functioning as a major transport hub, also emerges here as a residential area where everyday life is deeply embedded; Garibaldi, by contrast, reflects its character as a redeveloped mixed-use district where residential and professional spheres frequently intersect. Taken together, these data highlight the coexistence of deep-rooted familiarity among long-term residents and more transient or functional forms of engagement, providing a rich basis for exploring how different degrees of embeddedness shape women’s perceptions of safety and belonging in Milan’s public spaces. Within these diverse urban experiences, the sample also included one participant who uses a wheelchair and four participants who are mothers of very young children, whose interactions with the city offer important perspectives on accessibility, caregiving responsibilities, and mobility.



In terms of occupational distribution (see the figure below), participants were spread across a broad range of professional and educational fields. The largest groups were employees (31.6%) and qualified professionals or freelancers (28.9%), followed by professors and researchers (13.2%), PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers (10.5%), public sector and service workers (10.5%), and university students (5.3%). More specifically, participants worked across academia, administration, architecture, banking, cleaning, communication, copywriting, cultural mediation, fashion, fundraising, hospitality, journalism, law, marketing, psychology, real estate, and social work, thus covering diverse roles and income levels in private, public, and non-profit sectors. Participants' occupational backgrounds also influenced how they related to the research topic: four were already working on related issues as researchers, one encountered it through her responsibilities in local government, while others had never previously reflected on it. This occupational profile partially mirrors Milan's broader urban economy, where high-skilled and well-paid professions coexist alongside precarious and low-paid service roles. The prominence of academic and research-related profiles partly reflects my own recruitment networks, but also resonates with Milan's positioning as a hub for higher education, finance, and fashion. The occupational mix thus exemplifies the socio-economic polarisation that characterises contemporary Milan: a city marked by global competitiveness and cultural capital on the one hand, and by structural inequalities, precarious employment, and rising living costs on the other.



At the same time, some absences remain significant. While two participants were on maternity leave and one was temporarily unemployed during fieldwork, retired individuals and those experiencing long-term unemployment were largely absent from the sample, leaving these vulnerabilities underrepresented. This absence, together with the lack of participants over 65, will be discussed later as it points to broader dynamics of invisibility, precarity, and disengagement from participatory spaces, reminding us that recruitment barriers are not only methodological but structural. Given the qualitative and participatory nature of this research, the analysis does not aim for statistical representativeness but rather foregrounds the situated experiences and positionalities of individual participants. In line with feminist epistemologies that emphasise participants as knowledge-bearers, the "Participants' Table" in the Appendix (p. 153) introduces the full set of participants, detailing demographic, social, and spatial characteristics such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, profession, field site, relationship with the area, and whether they were born and raised in Milan. Presenting participants in this way both resists abstraction and underscores the heterogeneity of the sample, situating their narratives within specific social locations and



highlighting how intersecting identities inform women's experiences of safety and belonging in Milan's public spaces.

None of the participants were directly recruited; rather, they contacted me after learning about the project. Once we made initial contact, I provided a comprehensive explanation of the study's aims and implications, allowing them time to reflect on whether they wished to proceed. Dates and times for focus groups were usually chosen in mutual agreement so as to accommodate participants' availability. Prior to each session or interview, participants received information sheets about the study and data usage and storage, as well as informed consent forms detailing their rights, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the potential risks and benefits of participating. Considering consent as an ongoing process rather than a one-off formality (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), participants always had the possibility to withdraw or to refuse certain questions or activities without justification. Consent was also reiterated at various stages of the research, such as when transcripts and visual materials were shared with interested participants. At the same time, in order to fulfil the logic of the research design, participants were asked, where possible, to attend all three planned focus-group sessions.

As reported in the previous chapter, fieldwork also unfolded alongside a broader local ecology of feminist urban safety interventions. During my doctoral research, *Sex & the City* and the *Comune di Milano* conducted three short-term projects<sup>45</sup> in neighbouring areas that partially overlapped with my field sites. Their presence shaped the field in concrete ways, occasionally generating confusion among potential participants, many of whom questioned my affiliation with those initiatives. In this sense, these projects did not merely form part of the wider context of the research, but directly affected the conditions of recruitment and field access.

### Data Collection and Analysis

After outlining the sampling strategy and settings that grounded the research, this section turns to the practices of data collection and analysis. In this section, I elaborate on how the qualitative materials from ethnographic fieldnotes to visual outputs were systematically organised, securely stored, and rigorously analysed. In doing so, I also foreground how feminist ethical commitments and reflexive practice informed each step of interpretation, ensuring that participants' voices and lived realities remained central to the analytic process.

As the research encompassed multiple qualitative methods, a robust and ethically sound plan for data management, organisation, and interpretation was essential. All data were stored on an external drive protected by double authentication, and pseudonyms were consistently used to safeguard participants' identities. In practical ethical terms, I followed clear procedures for anonymisation, privacy, and data storage, in line with best practices in qualitative research (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Identifying details were removed or masked through pseudonyms, while each participant's personal information (such as age, occupation, nationality, and sexual orientation) was recorded on a password-protected Excel sheet kept separately from the rest of the research materials. Signed consent forms and any physical documents were destroyed after digitisation, while their digital copies were securely stored on the external drive. All data will be retained for five years after the completion of the study, and I am and will remain the only person with access to the materials, including the re-identification keys, transcripts, and maps. To ensure comprehensive documentation of the focus groups, I also worked with research assistants trained in sociology and interested in gender dynamics, who helped capture dynamic exchanges and record emotional reactions in real time.

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<sup>45</sup> The previously mentioned: *STEP UP -Walkability for Women in Milan*; *Per Strada Più Libere*; *Per Strada Più libere-La notte. Una nuova luce per Stazione Centrale*



While they were present during moments of data collection, they did not retain access to the stored data afterwards.

Careful attention was paid to preparing and organising the data before formal analysis. Transcriptions of all audio-recorded interviews were produced verbatim, primarily in Italian, with clarifying annotations when participants used other languages or dialects. Ethnographic notes derived from the extended field observations in and around Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi were compiled in a structured format at the end of each fieldwork session, while photovoice captions, collective mapping notes, and short written statements were likewise typed out. Interview transcripts and participant-generated images were systematically organised, securely stored, and tagged with detailed metadata (such as pseudonyms, dates, and contextual notes) using NVivo, so that each image could be accurately linked to its field context and associated participant commentary, and so that cross-referencing could be facilitated throughout the analysis (Gibbs, 2007). Where participants had expressed interest in receiving focus-group and interview materials in the consent forms, data were shared with them at this stage, welcoming comments or clarifications.

The coding process was conducted systematically, iteratively, and reflexively in order to capture the complexity of women's experiences across multiple data sources, including ethnographic fieldnotes, focus-group and interview transcripts, and visual materials produced through photovoice and mapping exercises. I began with an initial phase of open coding. For textual data, I examined materials line by line, assigning broad descriptive codes that laid the groundwork for subsequent analytical interpretation. The visual data underwent a similarly close reading: each image was analysed in terms of environmental conditions, social interactions, and emotional cues, generating descriptive codes that articulated key elements evident in photographs, maps, and drawings. Visual materials were thus treated not as supplementary illustrations but as integral sources of meaning directly relevant to the research questions (Pink, 2001). To ensure that interpretative insights from visual data remained participant-informed, I systematically linked participants' commentaries to the corresponding images, transcripts, and fieldnotes within NVivo (Pink, 2001). Through a feminist epistemological lens (Haraway, 1988), the photographs reproduced in the findings chapters operate as situated visual fieldnotes, produced primarily from participants' embodied vantage points. While often seemingly devoid of wider context, these images act as signifiers of spatial legitimacy, echoing Rose's (2001) notion of "visuality as a social practice": a mode through which visibility and representation function not merely as reflections, but as performances of gendered space. In this sense, the photographs condense the participants' body-city interface analysed throughout the thesis and materialise the central arguments of the empirical chapters.

Upon completing the initial phase of open coding, I moved to a more structured stage of thematic analysis in NVivo, working through successive cycles of coding, clustering, and refinement. Rather than following a linear path, the process was recursive: broad categories of "body" and "self" were first established, and then progressively disaggregated into more specific dimensions. Within the "body" category, for instance, two transversal subdomains "mobility" and "clothing" were created, through which participants' narratives and visual materials were re-examined. These subdomains were subsequently broken down into finer-grained codes such as "vulnerability," "hypervisibility," "gaze," "navigation," "situated agency," "resistance," and "spatial hacking." This stepwise movement from broad categories to analytical subcodes allowed patterns to be identified not only across data sources but also within them, ensuring consistency while retaining the nuance of participants' embodied accounts.

At each stage, the coding was cross-checked against feminist theoretical frameworks such as Bartky's (1990) account of self-surveillance, Butler's (1990; 1993) theory of performativity, and Kern's (2020) analysis of defensive dressing, while remaining open to inductive insights generated by participants' own terms, metaphors, and images. Through successive cycles of refinement, these codes were then grouped into thematic clusters that directly informed the macro-structure of the



findings chapters. For example, initial open codes such as “feeling watched,” “walking faster,” or “adjusting clothes” were progressively consolidated into the categories of hypervisibility, internalised regulation, negotiation, and reconfiguration. This recursive abductive movement between data and feminist theory was central to conceptualising the “body–city interface” as well as to elaborating the original contribution of this dissertation. In this way, the analysis foregrounded Haraway’s (1991) notion of situated knowledges and Yuval-Davis’s (2015) call for situated intersectional perspectives. Emphasising that interpretations are always partial and embodied, knowledge production thus emerged as a collective, relational process of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), rather than a detached act of representation.

This iterative analytic process allowed me to remain attentive both to literature-informed categories and to participant-driven insights, ultimately fostering a nuanced and contextually sensitive interpretation of the empirical material. As the sample progressively diversified, I reflected more critically on the porous and shifting boundaries between insider and outsider positions, particularly during moments of unexpected resonance or dissonance. Throughout the coding process, I maintained extensive reflexive and analytic memos (Pitch, 2004; Valentine, 1989), documenting evolving interpretations, emotional responses, and emerging uncertainties. These reflective practices captured how access, identity, and participation shifted in response to context, encounters, and emotional engagements in the field, and they proved crucial in accounting for how my own positionality as a woman navigating the same urban context informed data collection and interpretation (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025; Reinharz, 1992). Regularly revisiting these memos also enabled me to address potential biases and to keep the analysis grounded in participants’ perspectives across multiple data sources.

Within feminist epistemology, the co-production of knowledge is not an optional add-on but a methodological imperative that addresses systemic inequalities in who is allowed to speak and be heard (Haraway, 1988; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). In line with this commitment, I did not limit the process to verifying the accuracy of selected quotations, but shared with participants the passages of the findings chapters in which their narratives and images were analysed. Each participant received both the original English version and a translated text, thereby ensuring accessibility and transparency in the ways their contributions were represented. While some participants did not respond, several expressed enthusiasm at seeing their experiences articulated within a broader analytical frame, and others offered valuable corrections or requested additions that enriched the interpretation. This iterative dialogue exceeded the scope of conventional respondent validation and became a constitutive dimension of feminist methodology: a dialogical process through which participants could intervene in the very construction of meaning, thereby enhancing both the ethical accountability and the analytical depth of the study.

After this dialogical step, I also organised what can be understood as both a co-interpretation and a restitution session, inviting all participants, ten of whom attended, bringing with them friends and family members for a total of around thirty people. The event took place in a municipal space and lasted approximately two hours. Around the room, printed anonymous copies of the images were displayed and reviewed collectively by participants walking in small groups or pairs across the space. Participants were visibly enthusiastic and spent longer than anticipated circulating around the room, looking closely at one another’s drawings and maps, so much so that the session extended beyond the planned time. After roughly an hour, we sat in a circle and I offered a concise restitution of the two findings chapters, supported by a colleague who moderated a short Q&A and took fieldnotes. I used a small set of images to scaffold my account, in continuity with the visual strategies structuring the findings. During the discussion, participants were curious and engaged, asking many questions and commenting on the emerging themes. A moment of tension emerged when the sister of one participant who had herself joined the focus group, the interview, and the night walk, strongly insisted that cultural background is the overriding determinant of spatial perception, eclipsing all other factors.



While speaking specifically about people experiencing homelessness, Beatrice stated that “the absence of data is itself a telling datum,” a theme I engage more fully in Chapter Six. Many participants thanked me for the experience, especially for making visible aspects of their everyday lives that are often taken for granted. Someone asked which finding had most surprised me and, as Luisa quipped, “I bet you are mostly surprised by our surprise.” More generally, this collaborative member-checking exercise not only validated initial interpretations but also refined the thematic architecture so that it more accurately reflected participants’ lived realities (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012).

Rather than functioning as a post hoc check on the findings, the restitution session thus became an additional moment of analysis, in which interpretations were reopened, contested, and sharpened through participants’ responses. By employing this comprehensive, participant-informed coding approach, the data collection and analysis aimed at preserving the complexity of women’s experiences while upholding high standards of ethical practice. By integrating a layered approach to data storage and confidentiality, a systematic coding framework, and a reflexive stance toward researcher influence, the analysis did not unfold separately from ethics or participation, but through them.

### Accounting for the Self and the Ethical Dimension

Note-taking and sketching during observations and data analysis, as well as after focus groups and interviews, formed a key component of my fieldnotes, which, when triangulated with focus-group and interview data, gave the research a multidimensional depth (Naples, 2003). Continuing until the submission of this thesis, these fieldnotes have been kept as a non-selective, unstructured, and spontaneous journal of experience, encouraging reflective practice, capturing non-verbal data, and underscoring the importance of gaining a holistic sense of each setting’s dynamics and flows (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Kept from the first stages of observation to the final stages of writing, these fieldnotes became more than a spontaneous journal of experience. They were also a space through which I could trace how prior assumptions, field encounters, and later acts of writing shaped the knowledge produced. In this sense, reflexivity was approached not as a one-off gesture of self-disclosure, but as an ongoing situated practice unfolding before, during, and after fieldwork (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Through the meticulous documentation of observations, fieldnotes allowed me not only to record the details of encounters, but also to reflect on my own social positioning as a middle-class, white, able-bodied, heterosexual-passing woman navigating these public spaces. In this sense, they became crucial sites through which to trace the affective dimensions of fieldwork, the power imbalances I encountered, and the varied relationships I forged with participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

During my doctoral studies, I also served as a municipal councillor for *Municipio 1*<sup>46</sup> in Milan, specifically overseeing equal opportunities and presiding over the commission on safety and nightlife. Although I resigned last year and the first municipality did not encompass the areas investigated in this research, the role provided me with valuable contacts within public administration and with insight into local projects, policies, and institutional perspectives. Additionally, prior to commencing my doctoral research, I co-founded the organisation *DonneXStrada*, from which I stepped away before beginning the PhD. Although not directly involved during the research itself, that foundational experience undeniably informed the trajectory and focus of my doctoral work. In this context, fieldnotes became not only a tool of observation but also a means of self-reflexivity that at times moved close to autoethnography, grounding my moral awareness of the research’s sensitivity and addressing the epistemological questions that emerged from my personal, physical, and emotional

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<sup>46</sup> Municipio 1 is the administrative district that covers the historical center of Milan.



involvement. Since reflexivity is not a static account of identity but a continuous negotiation unfolding throughout the research process, the fieldnote also became a site of epistemological movement, where tensions between ethics, care, positionality, and emotional labour could be observed and reworked in real time (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025).

This positionality also shaped my relationship to other actors already operating in the field. Despite my familiarity with the *Sex & the City* research team, whose work partly inspired this doctoral investigation, and despite the role as a city councillor, I was not actively involved in their projects. Even after explicitly requesting participation, I encountered forms of gatekeeping that ultimately led me to attend several of their public sessions independently as a participant. This experience made visible the uneven institutional and relational conditions through which access is negotiated within local feminist urban research, and further sharpened my awareness of how legitimacy, proximity, and exclusion are produced not only within research encounters, but also across overlapping knowledge-making initiatives.

Attending to positionality and reflexivity in this study meant recognising that my identity, academic status, and relative privilege significantly shaped interpersonal dynamics at every stage of the research (Haraway, 1991). My presence could lead participants to speak more freely about some subjects or, conversely, to downplay certain experiences due to perceived hierarchies or unfamiliar references (Hesse-Biber, 2014). As Fujii (2018) notes, researchers in sensitive or conflict-ridden settings must remain critically attentive to how their presence, behaviour, and interaction style shape interviewees' responses. My fieldnotes indeed document moments when participants hesitated to discuss specific experiences, either because the subject felt too personal or because they doubted the potential impact of sharing. Similarly, recruiting women living in precarious circumstances or with unsettled migration statuses was occasionally difficult, as some worried that participation could place them in an even more vulnerable position. By reflecting continuously on my involvement and on the ways participants responded to my questions, appearance, or speech, I aimed to keep track of intersubjectivity and trust as methodological issues in their own right. As argued elsewhere, participatory feminist research often entails navigating shifting boundaries of trust, distance, and intimacy, especially where precarious positionalities intersect with structural vulnerabilities (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025).

I often grappled with questions of interpretative power; for example, whether my theoretical frameworks risked overshadowing women's lived realities, or whether my own cultural background impeded mutual understanding. Rather than attempting to resolve these tensions, I treated discomfort as epistemologically generative and revisited it repeatedly in my fieldnotes. The latter served not only as spaces of reflexive inscription but also as analytic tools that made visible recurring patterns grounding interpretation in the lived textures of the field (Yuval-Davis, 2015; 2016). Given the potential for distress when recalling negative or traumatic experiences, I also remained vigilant about risks of re-traumatisation when participants discussed or confronted sites where they had experienced harassment (Olesen, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2014). If participants showed signs of discomfort, I would pause the activity, acknowledge the validity of their emotions, and offer immediate support or, when appropriate, referrals to professional resources. Guided by Tronto's (1993) conceptualisation of care as attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness, I therefore adapted my interactions and research activities to prioritise participants' comfort, emotional safety, and well-being.

Navigating persistent structural exclusions likewise required continuous reflexivity, reminding me that meaningful inclusion is not simply a matter of diverse representation but also of creating genuinely accessible conditions of participation. This became evident when a visually impaired individual contacted me expressing interest in joining the study. Although I was immediately willing to explore alternative methodological strategies to facilitate their involvement, participation ultimately proved impossible because the person did not have a direct connection to the specific research areas. At the same time, this episode made visible a more structural limitation in my



design: several participatory activities relied heavily on visual techniques such as mapping, photovoice, and spatial navigation exercises. Reflecting on this experience underscored how accessibility must extend beyond physical spaces and explicitly encompass methodological choices, so that participatory activities can become genuinely inclusive of individuals with diverse abilities and sensory experiences.

The ethic of care was therefore not an auxiliary concern but a central dimension of this research. In using fieldnotes as a reflective space, I repeatedly confronted the ethical dilemmas that arose where my role as emotional support provider intersected with my responsibilities as a researcher. Care, in this context, centred on participants' comfort and well-being in order to enable nuanced data collection while minimising re-traumatisation. Yet responsibility of care extends not only to participants but also to the researcher, who must remain emotionally aware and prepared to handle psychological and ethical contingencies (Olesen, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) conceptualisation of care as an ongoing relational practice embedded in everyday research interactions was especially helpful here, as it made clear that maintaining emotional awareness for oneself is not secondary to maintaining it for participants. Balancing responsibility with vulnerability, both theirs and mine, thus became one of the most ethically demanding yet transformative aspects of the project.

Several field encounters made these ethical and relational tensions tangible. During one focus-group walk in Stazione Centrale, repeated instances of catcalling exposed not only the pervasiveness of harassment in public space, but also the dual burden of feminist fieldwork: while such episodes generated valuable data, they simultaneously heightened my own sense of vulnerability and my responsibility towards participants' well-being. On another occasion, while I was grieving and struggling to lead a walk, participants themselves collectively took over the route and the reflective prompts, turning a moment of personal fragility into one of reciprocal care and shared epistemic labour. Even moments of absence or substitution (such as when a trusted research assistant led a walk in my place due to health reasons) made clear that participatory feminist methods are sustained by trust, responsiveness, and a willingness to allow knowledge to emerge through contingency as well as design. Together, these experiences reinforced my understanding of care not as a soft add-on to research, but as a demanding and reciprocal practice through which both participation and interpretation are held together (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993).

Taken together, these instances illuminate the affective textures of co-research and represent moments in which the aspirational ethics of feminist inquiry confront physical limits, emotional strain, and logistical setbacks. They point towards a feminist ethic of interdependence, in which emotional exposure does not undermine research but becomes a mode of deepened relationality and trust. In this sense, an ethic of care involves mutual and ongoing practices, encompassing proactive measures during data collection, careful contingency planning, and, to an extent, reciprocal emotional support, to ensure that both participant and researcher well-being remain safeguarded throughout the research process (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025). It also requires refusing to romanticise care as a harmonious or uncomplicated add-on, and instead approaching it as a terrain of negotiation, emotional work, and structural friction. Reciprocity, in this light, does not merely humanise the research relationship; it also constitutes a form of coproduced knowledge in itself—a relational epistemology rooted in the affective entanglements of fieldwork.

In practice, this reciprocity extended well beyond the moments of data collection. Many participants expressed a strong interest in following the research beyond their initial involvement, asking to read parts of the thesis, to receive updates on its progress, and to obtain restitutions that I sought to adapt to each interlocutor's needs and interests. Some participants continued to engage long after the activities had concluded, at times sending voice notes while walking through the city, transforming our chats into a kind of collective diary of urban presence. Others explicitly asked me to connect them with local institutions and associations in order to organise a performance in Piazzale



Duca D'Aosta or to find a new meeting space for the *Gruppo Mamme NoLo*. Responding to such requests confronted me with the ambivalence of mediating between participants and local institutions. Rather than conceiving mediation as instrumental facilitation, I sought to reframe it as a dialogical opening: an attempt to support participants' initiatives while remaining critically aware of the asymmetries of power and responsibility that such engagements inevitably entailed.

Overall these interactions indicate that reciprocity in feminist research is not a transaction but a relationship unfolding over time that cannot be reduced to compensation or token material gestures during fieldwork. It entails sustained attentiveness, responsiveness to participants' articulated needs, and the co-creation of dialogical channels through which knowledge circulates, returns, and is put to use. Practised in this way, giving back becomes part of the method: a form of relational labour and accountability that treats participants as co-owners of the inquiry, invites them to shape interpretation and dissemination, and builds the social infrastructure through which findings can travel to the places where they matter (e.g. community groups, municipal arenas, and everyday life- see Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). It also reorients research temporalities from punctual extraction to ongoing accompaniment, countering extractivist logics by recognising responsibilities that persist after fieldwork ends. In this project, reciprocity thus operated as an integral dimension of the ethic of care underpinning co-production, anchoring analysis in everyday relations while also opening pathways for translation into collective and institutional action.

These interwoven issues of positionality, ethics of care, and ongoing reflexivity shaped every element of the study, from the initial recruitment of participants to the collaborative interpretation of visual data and, ultimately, the final stages of writing. Fieldnotes, in particular, became a living document of my ethnographic and feminist journey, capturing the messy interplay of personal involvement, power relations, and the emotional complexities of studying fear and safety in urban space. Each reflection on my positionality, each reconsideration of a participant's hesitation, and each note on how a fleeting exchange might reshape my interpretative lens proved crucial. Fieldnotes also served as a form of self-care, enabling me to process the emotional and ethical demands of the research. By documenting instances of potential re-traumatisation or conflicts between my supportive role and my data-gathering responsibilities, I was able to refine my approach while also illustrating how ethical challenges were navigated in practice. Including such reflections in the methodological narrative enriches the account of how knowledge was coproduced, while emphasising the necessity of maintaining both participant and researcher well-being throughout the study. Ultimately, by offering a rigorous account of the self, the project aspires to enact and exemplify the relational, reflexive, and ethically invested nature of feminist spatial inquiry, thereby reinforcing its broader goal: to elevate women's voices, challenge hegemonic structures, and generate insights that may contribute to more inclusive and equitable urban policy.

### Reflections and Remarks

This final section critically reflects on the methodological and ethical challenges involved in pursuing participation and intersectionality in practice, highlighting the tensions between feminist methodological aspirations and the structural, temporal, and institutional constraints of fieldwork. It engages directly with the "promises and pitfalls of feminist methodologies" (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025), asking not only what could have been done differently, but also whose experiences were included, omitted, or remained unreachable. Grounded in the conceptualisation of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991), and the articulation of situated intersectionality and the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2015), participatory methods have played a crucial role in feminist urban research by offering inclusive approaches to understanding how multiple forms of oppression shape women's experiences of public space. Yet their implementation also reveals the frictions that emerge when



epistemological commitments to participation, co-creation, and inclusivity encounter the practical realities of fieldwork.

Drawing on Collins (2019), McCall (2005), Yuval-Davis (2006; 2011; 2015; 2016), and Valentine (2007), I approached intersectionality not merely as an additive framework of difference, but as a critical social theory and methodological orientation attentive to how multiple axes of inequality and belonging are co-constituted in specific socio-spatial contexts. In line with Bonu's (2022) proposal to think participatory research intersectionally, I treated positionality, research planning, and the analysis and dissemination of findings as key sites where power differentials had to be confronted rather than assumed away. Following Rodó-de-Zárate (2013) and Yuval-Davis (2015), I therefore understood intersectionality not only as an analytical lens, but as a practical commitment shaping recruitment, facilitation, interpretation, and restitution. On paper, this orientation was meant to be foundational, guiding recruitment and analysis alike. In practice, however, its implementation encountered significant challenges. Despite efforts to engage a heterogeneous sample, structural barriers including time constraints, access limitations, and the socioeconomic and migratory precarities shaping participants' availability which restricted the diversity of voices represented. As Ravensbergen et al. (2019) remind us, intersectional methodologies often confront the paradox that those most marginalised are also the most difficult to reach in conventional research designs.

Feminist qualitative research has indeed the potential to “unpack the taken-for-granted ideas about women in specific material, historical and cultural contexts” (Olesen, 2000: 215). Yet there remains a significant distance between feminist epistemological ideals and the realities of research practice, especially in relation to recruitment and access. Throughout the project, I repeatedly encountered a tension between the aspirational ideals of inclusivity and co-creation intrinsic to feminist participatory methods, and the structural, temporal, and material constraints that shape participation in practice. The time-intensive character of participatory approaches raised persistent questions about recruitment, access, and representation. Even individuals initially confident in their ability to commit to all phases of the focus groups often faced unexpected emergencies or conflicts that prevented them from attending later sessions. Likewise, repeated rescheduling of participatory walks due to weather underlined the need for pragmatic adaptations responsive to barriers of time, accessibility, and care. Paradoxically, the same features that make participatory methods theoretically inclusive (e.g. iterative workshops, prolonged engagement, and collective reflection) can also systematically exclude those unable to dedicate substantial time or energy to the research process.

Often, those most invisibilised by broader social structures were also the least inclined, or least able, to participate. While I actively sought to involve women situated at different intersections of race, class, age, and migration status, individuals living in precarious circumstances often approached an academic project, especially one offering primarily intangible or long-term benefits, with understandable caution. Traditional outreach methods, such as flyers or mailing lists, proved ineffective for engaging those working irregular shifts, managing care responsibilities independently, or navigating insecure legal statuses. More specifically, recruiting older women or people with disabilities or migrant backgrounds proved particularly difficult. Collaborations with local NGOs and community groups were helpful, yet these relationships required substantial time and careful nurturing, revealing a broader tension between institutional timelines and predetermined deliverables on the one hand, and the relational, emergent ethos of feminist participatory research on the other. However, when engaging with organisations working with migrant communities, I encountered caution and hesitation: even after trust had been initiated, they often remained wary of exposing their members to potential harm or instrumentalisation. The few participants with migrant backgrounds and the single participant with a disability joined the research through different and unrelated channels, rather than through targeted outreach. Their participation therefore cannot be read as tokenistic; rather, it highlights how unevenly access to research unfolds.



My experience resonated with reflections shared by Azzurra Muzzonigro, a researcher involved in the project *Sex and the City*, who noted the underrepresentation of both younger and older people, as well as the lack of ethnic diversity, in their own participant sample. These convergences point to a broader and recurring tension between intersectional aspirations and the practical, structural barriers that impede genuinely diverse engagement (Yuval-Davis, 2015). The interview with Azzurra Muzzonigro proved analytically useful not only because it confirmed recurring difficulties around recruitment, representation, and access, but also because it allowed me to situate my project within a broader local ecology of feminist urban knowledge production and care-based activism. By consulting the final reports of those initiatives, attending some of their public sessions, and speaking with participants who had taken part in both processes, I was able to understand more clearly the uneven institutional conditions through which feminist urban knowledge is produced, circulated, and authorised locally. This comparative proximity also sharpened the specificity of my own methodological contribution.

As highlighted by Valentine (2007) and Ravensbergen et al. (2019), translating intersectionality from a critical lens into empirical research practice inevitably entails such frictions. Collins (2019), too, reminds us that intersectionality should be understood as a critical social theory precisely because it remains attentive to those tensions. I therefore frequently questioned whether it was ethically appropriate to insist on recruiting those individuals whom I struggled to engage or reach. This reflection led me to understand that those already rendered invisible through marginalisation, whether because of age, disability, or precarious legal status, may also prefer, or feel compelled, to remain unseen. In other words, not everyone experiencing marginalisation desires to be visible, named, or actively involved, especially in research contexts perceived as institutional or semi-institutional. This insight complicates the politics of visibility itself and calls for a more cautious, relational ethics of outreach, in which non-participation may be understood not only as a methodological limitation but also as a situated and deliberate choice. Rather than negating the intersectional orientation of the project, acknowledging these absences is considered as meaningful data, shedding light on broader dynamics of exclusion and invisibility within Milan's urban environment.

It was precisely because of these reflections that I chose not to insist excessively on recruiting women over 60 or under 24, and instead to acknowledge their relative absence as meaningful data in itself. In the case of young women between 18 and 20, this underrepresentation stemmed largely from my difficulties in gaining access to high schools, where this demographic predominantly spends its time. The underrepresentation of older individuals, by contrast, has deeper social roots, reflecting broader dynamics of isolation, invisibility, and disengagement from participatory or public spaces as elder individuals in Italy often experience prolonged isolation and rarely leave their homes, making both online and offline recruitment ineffective. Likewise, the absence of participants in precarious or low-paid jobs must also be read as significant: in contexts where, under capitalist temporalities, time is directly equated with income, dedicating hours to unpaid research participation becomes a privilege that many cannot afford. The absence of homeless women from the participant sample, together with the exclusively male composition of police personnel encountered during fieldwork, further underscores how some groups are systematically excluded or rendered invisible within the spatial and social dynamics of the city.

These absences also illuminate the extent to which field access and participant recruitment are themselves deeply context-specific and structurally mediated. Transit spaces, in particular, presented distinctive methodological challenges. Unlike lived-in or residential areas, they are characterised by transience and a high turnover of users, complicating both sample selection and sustained engagement. At the same time, precisely because these stations function as transit hubs, I was able to encounter many people who frequented them daily without living, working, or studying there. Their relationship to these spaces was defined by brief yet repeated transitions from train to



metro, or vice versa, raising questions about the forms of everyday knowledge generated through temporary but regular presence. During field visits, for example, I spoke with groups of young women who regularly gathered on the steps in Piazza Gae Aulenti to dance or socialise, even though they neither lived, studied, nor worked in the area. Their example suggests that repeated but temporary presence can still produce situated forms of spatial attachment and knowledge.

Methodological reflection also brought into view the extent to which language and sensory assumptions shaped accessibility and participation. All communication, including invitations, materials, and facilitation, occurred exclusively in Italian, inherently disadvantaging participants less proficient in the language. In addition, specific groups faced physical and logistical barriers when engaging in prolonged or demanding research activities. As mentioned in the previous section, participatory prompts often relied on art-based and highly visual materials, potentially excluding participants with visual impairments or limited engagement with image-based methods. These exclusions do not negate the value of the methods employed, but they do underscore the need to think of accessibility not only in spatial but also in methodological terms. The inherently multi-method and participatory nature of the research therefore required constant efforts to remain attentive to intersectional differences, while also acknowledging and accepting that not all barriers could be overcome within the project's actual conditions. The ongoing tension between aspirational inclusivity and practical constraint thus demands both pragmatic adjustment and deeper reflection on what forms of engagement are recognised as legitimate, valuable, or possible within participatory research.

A related challenge concerned the interpretation of creative and visual materials. While the artistic and visual outputs generated through participatory methods provided invaluable insights into the emotional and non-verbal dimensions of urban life, they also introduced a further layer of analytical complexity. These materials, although deeply generative, required slower, more flexible, and open-ended modes of interpretation. There remains a persistent risk of instrumentalising creative outputs, extracting meaning from them too quickly, or too confidently, without adequately respecting their ambivalence, opacity, and emotional density. In this sense, creative data invite epistemic humility and interpretive generosity, positioning analytical awareness itself as a form of ethical and relational care. The effort to adapt methods to participants' lives, while also doing justice to the ambiguity of creative materials, ultimately points to the dynamic, and at times cumbersome, character of intersectional inquiry.

Despite these challenges, the ethnographic fieldwork generated rich and situated understandings of how particular groups of women navigate Milan's urban spaces. Qualitative research does not aim for statistical representativeness, but for detailed exploration of how social phenomena unfold in context. As argued elsewhere (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025), the notable absences within the participant sample should not be treated merely as methodological gaps to be overcome, but as meaningful epistemological markers in their own right. They reveal the intrinsic limitations of representation and underscore the importance for feminist research of accommodating opacity, discomfort, and untranslatability. One of the most significant lessons emerging from this project, therefore, is the necessity of dwelling in uncertainty, of embracing a genuinely open-ended, contingent, and co-creative process of inquiry. Such an approach requires continuous negotiation, improvisation, and openness to rupture and disruption, recognising them as integral, rather than obstructive, dimensions of feminist participatory research. In this sense, the research process and the findings it generated reflect the broader conditions of knowledge production: marked by asymmetries, animated by care, and committed to doing justice to the messy, situated realities it seeks to understand.

## Conclusions



This chapter has shown that investigating women's experiences of public space in Milan required not a single method, but a layered and adaptive methodological architecture capable of following how safety, fear, belonging, and negotiation take shape across bodies, environments, social encounters, and temporal rhythms. Grounded in an interactionist ontology, a constructivist epistemology, and a feminist participatory orientation, the research design was conceived to co-produce situated knowledges about how public space is inhabited, interpreted, and negotiated in and around Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi (Haraway, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2015). Across multisited ethnographic observation, four focus-group cycles, participatory walks, community mapping, photovoice, photo-elicitation, and in-depth interviews, the study moved across observational, narrative, visual, and dialogical registers to attend to dimensions of women's urban experience that would have remained partial or invisible through any single method alone (Naples, 2003; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013; Valentine, 1989; Wang & Burris, 1997). Rather than functioning as a simple assemblage of tools, this design operated as a longitudinal and relational process through which different forms of knowledge were brought into conversation with one another. Ethnographic immersion sensitised the analysis to atmospheres, routines, bodily adjustments, and the temporal variability of place; focus groups and interviews created spaces in which participants could compare, elaborate, and reinterpret their experiences; and community mapping, photovoice, and photo-elicitation rendered visible the emotional and relational geographies of fear, familiarity, loneliness, care, and avoidance that are often difficult to access through verbal accounts alone (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Fujii, 2018; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). The chapter has also demonstrated that the strength of the methodology lay not only in triangulation, but in responsiveness: revisions to the original design, broadening of the interview sample, additional evening walks, and moments in which participants themselves redirected routes, discussions, or interpretations all underscored that feminist methodology depends on situated flexibility, negotiated participation, and openness to contingency as a source of knowledge (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025).

At the same time, the chapter has stressed that reflexivity and methodological tension were central conditions of knowledge production. Fieldnotes, iterative consent, co-interpretation, restitution, and ongoing negotiation around access, pace, disclosure, and emotional safety were crucial not only for ethical accountability but for analysis itself, since they made visible how my own positionality, affective involvement, institutional proximities, and moments of fragility shaped access, trust, interpretation, and the terms on which participants could speak (Fujii, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025; Reinharz, 1992). The aspiration to conduct an inclusive, intersectional, and collaborative study repeatedly encountered structural limits: the time-intensive character of the design, the transient nature of station environments, linguistic and sensory assumptions embedded in some activities, and the uneven reach of recruitment networks all influenced who could participate, under what conditions, and with what degree of continuity. The resulting absences, should therefore be understood not simply as methodological gaps, but as epistemologically significant traces of the unequal infrastructures through which urban participation itself becomes possible, desirable, or sustainable (Collins, 2019; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Ravensbergen, Buliung & Laliberté, 2019; Tronto, 1993; Valentine, 2007). In this scenario, care emerged not as a harmonious supplement to method, but as a demanding and sometimes uneven practice of attentiveness, responsibility, adjustment, and reciprocity through which participation remained possible, partial, and ethically sustainable. The main contribution of the methodology lies precisely in refusing neatness: contradiction, incompleteness, emotional intensity, contingency, and uneven participation are treated not as noise to be eliminated, but as constitutive dimensions of researching public space through feminist and participatory lenses. This chapter has therefore done more than justify a set of methods: it has established the analytical, relational, and ethical conditions through which the empirical chapters can examine the body–city interface as a lived, contested, and politically charged terrain.



## Chapter 5

# Findings and Discussion on the Body: Women's Embodied Experiences of Public Spaces as Portals of Urban Epistemology and Change

This chapter asks how women's bodies become both the register and the medium of gendered urban power in Milan's public spaces. Building on Chapter 2's discussion of the masculine coding of public space and the feminisation of privacy, I move from the abstract ordering of gendered space to the embodied interfaces through which that ordering is lived in everyday urban life (Kern, 2020; Massey, 1994). Women's public presence is frequently marked by hypervisibility: the sense of being watched, judged, and rendered potentially out of place, so that mobility becomes inseparable from anticipatory self-monitoring and adjustment (Bartky, 1990; Butler, 1990; Garland-Thomson, 2009; Young, 1990). In this sense, the body appears first as a threshold, marked by continual negotiation between security and insecurity, belonging and estrangement, autonomy and constraint (Anzaldúa, 1987; Grosz, 1995; Longhurst, 2001). Yet the chapter argues that threshold alone is not enough. If threshold names liminality, the concept of bodies as portals names mediation: the body does not simply stand at the boundary between exposure and exclusion, but translates urban norms, risks, and power relations into embodied knowledge, situated tactics, and occasional acts of spatial reworking. The analysis moves from hypervisibility and vulnerability to internalised regulation, and then to the everyday negotiations of clothing, mobility, and companionship through which women sustain public presence under unequal conditions (Kern, 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Valentine, 1989). Mobility and dress recur throughout not as isolated themes, but as practical everyday interfaces through which gendered power is lived, managed, and contested.

### Sites of Hypervisibility and Vulnerability

Anchoring the analysis in feminist spatial theory (Kern, 2020; Massey, 1994), surveillance and disciplinary power (Foucault, 1978; 1977; 1988), this section conceptualises the gaze as a key mechanism through which hypervisibility and vulnerability are produced. In historically masculinized urban contexts, women often occupy a position of hypervisibility as subject to continuous social and spatial scrutiny, while remaining invisible to the institutions that plan and govern urban space (Kern, 2020). This constant exposure directly produces vulnerability, not simply as an individual emotional response, but as a structural condition rooted in spatial and symbolic marginalization, embedded within broader mechanisms of social control (Longhurst, 2001). As women experience vulnerability and hypervisibility in public space through a phenomenological process (Bartky, 1990), the pervasive concept of the gaze, both external and internalised, lies therefore at the core of these embodied experiences. This gaze is not neutral: it sexualises, judges and moralises, thereby reproducing gendered norms (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). With gaze is intended the overlapping modalities of looking (e.g. heteronormative, racialised, "respectability" oriented) whose shape women's self-awareness and bodily behaviours, profoundly influencing how they navigate and inhabit urban spaces. Connecting lived experiences with theoretical insights mainly from Bartky (1990) and Butler's (1990; 1993) theories, this section argues that women's bodies emerge as critical sites where structural vulnerabilities become visible through the interplay of internal and external gazes, and where societal expectations and norms are continuously enacted, contested, and internalised. Racialised stereotypes, experiences of transition, body conformity and peer-policing further complicate embodied experiences, revealing how vulnerability and hypervisibility are structurally produced at different intersections of multiple dimensions of identity and power (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1992; Simon & Gagnon, 2003). Attending to how this gaze is



lived (and felt as shame, alertness, or diffuse vigilance) allows us to trace the intimate circuitry through which structural orders sediment into everyday bodily tactics.

At the core of women's embodied experiences in urban spaces lies therefore the concept of the gaze which significantly shapes their spatial practices, self-awareness, and perceptions of vulnerability. As remarked by Alex at the end of our interview, Margaret Atwood (1993) poignantly encapsulates this pervasive internalization of the male gaze with the words:

*“You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman.  
You are your own voyeur.”*

Alex shared this reflection precisely to highlight how every woman has internalised the male gaze and how the latter intertwines with external scrutiny, profoundly shaping women's everyday experiences of urban environments. In other words, this “man inside” mirrors the generalized other before whom gender is continuously “done,” rendering comportment answerable to normative scripts (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Luisa in her interview instead shared that she read an article<sup>47</sup> once on how the gaze conditions women's visual attention in public spaces, noting how women's gaze tends to be diffuse and alert -“women look everywhere”-in sharp contrast to men's straightforward and confident observation. During a focus group, when Elena recalled moments on public transport where the intrusive gaze of men on groups of women was palpable, Chiara extended this point by linking the sensation of being observed to feelings of inadequacy and exclusion:

*“fear is both subjective and objective because it is physical, and it is also linked to shame as well as survival. While feeling observed is primarily linked to inadequacy and not so much to safety... I feel observed because this space doesn't belong to me, not because the person observing me wants to kill me, mug me, or rape me.”*

First of all, this felt exclusion can be read as a politics of belonging in which some bodies are authorized as urban subjects while others are marked as perpetually out of place (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Moreover, following Ahmed's account of affective economies (2004), fear and shame here operate as circulating attachments that “stick” to certain bodies and sites, making women hypervisible while disqualifying their presence in public. These constant senses of being watched, having to be alert or not belonging are implicit consequences of the ways in which public spaces have been historically planned, systematically prioritizing male occupancy and marginalizing women's presence and, thus, clearly delineating which bodies can properly occupy them (Darke, 1998; Kern, 2020; Massey, 1994; Spain, 1992). Within this historical context, the internalization of the gaze becomes not only a psychological experience but a structural dynamic embedded within urban spatial practices.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://news.byu.edu/intellect/study-visually-captures-hard-truth-walking-home-at-night-is-not-the-same-for-women>



When asked during an interview to visually represent the connection between women's fear, space, and body, Nilde shared this photograph, explaining:

*"I was deeply struck by a small square in Paris, in the Montmartre area, where there is a bust of Dalida, the singer, which I believe has been there for about thirty years. I can't recall exactly when she died, but as you can see from the photo I sent you, her breast is worn down because everyone who passes by touches it. This gesture, which is somewhat cheeky and of course not comparable to sexual harassment, nevertheless left an impression on me. When I saw it, and I saw the people: the quintessential well-dressed men, exuding a certain French charm giving her breasts a little squeeze, it really struck me."*

Nilde's account makes tangible the shift from visual surveillance to a spatialised sense of entitlement: the statue's visibly worn surface operates as a material archive of a public ritual in which female breasts are rendered common property. As long argued in the street-harassment literature, such rituals help informally ghettoize women's presence and discipline their routes (Bowman, 1993; Gardner, 1995; Kissling, 1991). In the absence of the possibility of consent, the act is reframed as harmless tradition, yet it symbolically condenses the gendered logics of hypervisibility, objectification, and embodied vulnerability that women negotiate in public space. This practice is performed also to Juliet's bust in Verona, where the original 1969 statue by Nereo Costantini became a material archive of this ritual as the constant touching caused such severe structural damage that, in 2014, it was moved to a museum and replaced with a replica. Rather than stopping the practice, the replacement effectively institutionalizes the ritual, ensuring that the cycle of tactile intrusion can continue indefinitely under the guise of heritage preservation. As a civic artefacts, the busts illustrate how visibility can slide into touch, and how the public gaze, when normalised, may legitimise tactile intrusion. In this way, the monuments become spatial allegories for the ways patriarchal urban orders reproduce and naturalise bodily trespass.

To better understand the embodied consequences of the internalization of the gaze, Michel Foucault's theory of panopticon (1977) offers a powerful analytical framework suggesting that urban environments act as continuous sites of discipline, embedding self-surveillance deeply within women's bodily practices and significantly limiting their spatial autonomy. As he writes, "who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" (Foucault, 1977: 202). Drawing explicitly upon this Foucauldian analysis, Bartky (1990) elaborates on how women's bodies become both subjects and objects of continuous self-monitoring



and surveillance. Intensifying their vulnerability and limiting their autonomy, women's perception of being constantly observed and judged can be understood as a way in which urban spaces continuously discipline bodies by producing and reinforcing internalised social and behavioural norms. Internalizing this disciplinary gaze, women constantly monitor themselves, profoundly shaping their bodily consciousness, spatial autonomy, and behaviours, and reinforcing an enduring sense of vulnerability. This process also profoundly conditions women's sense of ownership over their own bodies—aspect that emerges clearly in Delilah's illustrated conceptualization of the relationship between women's bodies, public spaces, and fear:



During her interview, Delilah argued that within patriarchal cultures, persistent objectification leaves women feeling profoundly disconnected from ownership over their physical presence. This lack of bodily autonomy translates directly into experiences of fear, fundamentally understood as a loss of control. Central to her illustration is the assertion that women feel they do not fully possess ownership over their own bodies, which is deeply intertwined with patriarchal expectations that continuously objectify and regulate female physical presence. Consequently, fear shapes women's interactions with urban spaces, both socially (community interactions) and materially (architectural layouts)<sup>48</sup>, as they continuously navigate environments perceived as unsafe or restrictive, reinforcing their sense of vulnerability and disempowerment. Delilah's conceptualization of bodily disconnection effectively highlights how deeply women internalize surveillance, to the extent that their autonomy and self-perception become significantly compromised. Here, vulnerability emerges not simply as an individual emotion, but as a structural condition shaping how women continuously navigate urban environments both socially, through “community interactions”, and materially, via “architectural layouts”.

Serena further elucidates this dynamic in her interview, noting:

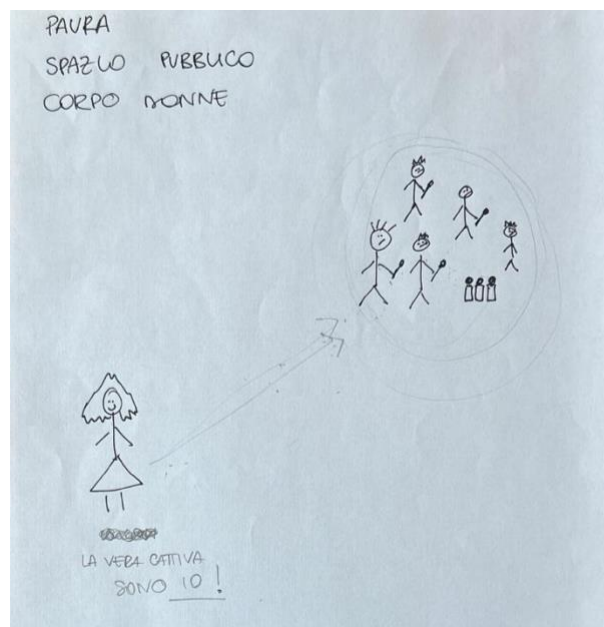
*“Women are afraid because they perceive they can't freely move around like everyone else—simply by being themselves. Their bodies are somewhat sexualized and emphasized, perhaps even against their will.”*

Serena then expanded her reflection on how internalised patriarchal norms are shaped by familial and cultural backgrounds, complicating women's embodied experiences and their spatial autonomy. Growing up in what she described as “a culturally conservative family” (of Moroccan

<sup>48</sup> In the drawing: (comunità/ architettonico)



origins), Serena notes how: “I don’t even think about it anymore out of habit, but I dress in a more covered way and it’s still a legacy of someone else’s patriarchal view”. Moreover, Serena disclosed how understanding Arabic significantly intensifies her embodied discomfort and sense of shame when she comprehends unsolicited comments directed at her. This shame arises specifically because these remarks come from individuals sharing her own cultural and linguistic background, complicating her sense of belonging and identity (Crenshaw, 1991). As an Italian woman of Moroccan origins in Milan, Serena experiences intensified vulnerability as culturally embedded patriarchal expectations expose her to heightened scrutiny both within and outside her community. Her narrative exemplifies the paradox of linguistic and cultural proximity, highlighting the double marginalization women of color face, navigating simultaneous surveillance both externally and within their communities (hooks, 1992). Serena’s account thus evidences how vulnerability is structurally produced at the intersection of gender, culture, and family dynamics, reinforcing racialised and gendered stereotypes, stigma, and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1991).



As a parallel form of gendered stigma and exclusion, this time grounded in perceptions of bodily size, Calipso’s visual representation of the relationship between women’s bodies, public spaces, and fear, illustrates how internalised perceptions of one’s bodily non-conformity can profoundly shape experiences of urban isolation and perceived vulnerability. Depicting herself standing apart from a group of men with the handwritten note: “*La vera cattiva sono io!*”<sup>49</sup>, Calipso’s worry primarily emerges from internal emotional responses and perceived societal judgments, rather than stemming from direct potential external threats. This self-blame and sense of isolation are exclusionary practices rooted deeply in societal norms and expectations about bodily conformity that systematically reinforce an internal narrative where perceived deviation from normative standards serves as powerful regulatory framework, restricting not only physical accessibility but also emotional belonging and spatial agency (Butler, 1990; 1993). Similarly, Isabelle’s interview complicates this dimension by foregrounding the tensions inherent in negotiating gendered bodily expectations. Recalling how, upon experiencing catcalling for the first time after her transition, she felt paradoxically gratified: “you know, it meant that society recognized me for who I am”. Isabelle underscores how recognition as a woman often requires alignment with normative scripts of

<sup>49</sup> Trad lit. “The real villain is me!”



femininity that include bodily objectification (Butler, 1990; 1993). Validation as a woman, in her account, becomes contingent upon conformity to conventional-and inherently objectifying-gendered expectations, further complicating transgender experiences of empowerment and acceptance (Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

These narratives converge with Nuvola's account, which situates the regulation of women's bodies within intergenerational dynamics. During the interview, she recalled an instance on the underground when she judged young women's attire through subtle facial expressions, prompting her daughter to call her out for what she identified as body shaming. This moment reveals how deeply ingrained, internalised, and perpetuated "sexual scripts" (Simon & Gagnon, 2003) defining acceptable femininity remain, becoming increasingly rigid and exclusionary for ageing women, who, in turn, may reproduce and enforce them upon others. The very act of noticing and commenting thus becomes a reproduction of the surveillance-judgement dynamic typical of patriarchal structures, but enacted horizontally, as a form of intra-feminine regulation. Another example of peer-policing can be found in Anna Maria's interview when she described a colleague who regularly cycles to work wearing "incredible miniskirts," noting:

*"every time I see her getting off the bike I think: 'How, a miniskirt on a bike...' and she's also beautiful, I don't know how she manages it!"*

Even though she talked with a mix of curiosity and admiration, her story contains an element of evaluation of another woman's body and clothing, implying that wearing a miniskirt while cycling is perceived as unusual or outside the norm. Transforming safety norms (e.g. avoiding certain garments on a bicycle for reasons of comfort or protection) into a standard of feminine respectability, Anna Maria participates in a form of mutual surveillance among women, in which other women's choices are evaluated through internalised social parameters. Indeed, these intra-feminine evaluations echo respectability politics and Italy's "decoro" regimes that moralize women's presence in public (Garreffa, 2010; Pitch, 2006; Skeggs, 1997). In doing so, women actively re-enact the evaluative gaze shaped by patriarchal norms, directing towards other women-and towards themselves-the same standards and judgments embedded in the male gaze.

Taken together, all these accounts reveal how women become simultaneously subjects and objects of the male gaze-seen by others, yet also seeing themselves being seen (Bartky, 1990). They also illustrate how hypervisibility and vulnerability are not merely externally imposed but are sustained and reproduced through women's own internalised gaze hence surveillance. The next section precisely traces how this dynamic translates into clothing and mobility comportment, turning the body into a site of everyday self-surveillance and discipline.

### Spaces of Internalised Regulation

Building upon the previous section's analysis of hypervisibility and vulnerability, this section conceptualizes women's bodies as spaces of internalization for social norms and spatial regulations. Drawing on Bartky's (1990) feminist phenomenology of patriarchal self-surveillance, Garland-Thomson's (2009) account of normative gazes and bodily minimisation, Kern's (2020) work on defensive dressing, Longhurst's (2001) discussion of fluid bodily boundaries, and Butler's (1990; 1993) theory of gender performativity, the section examines how patriarchal expectations shape everyday embodied behaviour. Using qualitative narratives from interviews and focus groups, it demonstrates that clothing and mobility choices function as situated tactics of internalised regulation, mediating hypervisibility and vulnerability in urban spaces in ways that are neither uniform nor universal but rather influenced by factors such as positionality, bodily conformity and ageing.



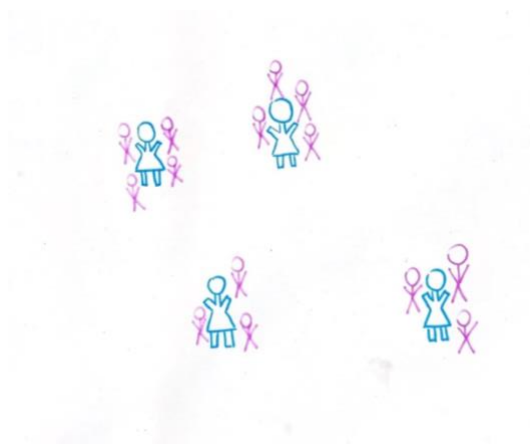
Many practices indeed start from external gazes (e.g. catcalling, evaluation of others), but consolidate as internalised devices of body management, as if we were always being observed. According to Bartky (1990), women's bodies operate as phenomenological thresholds of internalised patriarchal oppression, continuously experienced and embodied through persistent self-surveillance. As this embodied internalization deeply influences women's relationships with their own bodies, their behaviours in public spaces thus remain strongly conditioned by external gendered expectations regarding bodily visibility. For instance, scholars such as Phadke, Khan, and Ranade (2011) articulate how internalizing the perception of being potential targets of harassment significantly shapes women's urban practices, compelling women toward continuous self-monitoring and creating a persistent sense of marginalization within urban environments. Such feelings of hypervisibility (objectification and sexualization) and exclusion (being out of place, not belonging) profoundly constrain their spatial autonomy, resulting in experiences of fear that sharply embody a loss of bodily control (Kern, 2020). As Iris Marion Young (1990) argues, women often embody a restricted spatiality (characterized by hesitant movements, constrained gestures, and self-contained postures) that concretely illustrates the internalised spatial hierarchies shaping their everyday urban practices.

During her interview, when asked to visually represent the intersection of women's bodies, public space, and fear, Chiara requested to be photographed in the following position:

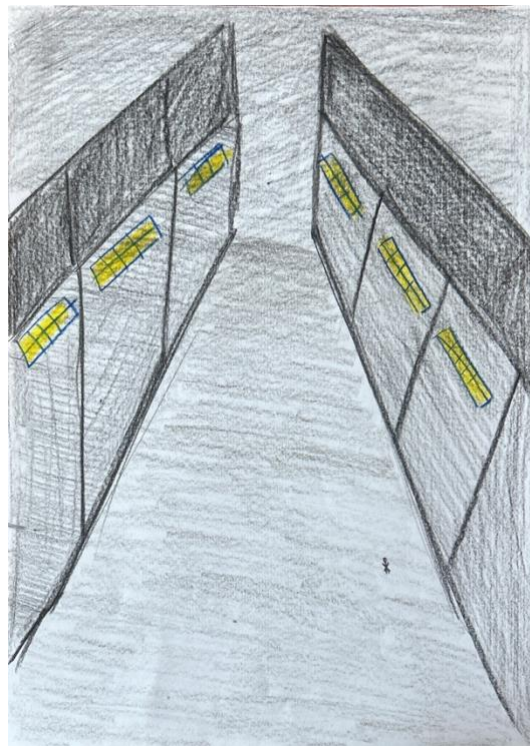


Physically manifesting an instinctive strategy of self-protection, Chiara's request to be photographed in a tightly curled posture, dressed entirely in black, visually translates the internalised self-surveillance theorised by Bartky (1990) and aligns with Garland-Thomson's (2009) conceptualization of bodily concealment and minimization as strategies of self-erasure in response to normative gazes. Moreover, drawing on Simonsen's (2005) account of bodies, sensations and space, Chiara's curled-up posture exemplifies a felt choreography of space-time: a practice of minimisation enacted through the sensing body. Along these lines, Anna, during her interview, confessed:

*“When I observe my own behaviour, but also that of the girls around me, I notice that I try, when I'm among other people, to take up as little space as possible. And that's why I decided to draw women as separate-very separate-from one another. What I notice instead about men is that they don't have this problem. I drew many men close together [in pink], while the women [in blue] are in fact apart.”*



This deliberate shrinking of women's presence in public reflects their internalised differential entitlement to space. While in the previous section a participant traced gendered differences in sight, here the asymmetry materialises in spatial practice- what, in Lefebvrian terms, can be read as an unequal "right to the city" (1968). Zeta's drawing makes this practice even more spatially tangible:



*"The woman in this drawing is tiny, because for me there's always this desire to go unnoticed, to move through space quickly. The female body is minuscule before an enormous public space made of wide streets, towering buildings, and dimly lit areas-like Stazione Centrale or Via Galvani. Fear, for me, resides there: in the great heights and in the great darkness. In the end, it is perhaps more a painting about proportion than about form: a small body within an immense space, evoking that feeling of being diminished and disoriented, not by anyone in particular, but by space itself."*

Her composition, where a minuscule body is engulfed by monumental dimly lit buildings, renders visible the asymmetric relationship between scale, visibility and fear. The small figure



becomes a cartographic metaphor for the ways in which urban form amplifies women's sense of exposure and displacement: architectural vastness mirrors social disproportion. Through its skewed perspective and vertiginous spatiality, the image materialises the phenomenology of vulnerability, translating the emotional compression of the body into the visual grammar of the city itself. Such practices of self-elimination thus reveal not only defensive adaptations but a profound internalization of gendered spatial hierarchies that actively shape women's daily urban experiences and modes of inhabiting the city (Kern 2020).

In her interview, Effemme further emphasized how gendered spatial hierarchies shape bodily practices and experiences:

*“The body is placed, each time, in spaces that can be public or private, and when these spaces generate fear, this fear directly impacts the body itself. The body is hidden more, clothed differently precisely because the fear derived from the surrounding space influences how the body and consequently the woman is presented.”*

On the concept of bodily presentation, Chiara further addressed in her interview the embodied dimensions of ageing by linking changes in her physical appearance to her diminished comfort in urban public spaces, concluding “we live in a world where if you are not size 42 you are worthless”. Her reflection on no longer wearing a miniskirt due to ageing and recent weight gain highlights the permeability of bodily boundaries at the intersection between societal beauty ideals and the embodied expectations of ageing women (Longhurst, 2001). Speaking directly to how urban spaces become sites of intensified bodily scrutiny and exclusion, Chiara's account reflects how cultural norms of femininity are continuously enacted and reinforced through everyday practices, becoming increasingly restrictive as women's bodies age (Butler, 1990; 1993). Amplifying feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness as women age and their bodies diverge from socially constructed ideals, Chiara's self-imposed norm is also exemplary of how ageing women must continually negotiate societal expectations, managing self-presentation amid intensified scrutiny and subtle stigma (Goffman, 1959; 1977).

Complexities related to bodily normativity and societal acceptance emerge also from Calipso's interview, beyond the representation discussed in the previous section. Confidently asserting: “I go my own way thinking that if it hasn't happened yet, why should it happen now?” Calipso recalled she had never felt targeted by intrusive gazes, nor she has ever experienced catcalling, thus explicit safety concerns did not overtly influence her clothing and spatial choices. She described choosing clothing primarily based on her mood, generally favouring casual outfits such as jeans and t-shirts, predominantly wearing black, stating that she does not dress according to external opinions or fashion trends. However, as someone whose body does not conform “to size 42” (ref. Chiara), Calipso's experience reveals subtler dimensions of embodied urban interactions. Since normative gazes reinforce bodily conformity by implicitly marking certain bodies as deviant or undesirable, her frequent choice of black clothing becomes a symbolic expression of internalised societal expectations, revealing an ambivalent negotiation between self-expression and self-erasure in contexts of intensified bodily scrutiny and exclusion (Garland-Thomson, 2009).

As illustrated by Serena's account in the previous section, and further reinforced by Chiara's and Calipso's narratives, clothing choices are deeply intertwined with women's embodied negotiations of hypervisibility and vulnerability in urban spaces. In this regard, Anna Maria stated during her interview:

*“Because fear affects the way you dress, the way you move... That is, if you are dressed in a certain way you feel more in danger.”*



Indeed, clothing emerges as a significant embodied practice through which women continuously negotiate their visibility, actively internalizing societal expectations and patriarchal gazes to mitigate perceived vulnerability (Butler, 1990; 1993). For many women, clothing choices are deeply contextual, tied closely to the mode of transportation and anticipated interactions within urban spaces. Indeed, during focus groups, many participants share preventive self-regulation of clothing when using public transportation to reduce visibility and perceived vulnerability.

Across interviews and focus groups, participants repeatedly linked what felt wearable to mode of travel, anticipated exposure, and the possibility of needing to move quickly: skirts, heels, low necklines, or lighter summer clothes were more easily imagined when travelling by car or in company, and more often avoided on public transport or when returning alone. In this sense, what Kern (2020) terms “defensive dressing” appears less as an exceptional response than as an ordinary embodied calibration of visibility, mobility, and vulnerability. Negative experiences, along with individual and collective memories, intensify this calibration over time (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005). Luisa’s account condenses this logic sharply: she “stopped wearing dresses on trains after an elderly man touched [her] thighs”. Several participants likewise described a gradual shift towards practicality, especially when anticipating an unaccompanied journey home. Comfortable shoes, in particular, were repeatedly framed not only as convenient but as part of a bodily preparedness to run if necessary. As Anna Maria put it, “if you’re wearing heels, you’re more at risk than if you’re wearing trainers, because you’re not in a situation where you can run.” Clothing, then, appears here less as an aesthetic choice than as a situated negotiation through which women manage exposure, anticipate danger, and modulate their bodily presence in urban space.

Even when their own dressing habits remain relatively stable, participants described how incidents involving other women recalibrate their sense of what is wearable in specific settings. Joy, for instance, reflected that hearing about a friend being groped under the skirt on a tram in broad daylight had made her more vigilant when boarding public transport. Monica similarly recalled a friend who had bought slightly transparent trousers for a night out but ultimately decided against wearing them because the journey by metro felt too exposing; as Monica noted, the choice would likely have been different “if we had travelled by car or had been accompanied by male friends”. Rather than direct victimisation alone, these accounts point to a more diffuse mode of regulation, shaped through circulating stories, anticipatory advice, and collectively shared calibrations of risk. Read through Simon and Gagnon (2003), such narratives also operate as sexual scripts, quietly codifying acceptable visibility and comportment.

Beatrice makes this mechanism explicit when she links clothing not only to display or concealment, but to “how a woman views her own body” and, consequently, how she appears in public. Alex’s account adds a further layer: after feeling intensely exposed under a man’s gaze at a professional event, they decided to reserve dresses for selected circumstances, showing how a single episode of scrutiny can crystallise broader norms of visibility into lasting bodily discipline. Internalised regulation, then, is both social and reflexive: it circulates between women’s stories, sediments in self-perception, and shapes how the body is presented, protected, and negotiated in urban space. Internalised bodily regulation is not confined to appearance alone: the same norms that discipline what women wear also condition how they move, the routes they select, and the ways they manage proximity to others in public space. In this regard, Agnese recounts:

*“One evening, on my way home, I ‘tagged along’ behind a couple—a man and a woman. Although I only intended to overtake them, I noticed that the woman immediately turned around at the sound of my quick steps, interpreting the gesture as a sign of how alert and sensitive women are to the close presence of another person compared to men. In fact, the guy barely noticed me only when I overtook them”*



This heightened attunement to proximity illustrates an embodied vigilance that runs through these accounts, where spatial choices and micro-interactions alike are shaped by a constant calibration of safety in relation to others. As highlighted by Valentine (1989), women's everyday mobility is persistently constrained by an underlying sense of vulnerability and exposure to harassment or violence. In other words, internalization of gendered bodily regulations have direct consequences for women's everyday mobility choices, shaping their movements and interactions within urban contexts (Kern 2020). During focus groups, some mentioned refraining from specific activities (such as taking late-night trains or crossing underpasses) precisely to minimize their exposure to vulnerability. Many also confessed adjusting travel habits depending on the time of day or altering their daily routes to avoid parks, gardens, and areas perceived as unsafe at night, and selectively avoiding particular urban spaces such as train stations and isolated paths after dark.

From Siria, Shige and Ida who do not go to Stazione Centrale at night, to Alex who avoids passing “by the Monumental Cemetery at night” and walks “quickly through alleys only after ensuring no one is following” her. From Joy and Tati who prefer avoiding parks and gardens at night opting for longer but busier roads, to Zeta who on her way back home from work walks roads that she knows are safe, that might not be the same she does when she is on her way in the morning. To Anna Maria, who expresses clear route modification, since the gentrification of the area, to avoid certain spots of Garibaldi and its Station at night when she gets back home. Anna Maria also shares she is no longer taking night trains alone after “catching an 11:30pm train” she felt “vulnerable”; also Joy admits she stopped crossing the underpass in Melchiorre Gioia alone at night because she “did not want to feel vulnerable”.

Despite different positionalities, all these experiences demonstrate ongoing spatial adaptations driven by implicit and explicit societal expectations of safety as routine practice adopted especially at night, often describing what looks like an “informal curfew” that truncates their movements after dark (Pain, 1997; Valentine, 1989). These navigational grammars do not arise in a *vacuum*: they intersect with planning logics that problematise space through fear, rendering specific paths and times risky by design (Tulumello, 2017). Not by chance, it is argued that women's spatial practices are continuously conditioned by dynamics of vulnerability, heightened vigilance, strategic route planning, risk perception and management (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020; Condon et al., 2007; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). On this note, Williams Reid and Konrad (2004) emphasize how women's perceived risks in public spaces materialize into concrete behavioural modifications, a perspective illustrated by these testimonies whereby participants consciously constrain their freedom of movement and adjust their routes considering factors such as time of day, companionship, and perceived threats. Additionally, disability and motherhood emerge as a significant experiential factors reshaping women's urban practices, prompting shifts toward even more fragmented and longer transport options that profoundly altering daily routes and spatial habits due to practical considerations like inadequate infrastructure or navigating obstacles with wheelchair and strollers.

Beyond route selection, perceived risk also sediments into a repertoire of micro-practices that choreograph both bodies and objects. During focus groups, participants described opting for crossbody or bum-bags to reduce the chance of snatching; avoiding taking out wallets or phones along stretches perceived as risky; slipping the phone away when exiting the metro or keeping phones illuminated to simulate companionship; and pre-drawing keys before reaching the doorway to avoid fumbling, at times, carrying them between fingers. This continuous micro-tuning of personal items and the learned injunction to avoid distraction-functions as an everyday regulatory practices that sustains vigilance even in routine movements. Alongside management of things, women also manage themselves: stillness, silence, and the careful calibration of voice and posture in response to harassment.

In the face of catcalling, several women described in focus groups to adopt deliberate non-engagement that Viola called an “ice-pole strategy”, even while acknowledging the urge to respond:



“it would be right to say, what do you want?”. Luisa similarly described freezing as a way to contain fear and hold her body in place when harassed: “I become a mummy and I fix my attention on a single point”. Others reported instead practising selective non-response. For example, Siria noted, “if someone approaches me and asks me something, I often don’t answer and keep walking,” while Joy stated she aims to “reduce feedback to a minimum, as much as possible.” Together, these micro-practices translate perceived risk into embodied self-management, curating one’s visibility and legibility under the male gaze and sustaining an everyday regime of internalised regulation in public space. The link between self-monitoring and bodily presentation emerges clearly during Difred’s interview:

*“I once took a women’s self-defence course, and the instructor said that a thief or an attacker tends to choose the person who appears weaker or more distracted. So I try not to appear like an easy target: if I have to walk down a street I know is unsafe, I keep my shoulders straight, look carefully around, and don’t walk with my phone in my hand...”*

Difred illustrates how messages received even in empowerment-oriented contexts, such as a women’s self-defence course, can reinforce an ongoing imperative to self-monitor and to calibrate bodily presence according to perceived threats. The instruction to avoid appearing “weaker or more distracted” is internalised and enacted through posture, gaze, and the regulation of gestures, resulting in a choreographed embodiment aimed at deterrence. In this sense, the street is not navigated as a neutral terrain but as a stage for the continuous performance of alertness, where the female body becomes both the object and the instrument of its own surveillance. This example further reveals how internalised regulatory logics are embedded in everyday movement, shaping women’s comportment as a constant negotiation between visibility, vulnerability, and self-protection.

At the micro-spatial scale, participants describe during focus groups a shared, constant, embodied reading of the environment to reduce exposure and avoid distraction. As Viola put it, “I try to imagine possible escape routes, whether I’m on a narrow street or a wider one with shops-and this changes with the time of day.” In transit spaces, the same vigilance translated in small repeatable gestures such as Chiara who admitted she always checks behind “who enters the lift with [her] in the underground,” a script she links to lessons “we are given since girlhood.” Here Miele highlighted how she cannot rely on the underground in Milan as “elevators, even when indicated, are frequently absent or non-functional” while I shared my own unease with lifts in public transport as I associate enclosed environments with heightened vulnerability, particularly in relation to the sudden proximity of strangers. These differing experiences underscore the deeply intersectional nature of urban life, illustrating how spatial perceptions and feelings of fear and safety are profoundly shaped not merely by geographic location but by the interplay of bodily capabilities, social privilege, and multiple intersecting social identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Agnese described her body accelerating almost automatically when in underpasses: “I start walking much faster, keep looking back, do it in a rush; it smells, it’s dark.” Waiting areas are managed similarly: “I never stand under the shelter; I wait a little farther away,” says Beatrice; “I step away from the shelter; it isn’t pleasant for me to wait there,” adds Nana. Together, these accounts elucidate a repertoire of subtle, internalised regulatory strategies that mediate hypervisibility and vulnerability, rendering risk manageable while quietly disciplining the body.

Covering up can increase safety but translate it into respectability politics (Skeggs, 1997); selective non-response can de-escalate risk yet normalise harassment as ambient noise. The same gestures can also be read as micro-affirmations of autonomy. Managing visibility, choreographing exposure, and refusing unwanted demands may assert control even as they reinscribe geographies of fear. In this sense, these tactics operate as ambivalent media through which women negotiate and, at times, extend their presence and spatial entitlement. As Rose (1993) suggests, women inhabit



“paradoxical spaces”: neither simply compliant nor purely resistant, but composed of continual recalibrations where internalised norms meet subtle acts of autonomy. Instead, they reveal ongoing recalibrations and ambivalent negotiations in which women simultaneously internalize restrictive norms while continuously enacting subtle yet meaningful acts of autonomy and resistance. Read this way, everyday clothing and mobility practices illustrate precisely this tension: they function both as internalised responses to vulnerability and as active mediums for negotiating, resisting and reshaping gendered spatial expectations. Just as clothing might serve as a medium of embodied resistance, mobility choices similarly emerge as critical acts through which women actively engage and challenge spatial vulnerabilities-dimensions explored in the following section.

### Mediums of Negotiation and Resistance

Within urban contexts historically structured by gendered spatial hierarchies (Massey 1994), women’s embodied experiences continuously unfold at a threshold, negotiating between security and vulnerability, autonomy and constraint. Guided by Bartky’s (1990) feminist phenomenology, Butler’s (1990; 1993) account of performative resistance, and scholarship on gendered urban dynamics (Kern 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011), this section examines clothing, mobility, and tactical companionship as active, embodied practices of negotiation and resistance. Drawing on qualitative narratives from interviews and focus groups, it shows how everyday sartorial and transport decisions operate as situated tactics of performative resistance (Butler, 1990; 1993) through which participants recalibrate routes and times, map “refuge” spaces and alliances, modulate visibility, and manage exposure. These tactics are differentially available and differently felt, structured by classed access to material resources and by uneven bodily capacities. Together, they translate internalised patriarchal norms and spatial inequalities into strategic (at times consolidated, at others improvised) micro-politics of movement that cohere into a situated grammar of navigation and resistance, a repertoire of tactical responses through which women assert autonomy and spatial agency.

Where repeated self-surveillance under the gaze becomes a rehearsed enactment of internalised gender norms, the interplay between societal expectations, spatial organisation, and embodied agency underscores that gender is not only performed through behaviours, but also through spatial practices deeply embedded in everyday urban contexts. Through this lens, women’s spatial choices emerge as dynamic responses that recalibrate routes and transportation modes, reflecting ongoing negotiations between agency, emotional experiences, and structural conditions. As detailed in the previous section, these practices span macro-adjustments (such as retiming trips, switching modes, avoiding particular routes or hours, and shifting stops or waiting positions) and micro-tactics (such as carrying keys between the fingers or keeping phones illuminated to simulate companionship). During focus groups, participants mapped a shared repertoire of “refuge spaces” along their habitual trajectories—restaurants, bars and cafés (e.g., Ostello Bello or Gelateria Sirtori near Stazione Centrale; a pizza place in Corso Como for Garibaldi), station bookshops (e.g., Feltrinelli at Stazione Centrale), and other trusted shops (see appendix: 163-164). Calipso and Viola also described using their dogs as “symbolic weapon.” Their accounts prompted a brief digression on the perception that black dogs are often seen as more intimidating than white ones, underscoring how non-human companions are mobilised as everyday security technologies and how colour-coded threat perceptions inform routine risk calculations. Read through Jacobs’ work on mobilities (1961), all these practices cultivate mobilities of comfort that generate safer place-attachments in motion.

These practices illustrate what Butler (1990; 1993) conceptualises as performative resistance: repeated, embodied acts that both reproduce and subvert normative spatial scripts. While strategies such as spatial avoidance or route modification might be read as evidence of internalised constraint, participants’ accounts demonstrate how these same actions can operate as deliberate refusals to passively accept patriarchal spatial arrangements. Through calculated decisions (e.g. choosing not



only where and when to move, but also how to inhabit that movement) women actively resist the relegation of their bodies to spaces of vulnerability. In this sense, each mobility choice becomes an embodied micro-act of contestation, challenging the implicit territorial logics of gendered urban space. Bartky's (1990) feminist phenomenology underscores that internalised regulatory regimes, while pervasive, can be recognised, contested, and strategically re-appropriated in the body's everyday negotiations. The empirical accounts here reveal precisely such processes: moment-to-moment recalibrations in movement and comportment that both acknowledge structural risk and reassert women's agency, situating the female body not merely as a site acted upon, but as an active instrument in re-shaping the conditions of its urban inhabitation.

Participants also described instances of overt bodily resistance, where physical or strategic actions were deployed to confront or deflect harassment and unwanted contact. During focus group, stories unfolded in direct succession, with participants prompted by each other's experiences. Nana, for example, recounted: "Coming out of the metro in the afternoon, I felt someone tugging at my backpack, I found a man with his hands inside it, and I slapped him twice..." Right after Beatrice intervened: "That reminded me of an episode: I was on the 87 bus getting back home from high school. A man approached a girl, stared at her, and took her phone. I was furious, so I told him to give it back, and he did. Then I was a little afraid he might follow me when I got off, but it didn't happen. When I told my mother, she was furious and said I shouldn't have intervened because it could have been dangerous. But in that moment I didn't think about it: I saw she was in difficulty and I acted on instinct." In her interview, Tati described a similar moment of bodily assertion on a bus: "On the 90 bus a man put his hand in my pocket... I pulled his hand out and got off the bus even though it wasn't my stop." Here, a thread of embodied resistance can be pulled across these three episodes: women enact improvised micro-politics of space, translating risk awareness into action while calibrating exposure. At the same time, the admonition of Beatrice's mother foregrounds the moral regulation of women's public conduct, showing how norms of prudence and self-preservation discipline intervention even when spontaneous solidarity feels imperative.

While these cases hinge on physical confrontation, other responses mobilise strategic performance as embodied resistance-in continuity with the micro-practices of stillness (Luisa; Viola), silence (Siria), and a pared-down voice (Joy) discussed in the previous section. Delilah, for instance, described feigning linguistic ignorance to deflect unwanted advances when verbally harassed on the metro with a non-Italian friend: "She didn't speak Italian, and I pretended not to either, because I didn't know what else to do." Taken together, these accounts position the body as both target and instrument-hands that slap or remove; a voice that commands; feet that exit-and delineate a continuum of embodied strategies: direct confrontation (Nana), bystander intervention (Beatrice), boundary-setting through strategic exit (Tati), and performative deflection (Delilah). Through these practices, women manage immediate risk while contesting the spatial scripts and behavioural expectations produced by internalised patriarchal norms and urban inequalities. Alongside these interventions, some participants also stressed the importance of on-the-move recalibration. As Siria explained during her interview, "it's simply about attention and common sense... if I see something that doesn't make me feel at ease, I might change my route, just using my instinct." Similarly, Serena described in her interview non-verbal coordination with her sister on public transport: "seeing someone who's not quite themselves and saying, okay, let's move; let's sit somewhere else, maybe further back on the bus... or just giving each other a look like: okay, maybe this isn't very safe!"

Forms of on-the-move recalibration are not limited to responding to immediate interpersonal threats. In her interview, Miele contrasted the years lived in London, where accessible public transportation allowed her to be completely autonomous and fully exercise her "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968), with her current experience in Milan. Her story powerfully embodies McDowell's (1999) argument that urban spaces predominantly reflect normative able-bodied ideals, marginalizing bodies diverging from these standards through infrastructural barriers that systematically restrict



autonomy, mobility, and consequently limiting spatial and social opportunities for individuals with disabilities:

*“There are stations where there are no elevators or they are broken, so it’s impossible to get from one side to the other or take the metro. It forces you to completely change your route. [...] Sometimes, to get to a place on the other side of the city, if there’s no accessible bus, I have to go all the way around by tram or in my wheelchair, even for kilometres.”*

Despite the fact that Miele’s spatial autonomy and social interactions are largely confined to areas reachable by accessible buses and trams, she actively negotiates these constraints through adaptive strategies such as planning routes in advance, preferring routes she already knows are accessible and avoiding journeys that involve fragmented that might increase the chance of finding non-accessible stops. Due to the limited availability of accessible transportation options in Milan, she largely depends on the 90/91 bus lines which are at same the most accessible and the most stigmatized as very unsafe. Miele also highlighted that the perceived risks associated with these bus lines are not a consideration she can afford, given the little alternatives available, and succinctly remarked: “but I have no choice. I sit near the driver and mind my own business”. Thus, her mobility decisions are shaped not only by infrastructural accessibility but also by necessity, producing an urban geography in which there’s very little room to preference or risk calculation. On this note, Tati considered in her interview how individuals with disabilities, confronting daily infrastructural barriers, perceive urban spaces differently, remarking: “people already experiencing daily difficulties don’t view spatial inconveniences with the same stress levels as those of us privileged not to face these everyday mobility challenges”.

During a focus groups Anna highlighted how her transport decisions vary significantly based on companionship, stating that “if alone at night” she “would rather call a taxi” than take public transport. Servis instead shared to predominantly use her scooter to move around the city but acknowledged situations in which feeling unsafe compelled her to opt for a taxi instead. Deepening the analysis on how women continuously internalize and negotiate their relationship with urban safety and accessibility, Phadke, Khan & Ranade (2011) emphasize that women strategically choose transportation modes to actively reduce their perceived vulnerability. In contrast, during their individual interviews, two participants shared often choosing shared scooters primarily due to their convenience and speed. For many participants, transportation decisions emerge from a careful negotiation between practical considerations, economic affordability, and personal preferences or pleasures, all filtered through the lens of safety and accessibility. Calipso, for instance, explicitly favours surface transportation for the sensory and spatial engagement it affords, enabling her to enjoy observing her surroundings. Several others both during focus groups and interviews articulated a marked preference for walking when circumstances of time and safety permit, underscoring how sensory pleasure and aesthetic appreciation become meaningful components of everyday urban navigation. Such accounts suggest that mobility choices are not reducible to utilitarian calculations; rather, they encompass affective and experiential dimensions that actively shape women’s spatial practices.

As previously emerged, many participants tend to routinely rely on public transportation during the day, significantly shifting their preferences towards private cars at night, emphasizing considerations of safety, independence, and autonomy also related to their clothing choices. Indeed, several participants underlined how their sartorial decisions closely align with their chosen transport mode (e.g. Arianna, Beatrice, Effemme), subtly highlighting how mobility intersects with bodily visibility and perceived vulnerability. On this note, during a focus group, Serena drew attention to the contrast between public and private spaces in relation to transportation choices, emphasizing how the car as “a way to protect oneself” transforms into a mobile refuge. Conversely, while Tati



acknowledged the car as potentially safe in certain scenarios, she expressed reservations related to parking areas, noting concerns that extend beyond mere convenience to encompass direct safety implications, as parking locations are often situated in tunnels or in isolated, poorly lit areas. In this light, taxis, scooters, and especially private cars emerge not merely as practical modes of travel, but as deliberate strategies for reclaiming autonomy, safety, and personal control within urban environments often perceived as constraining.

During her interview, Carlotta elaborated on this strategic dimension of mobility choices:

*“I've completely stopped walking alone at night-even for just 200 meters, I use the car. Even from my house to the Isola district, I drive, and despite this precaution, someone once tried to open my car door. I acknowledge that maintaining a car is a significant personal expense, but I justify it primarily for two reasons: firstly, the convenience of moving around whenever I want, and secondly, for safety reasons. [...] I prefer dealing with traffic and extra costs because ultimately, it gives me more control over my movements.”*

Carlotta's choice of private transportation, despite its significant economic implications, illustrates an ongoing embodied negotiation, capturing the tension between the capacity to act independently and an awareness of the risks embedded in the urban environment. Her preference for the car foregrounds mobility as a site of corporeal and spatial agency, where the act of driving is strategically adopted to reclaim bodily autonomy and mitigate perceived vulnerability. Carlotta's willingness to endure traffic and associated financial costs underscores how women's transportation decisions represent complex negotiations between practical considerations, emotional responses, and socioeconomic constraints. Her testimony poignantly illustrates how economic resources critically determine women's capacity to navigate and resist urban vulnerabilities, showing that such mobility choices, while framed as personal strategies to manage risk, are inherently conditioned by the availability of material resources. The capacity to adopt a private vehicle as a strategy of navigation or resistance is not universally accessible and is shaped by economic inequalities that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of those without comparable means.

As a more accessible private mode of transportation, cycling emerged both in interviews and focus groups as particularly significant for eight participants, representing a profound form of spatial agency and empowerment. For many, cycling represents a profound form of spatial agency and empowerment, offering what Anna Maria evocatively called, during her interview, as the “luxury of speed.” This velocity provides not merely “practical and environmental convenience”, as mentioned by Kuru in her interview, but also crucial psychological reassurance and embodied control. The enhanced mobility provided by the bicycle enables women to swiftly navigate through or rapidly leave spaces perceived as unsafe, allowing them to traverse urban routes they would otherwise avoid on foot: “I always cycle here and I'm happy to pass by this place but I wouldn't dare going there by foot,” said Anna Maria, pointing to an underpass on the map during a focus group. In this regard, Nana framed cycling as an essential safety strategy, emphasizing its capacity to provide rapid escape in case of danger: “I cycle everywhere; I wouldn't dare walk, as I can escape more quickly”. Yet, beyond practicality, cycling also represents for Nana a meaningful act of personal liberation. During a focus group Nana disclosed that, after experiencing assault, cycling offered her a pragmatic and political pathway to overcome fear, reclaim autonomy, and re-establish her social life. Nana's story compellingly demonstrates how mobility, speed, and visibility intertwine with bodily autonomy, enhancing women's agency in negotiating urban spaces. In this sense, cycling allows her to re-engage with the city on her own terms, actively reframing her embodied experience-not as passive victimhood, but as empowered spatial navigation.

Delilah's experience of being chased by a van after confronting harassment while biking adds a layer to the analysis showing how this form of freedom on two wheels can simultaneously heighten



exposure to risk and vulnerability. “Being on a bike undoubtedly makes me feel much safer,” she reflected during a focus group, “because paradoxically, I think if someone wanted to attack me, I’m faster on a bike than on foot, and I feel more protected, even though I might be more at risk as no one really considers cyclists” on the road. Her experience highlights that cycling, while empowering, remains embedded in context-dependent realities shaped by urban infrastructures and gendered social expectations. This narrative poignantly echoes Young’s (1990) feminist phenomenological insights, highlighting how women’s embodied navigation of urban spaces involves a persistent negotiation between socially imposed bodily constraints and the assertion of spatial agency. Indeed, Delilah’s account illustrates that cycling, while empowering, remains deeply embedded in context-dependent realities shaped by urban infrastructures and gendered expectations.

Similarly, Chiara recalled during her interview:

*“There’s a funny episode from when I had the motorbike: I was stopped at a traffic light and a man came up next to me and said, ‘Miss, aren’t you afraid?’ I told him I was more afraid on foot than on the motorbike.”*

Her response encapsulates the paradox of gendered mobility where autonomy and exposure coexist. As the bicycle for Delilah, the motorbike becomes a paradoxical site of freedom: a space that offers both vulnerability and control, where women negotiate safety through speed, movement, and the symbolic armour of autonomy. These mobility practices can be understood as inherently ambivalent, simultaneously enacting vulnerability and resistance, conformity and autonomy, thus reflecting women’s complex and context-specific engagements with urban environments (Rose, 1993). Thus, cycling emerges as a strategic yet contested practice that simultaneously reinforces women’s autonomy and underscores their persistent vulnerabilities, symbolically marking the embodied negotiation of freedom, safety, and identity within urban environments.

Clothing functions not only as a protective strategy for urban navigation, enabling mobility, but also as a medium through which women construct, defend, and reconfigure their self-representation in public space. Delilah, for example, admitted during an interview to purposefully dress in ways that challenge victim-blaming narratives, framing her sartorial decisions as conscious acts of resistance and feminist re-appropriation of her body. Similarly, in her interview, Isabelle stated to choose overtly feminine and sometimes provocative clothing is a powerful affirmation of her gender identity, a visible assertion against societal invisibility, and a reclaiming of her embodied presence within public spaces during transition. While for Delilah and Isabelle sartorial choices are framed as assertions of identity and resistance, for Nilde they are equally shaped by the ongoing negotiation between self-assertion and the gendered imperative to mitigate risk:

*“I still wear miniskirts-ultimately I shouldn’t have to limit myself because others are unable to manage their own behaviour. But it’s still something you think about. And if I had a daughter, I honestly don’t know if I would tell her, ‘Yes, go to the station at midnight in a miniskirt’ ... I can say this lightly because I have two sons, but perhaps if I had a daughter it would be different, because, whether we like it or not, our bodies in public space provoke reactions, and we feel the responsibility to anticipate and manage them.”*

Nilde’s interview illustrates how sartorial choices operate as active, embodied negotiations between autonomy and the gendered imperative to self-protect. Her refusal to give up wearing miniskirts signals a resistance to the disciplining effects of victim-blaming discourses, yet her acknowledgement of the constant mental calculation-amplified by imagined responsibilities toward a hypothetical daughter-reveals the persistent social burden placed on women to anticipate and manage others’ reactions to their bodies. In this sense, clothing becomes both a medium of self-



assertion and a tactical response to spatial risk, embodying a form of resistance that is inseparable from the everyday negotiations of visibility, vulnerability, and safety in public space. While Nilde's account frames clothing as a space of tension between resistance and the gendered imperative to self-protect, Miele's narrative foregrounds how disability reconfigures the calculus of sartorial choice in public space. For her, the act of dressing is embedded within a broader economy of accessibility rather than primarily oriented toward gendered self-protection. As she remarks, "if I also had to think about how I dress, I'd never leave the house", noting that she already must calculate accessible routes before even considering what not to wear.

*"Over the past two or three years my way of dressing has changed enormously. Now, for me, it revolves around comfort and speed, whereas at 28 I was much more attentive to my clothing. Even when I go out at night now, I don't spend much time getting dressed up. That said, especially on the bus, I the luck that, being in a wheelchair, I always feel, in a way, covered from a certain point of view... Sometimes at traffic lights I notice someone looking down my neckline and, having long hair, I put it in front of me to cover it, or, more simply on public transport, I put my bag on my lap to cover my chest... these are my strategies."*

Miele's interview thus reveals how accessibility needs create a primary axis of negotiation, with clothing choices subordinated to the logistical demands of mobility in a city that remains unevenly accessible. While gendered visibility and the micro-strategies of bodily protection remain present, they are reactive, situational responses rather than pre-emptive determinants of her self-presentation. Not refraining from wearing low-cut tops, but instead adapting strategies in the moment to shield her chest, can itself be read as an act of resistance, asserting her right to dress as she wishes while managing exposure on her own terms. This negotiation further shaped by the fact that being in a wheelchair means being at a lower eye level, making it easier for people to look at your chest. In this context, negotiation and resistance are refracted through the politics of infrastructure: her practices resist exclusion not through the overt recalibration of clothing, but through the persistent navigation of an environment that simultaneously constrains and demands adaptation. This layering of spatial risk illuminates how intersecting systems of constraint related to gender and disability reconfigure the hierarchy of priorities in everyday urban navigation.

Participants' accounts have already highlighted forms of tactical companionship shaping everyday navigation, such as the decision to use underpasses only when accompanied (Agnese, Luisa, Tati) and the way in which companionship directly influences clothing choices (Anna, Arianna, Effemme, Monica). However, both during focus groups and interviews, many participants described strategies not only to free and protect themselves, but to ensure the safety of other women—particularly during evening outings by avoiding leaving friends alone and coordinating group returns home. For instance, Nuvola recounted sometimes "dragging someone along" to avoid walking alone, while Eleonora also emphasised the importance of planning evening activities with friends to ensure shared return journeys, adjusting meeting points or timings so that no one would have to travel unaccompanied. If, as previously discussed, Nana's use of the bicycle and Carlotta's reliance on her car assert bodily autonomy, turning individual mobility choices into active strategies of reclaiming public space, these mobility practices also contain a significant collective dimension. Indeed, those with access to private cars, such as Carlotta and Monica, frequently offer rides to friends, while cyclists like Agnese, Delilah and Nana sometimes deliberately take longer routes and walk a friend home before cycling to their own destination so as not to leave them walking by themselves.

Social proximity tactics extend beyond simply avoiding going out alone at night or being accompanied. Indeed, when Delilah recalled the evening ride when, after responding to harassment from a van driver, the vehicle slowed down and began following her, she admitted to have quickly assessed her surroundings and deliberately approached a woman on the street: "I chose her on



purpose, I put on a terrified face to signal I needed help and approached her, waiting for the van to go away.” This form of situated agency enabled her to de-escalate the situation and wait in safety until the vehicle left. Such episodes illuminate how women’s urban navigation often involves forging immediate situational alliances in public space to mitigate vulnerability, mitigate vulnerability, and transform isolation into co-presence.

Tactical companionship is also technologically mediated. Participants described using GPS tracking apps with real-time location sharing, texting upon arrival, and real or staged phone calls during night-time journeys as ways of transforming solitary movement into accompanied movement at a distance. Arianna and Difred, for instance, spoke of sharing their live location when out alone at night; Arianna, Calipso, Difred, and Viola described routinely texting once they had arrived home; and Arianna, Monica, and Eleonora portrayed phone calls as an “extension of company” while crossing dark or isolated areas. These tools varied somewhat across generations (live texting and location-sharing were more common among younger participants, while others more often relied on phone calls or face-to-face arrangements) but across these differences their function remained similar: to create a temporary sense of co-presence while moving through uncertain space. Alex’s account shows how this mediated companionship can also be improvised strategically in real time, mobilising relational support while drawing on gendered assumptions about male protection:

*“Once I got off at the bus stop, it seemed like a man was lingering to see where I was going. The house was in Bicocca, near the Arcimboldi, and between the bus stop and the house there’s a huge magnolia tree that blocks the view. So I pretended to be on the phone, as if I was trying to figure out where home was. This guy was just standing there, and it wasn’t clear what he was doing. I called my mother, who lives in the same complex, and told her: ‘Mum, I’m almost home, tell Dad to come downstairs and bring me the keys.’ My mother was confused-my parents have been divorced for years-and at one point I had to say quietly: ‘There’s a man who seems to want to follow me home, so please open the door so I can get in as soon as he looks away.’ Basically, pretending that there’s a man waiting for me somewhere.”*

Collectively, these narratives illustrate how transport, clothing, and companionship choices become key sites in which autonomy, vulnerability, visibility, mobility, and safety are continuously negotiated. They form a situated grammar of navigation and resistance: a repertoire of tactical responses to patriarchal norms and uneven urban conditions (Kern, 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011; Valentine, 1989). Crucially, access to these tactics is both classed and corporeally mediated, since material resources and uneven bodily capacities condition whether speed, privacy, or proximity can be secured at all. Read together, these practices are not merely pragmatic adjustments to risk, but embodied negotiations through which women refuse passive accommodation and carve out contingent margins of autonomy. Some remain primarily tactics for enduring unequal urban conditions; others, especially when they generate reciprocal protection and shared presence, begin to open onto more collective reworkings of space. The next section precisely follows this shift.

### Agents of Spatial Reconfiguration

If space is relational and always under construction (Massey, 1994), women’s bodies are not merely situated within it but actively implicated in its ongoing reconfiguration (Grosz, 1995). At the body–city interface, everyday embodied practices can become generative of spatial form and meaning. This final section approaches spatial reconfiguration in a stricter sense: not as a label for



every tactic through which women manage risk, but for those practices that begin to alter the relational, symbolic, and affective organisation of space itself. Building on the previous sections, it revisits selected examples through a different analytical lens, asking when embodied negotiations cease to function only as coping or refusal and instead generate new trajectories, relations, and modes of inhabiting the city. Women's bodies are thus approached not simply as sites of vulnerability, regulation, or resistance, but as thresholds of spatial change as embodied interfaces through which co-presence, shared legibility, and claims to urban space emerge. In this sense, women's presence in public space operates simultaneously as material and symbolic, registering unequal conditions while also opening partial rearticulations of urban use, meaning, and belonging. What comes into view, then, is not a total remaking of the city, but a situated reworking of its immediate textures and possibilities.

The sartorial accounts of Calipso and Alex are best read as threshold cases rather than as the clearest instances of spatial reconfiguration. Calipso's neutral, total-black attire and Alex's refusal of certain traditionally feminine clothes emerge from conditions of vulnerability, yet they also assert alternative modes of spatial embodiment. Precisely at this phenomenological threshold between internalised oppression and everyday resistance (Bartky, 1990), clothing becomes a medium through which the terms of appearance are renegotiated: normative femininity is not simply reproduced or rejected, but reworked in situated, partial, and unresolved ways (Butler, 1990; 1993). These choices do not yet reconfigure space in the stronger collective sense developed below, but they begin to alter the scripts through which urban presence is performed and read. If these sartorial choices mark a threshold between embodied refusal and spatial re-signification, the following practices show more clearly how space itself can be relationally reworked.

Participants described a repertoire of social proximity tactics that blend precaution with solidarity and transform isolation into co-presence. And this form of co-presence turns into a vernacular safety infrastructure that formal surveillance rarely substitutes for (Jacobs, 1961). During her interview, Tati recalled noticing a girl standing alone waiting for a bus and choosing to remain nearby "Once I saw a girl that was there alone waiting for the bus, so I went over and stayed near her until her friend arrived. I said to myself: at least while I'm here, she is not alone". During a focus group, Anna recounted using proximity as a form of support and protection: "once I pretended to know a girl in order to intervene, because there was a guy harassing her. I approached her as if we were friends, and we left together". In her interview, Difred disclosed that, when travelling, they try to sit next to other women on public transport or trains, choosing proximity as a measure of reciprocal protection: "I always try to sit next to girls or to people who make me feel at ease, on public transport or on the train. That way I feel calmer, and I think they also feel calmer". In her interview, Nuvola similarly noted recognising and informally aligning with other women in public space, describing how, even without explicit incidents, mutual glances and subtle gestures can signal a shared awareness and form of tacit solidarity: "So more than anything else, for me it hasn't happened explicitly, but with looks and attitudes, I've also found other women."

These proximity practices do more than assist individual women in managing risk. Through adjacency, tacit recognition, brief intervention, and the deliberate creation of co-presence, safety is produced relationally rather than privately endured. What is reconfigured here is not the city in any total sense, but the immediate social texture of space: isolation is interrupted, vulnerability is redistributed, and public space is provisionally remade as a site of mutual care rather than solitary exposure, showing how fear can become generative of solidarity rather than only of withdrawal (Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). In this sense, such practices function as vernacular safety infrastructures, materialising protection through relations rather than through fortification or formal surveillance (Jacobs, 1961; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). It is telling, then, that participants did not mention *DonneXStrada*, *PuntiViola*, or comparable initiatives. This does not make such infrastructures irrelevant; rather, it suggests that, in everyday practice, the



first line of safety still often lies in friendships, proximate communities, and ordinary networks of care, recognition, and accompaniment.

This relational reworking of safety also emerged through the circulation of experiential knowledge. Shared mapping exercises during focus groups in Garibaldi and Centrale functioned as collective cartographies where participants annotated routes, landmarks, and “feelings” layers together. The initial prompts asked very simply which spaces they used and which they avoided, and why. Yet as participants came together, these maps evolved beyond functional accounts of mobility into shared spatial narratives. Everyday trajectories (such as the Biblioteca degli Alberi where Calipso and Viola walk their dogs, or Delilah’s path to her yoga class) were inscribed alongside affective attachments as, for instance, Corso Como, remembered by some as a vibrant night-time route in earlier years, now largely avoided after dark (Arianna, Calipso, Serena, Viola). Participants collectively also identified places of attachment and caution (e.g. pizza places, supermarkets and long-familiar cafés- see appendix: 163-164). These moments of recollection and recognition often triggered group laughter, turning the mapping into a convivial yet epistemically productive encounter.

Following Haraway’s (1988) insights, these maps can be understood as situated knowledges: partial, positioned accounts that, when stitched together, yield a more accountable and reflexive picture of risk and safety. In tracing, debating, and re-evaluating routes and places together, the mapping process thus produced more than a visual record: it generated a checked and contested understanding of refuge and exposure, a shared spatial grammar through which individual experiences were aligned, challenged, and expanded. This generative quality was evident when perceptions shifted in real time. Luisa, for example, began using a park she had long avoided after hearing other women describe it as a pleasant lunch spot-illustrating how collaborative mapping can reconfigure not only the representation of space but also the ways women inhabit and imagine it. Echoing Serrano Santos’s (2024) emphasis on the everyday practices of care mobilised by young women in violent urban environments, the maps produced in this study similarly captured how Milanese women articulate spaces of refuge, collective presence, and supportive companionship as counterpoints to sites of risk. In doing so, they materialised not only individual trajectories but also a collective grammar of care that redefined the affective landscape of the neighbourhoods.

This shift exemplifies how collective testimony can recalibrate risk perception and expand women’s spatial repertoires: rather than merely coping with the city, women actively construct and deconstruct it together, turning urban space into a site of contestation and meaning-making through shared narratives and embodied revisits of place. The collective walks conducted during the Garibaldi and Centrale focus groups were designed as mobile mapping laboratories, enabling participants to document and discuss spatial experiences in loco. While moving through the stations and their surroundings, women photographed blind corners and identified stretches of poor lighting or obstructed visibility (see appendix: 163-164). They also highlighted spaces that felt safer due to commercial activity, pedestrian flows, or open sightlines (see appendix: 163-164). Walking together made the divergences and convergences in these assessments more tangible. Participants could immediately negotiate meanings and exchange navigation strategies, refining them collectively along the way. In this sense, the walk itself revives the figure of the flâneuse: women claiming the right to look, linger and traverse routes historically coded as male (Elkin, 2016). In Lefebvrian terms, these embodied routes are spatial practices that produce the city and enact a right to it (Lefebvre, 1968). Nicoletta’s account precisely encapsulates the transformative potential of such practices when she describes organising Jane’s Walks<sup>50</sup> in Milan:

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<sup>50</sup> Jane’s Walk is a global movement of free, citizen-led walking tours inspired by urbanist Jane Jacobs. These walks encourage people to explore their neighbourhoods, share personal stories, and discuss urban issues from a local perspective. In feminist adaptations, they often centre on questions of safety, accessibility, and the embodied experience of public space. See: <https://janewalk.org/>



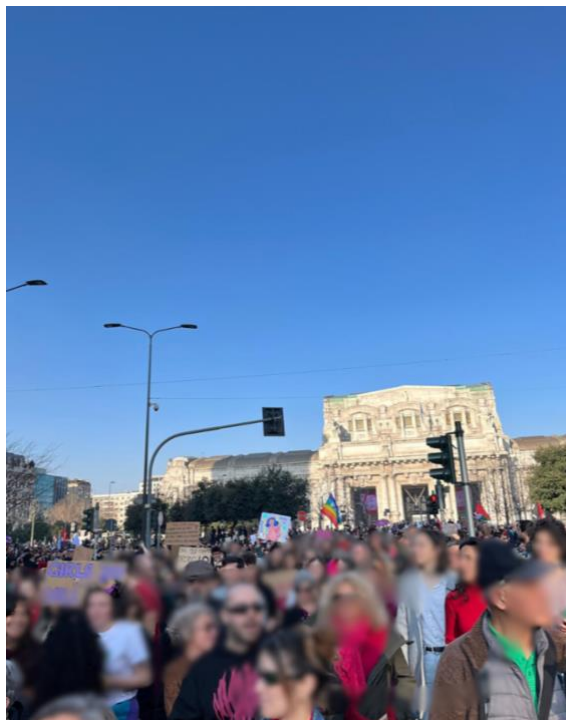
*“They were very beautiful experiences because they were collective walks specifically designed to explore and hold public space together, in the evening, and to reflect on safety and accessibility. The idea was to walk in a group, even at times perceived as less safe, to share perceptions and imagine alternatives.”*

Even outside the context of organised collective exercises, women’s presence in public space can actively reshape the city through moments of situated agency, occupying space alone and claiming the right to appear. For example, during focus groups, some participants described walking in the middle of the street (Giuliana and Tati) or along tram tracks and cycle lanes (Nana) because they feel safer there.

*“When alone, at night, I often choose to walk in the middle of the street because it’s more illuminated.” -Giuliana*

*“Me too, I’m not afraid of cars, I see them and I move aside; in the end, I feel safer in the middle of the street than on the sidewalk because no one can see you there, and someone could easily push you against the wall.” -Tati*

Such positioning increases visibility and reduces the risk of being cornered against a wall, even though these are spaces not designed for pedestrians. For participants, the potential for interpersonal aggression outweighs the danger from cars; stepping off the sidewalk is a calculated tactic rather than a mistake. Read with Cresswell’s account of mobility and transgression, moving into the carriageway is a minor but consequential breach of spatial codes that tactically redefines what counts as in place for women after dark (2006). These micro-spatial displacements are geometric hacks that enact Kern’s (2020) claim about women’s transformative capacity to rework urban order. In this sense, their movements institute ethical and relational thresholds that reshape conditions of safety, autonomy, and mutual accountability (Kern, 2020).





*“I chose a photo I took at the last March 8 feminist demonstration because I think that in these moments I see so many women-young, less young, with children, and women of a certain age. They are shared moments in which I truly have a beautiful feeling of feeling protected. You meet people with whom you have shared a journey, experienced moments of militancy or activism. Those smiles, those hugs, that walking together while chanting are, for me, a beautiful image. I think these open, participatory squares, these walking together moments, are an example of how fear is defeated. Safe streets are made by us women who walk through them together, whenever possible.” -Audrey*

Audrey’s account makes visible a counter-production of space. Bodies usually marginalised become central, visible, and connected; the square in front of Stazione Centrale (usually coded through surveillance, transience, and risk) is re-made through women’s collective occupation. In Lefebvre’s terms, marching, chanting, and lingering enact an appropriation of urban space and perform their “right to the city” (1968). Through passage, occupation and use, women convert abstract, regulated, conceived space into a node where heterogeneous trajectories meet across generations and times of day, opening the site to new co-presences rather than fixing it in a single meaning (Massey, 1994). This is therefore more than creating safe spaces through number of bodies: it is claim-making. It is precisely what Kern (2020) describes as a feminist re-making of the city: an assertive production of space in which autonomous and collective embodiment redefines safety as relational, generated through co-presence, care, and the political act of becoming visible in their own terms. In this sense, collective marches build affective infrastructures of care, courage and attachment through which space is re-made (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2005).

Even small and quick tags, often dismissed as act of vandalism and markers of degradation by politics of decorum (Fusco, 2021; Pitch, 2004), operate as vernacular claims to linger and to belong. In the Centrale underpasses, layered inscriptions such as “#LGBTQIACAB”, “GOD IS TRANS” and “né dio, né padroni, né mariti”<sup>51</sup> convert bare concrete into a feminist-queer noticeboard: they interrupt a space scripted for transit and surveillance and invite slow looking, response, and micro-assemblage. Like the politics of *loitering* that reasserts a right to be in public without purchase or purpose (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011), these marks assert presence and permission to dwell. Following Vacchelli (2016), they work as street-level spatial signs: not noise but a low-tech infrastructure of visibility that narrates the city otherwise, keeping counter-memories and alliances alive against official signage and commercial branding. Extending these street-level claims into the official lexicon of place, symbolic inscriptions sanctioned through naming also re-plot belonging and memory in the everyday city (D’Ambrosio Clementelli, 2018).

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<sup>51</sup> #LGBTQIACAB” combines two activist slogan acronyms: LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic/Agender) with ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards). The slogan “né dio, né padroni, né mariti” translates as “no gods, no masters, no husbands”: anarchist-feminist slogan rejecting patriarchal authority and affirming women’s self-determination.



*Photos taken by the researcher during participated night walks around Stazione Centrale in May and June 2025*

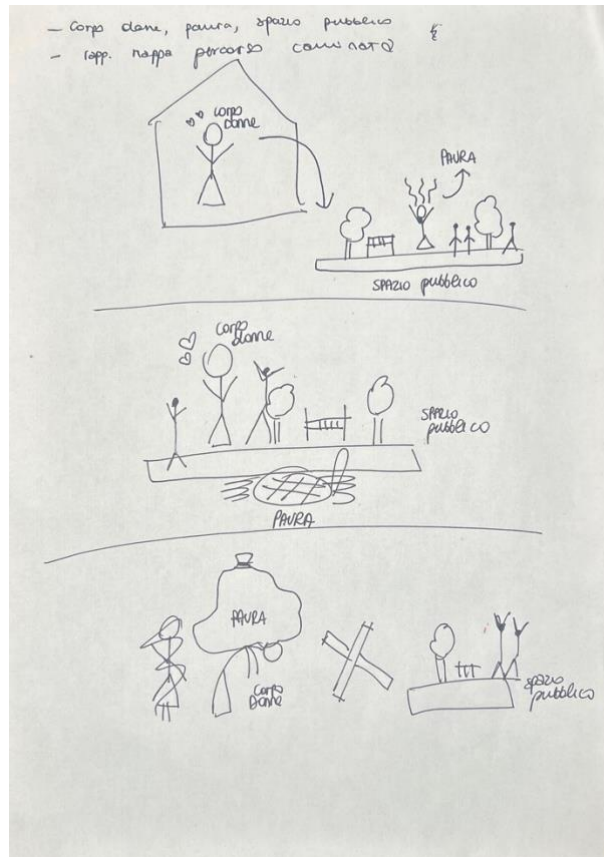
Urban spaces, systematically designed around idealised, typically male bodies, neglect the everyday realities and spatial needs of caregivers, thereby reinforcing exclusion and constraining spatial autonomy (Criado-Perez, 2019; McDowell, 1999; Spain, 1992). Several participants emphasised how motherhood profoundly reshapes both perceptions and navigation of public space, showing that embodied practices of care—rather than depending on institutional measures or formal support—actively rewrite the city’s cartography. For instance, Clara during her interview said that she avoids crowds, congestion, and pollution by altering her route from Corso Buenos Aires to Morgagni, and has reduced her use of the underground due to its practical difficulties, favouring surface-level travel that allows easier manoeuvring with a stroller. These adjustments have also led her to spend considerably more time within her neighbourhood. Yet, her everyday movements are marked by frustration and exhaustion in negotiating inadequate infrastructure, uneven pavements, and obstacles such as parked scooters. By modifying routes, rhythms, and modes of movement in response to inaccessible or unaccommodating environments, mothers and caregivers challenge dominant urban paradigms that marginalise bodies diverging from normative standards, ultimately opening alternative trajectories for inhabiting and perceiving urban space. Likewise, in navigating infrastructural neglect within spaces predominantly designed around normative bodily ideals, those manoeuvring wheelchairs or strollers expose the structural exclusions embedded in the urban fabric and unsettle its spatial logics. One evening, for example, Miele and I travelled from Corso Buenos Aires to her home, deliberately taking a longer yet quieter and safer route through the city centre due to the lack of accessible transportation. Carving new trajectories into the city’s spatial and social fabric, Miele explained that such multi-mile journeys alone in her electric wheelchair are routine in her nightly experience of Milan.

Following Lugones’ (2010) framework, Serena’s experience as an Italian woman of Moroccan origin living in Milan illustrates how intersecting dimensions of migration, racialised identity, and gender norms position women’s bodies as thresholds of active resistance against structural racism and the coloniality of power within European urban contexts. Her everyday practices—ranging from strategic clothing choices shaped by familial cultural expectations to linguistic negotiations and mobility decisions—can be analysed as explicit enactments of resistance against the coloniality of power, revealing how migrant and diasporic bodies are agent of spatial and cultural transformation that implicitly challenge and reconfigure urban spatial hegemonies (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lugones, 2010). Migrant, diasporic, colonized females bodies therefore not only reveals spatial and



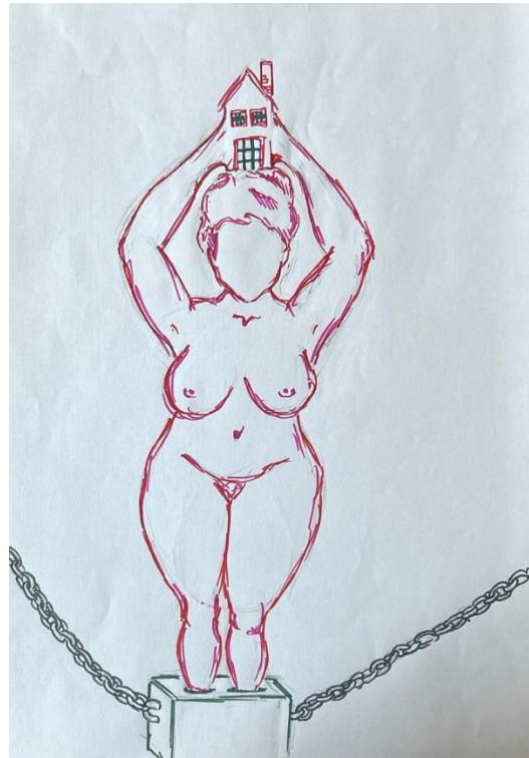
identity-based conflicts and negotiations but also constitutes itself as a cultural frontier, opening new possibilities for inhabiting, perceiving, and transforming urban space (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Shifting to a private–public lens, Elena offers a visual grammar of how fear modulates passage between spheres. As she explained during her interview:



*“I imagined three scenarios. The first is that the woman’s body enters public space and this generates fear; the woman feels confident in private, but when she has to enter public space that feeling of fear arises. Then, the woman is crushed by fear from the outset and cannot experience public space. Finally, the woman lives in harmony with public space... yet there is always this open manhole of fear, the risk that you might fall into it.”*

Read through this lens, Elena’s triad charts a graded body choreography where the private sphere has a sort of anchoring role: confidence is indeed locally secured in the private and begins to unravel at the boundary with public space, which is useable only through a balance that women continually recalibrate at the threshold. This hinge between private anchoring and public exposure is further materialised in Arianna’s drawing, which renders the politics of visibility and concealment with striking clarity:



Arianna's visual representation of the relationship between women's bodies, public space, and fear captures the intricate dynamics between visibility, invisibility, and the gendered negotiation of the public/private divide. The chained, full-figured naked female body "evocative of the Venus of Willendorf" stands on a pedestal, exposed to the scrutiny of the public gaze, and symbolises the persistent objectification and vulnerability that women navigate in public contexts. Perched atop the figure's head is a small house, a potent metaphor for the domestic sphere: historically constructed as the female realm *par excellence*, associated with privacy, safety, and invisibility (Massey, 1994; Spain, 1992). In Arianna's reflection, this juxtaposition embodies the symbolic "weight" that both anchors and restricts women's mobility: "This weighs you down, ultimately restricting your mobility. Fear, for me, also represents something that immobilises and holds you still." Her articulation resonates with De Beauvoir's (1949) analysis of patriarchal spatial divisions and Kern's (2020) observations on how the interplay of public exposure and private security actively constrains women's spatial autonomy. Similarly, Siwach's (2020) work underscores how public/private dichotomies materially and symbolically reinforce gendered spatial hierarchies, shaping women's embodied experiences and mobility patterns.

By situating an emblem of domestic security directly in the public realm, both Arianna's and Elena's pieces materialise the ongoing negotiation between the perceived safety of the private sphere and the vulnerabilities linked to public visibility, illustrating how women's embodied experiences continuously mediate and blur these spatial categories. Rather than just reflecting spatial tensions, the female body here emerges as a threshold between the public and private realms, a liminal site actively mediating, unsettling, and potentially reconfiguring the rigid boundaries of urban space to accommodate and legitimize vulnerable embodied subjectivities. Taken together, Arianna's and Elena's visual interventions thus position the embodied presence of women not only as a site of vulnerability or constraint, but as an active portal for spatial reconfiguration, implicitly opening new trajectories for experiencing, inhabiting, and transforming urban environments.

Through re-examining selected empirical examples under a stricter analytical lens, this section has shown that women's bodies become agents of spatial reconfiguration most clearly when



embodied practices generate co-presence, shared legibility, and relational infrastructures of care. Rather than naming every tactic of survival as transformative, the analysis has reserved spatial reconfiguration for those practices that begin to alter the affective, symbolic, and relational texture of urban space itself. In this sense, the female body does not simply alternate between vulnerability and resistance; at certain moments it reorganises how space is read, inhabited, and shared. The liminality of women's embodied experience can therefore be understood through the concept of bodies as portals: not a pure site of emancipation, but an epistemic and political threshold through which urban orders become legible and, at times, partially reworked.

### Conclusion - Bodies as Portals

This chapter has examined how women's embodied experiences of urban space unfold at a critical threshold, developing the theoretical formulation of "bodies as portals." Initially conceptualised as sites of paradox and contradiction, women's bodies emerged -through the integration of empirical and theoretical materials-as active openings to new urban imaginaries and transformative possibilities. Women report altering routes, adjusting clothing, and recalibrating comportment in anticipation of being watched or judged; these practices do not all remake space equally, but they reveal the body as the medium through which urban power is registered, negotiated, and, at times, transformed. Phenomenological insights from Bartky (1990) and Grosz (1995) ground the account of how embodied experience mediates between internalised patriarchal norms and the reshaping of urban materialities. Butler's (1990; 1993) performativity, read with Rose's (1993) paradoxical spaces, illuminates how everyday bodily practices simultaneously reflect and contest normative gender dynamics. Garland-Thomson (2009) and Longhurst (2001) help parse negotiations between hypervisibility, vulnerability, and public-private boundaries, while Kern (2020) connects bodily autonomy to spatial hierarchies through practices such as defensive dressing, strategic mobility, and collective spatial negotiations. Intersectional and decolonial frameworks from hooks (1992), Lugones (2010), and Anzaldúa (1987) foreground marginalised and colonised women's experiences, underscoring how embodied realities operate as epistemological and political portals for change.

Across the chapter, women's bodies appear as sites of ongoing tension, navigating between hypervisibility and invisibility. On the one hand, objectification and sexualisation render women prominently visible and vulnerable in public space; on the other, pressures to conceal or minimise themselves arise from vulnerability, spatial exclusion, and the internalised sense that public space does not fully belong to them (Kern, 2020; Valentine, 1989). This dual dynamic produces internalised regulation: behaviours shaped by patriarchal gazes that embed self-surveillance, vigilance, and cautious spatial performance in daily routines (Foucault, 1977, 1998, 2002; Valentine, 1989). Yet within these constraints, women enact situated strategies -defensive dressing (Kern, 2020), route adjustments (Valentine, 1989), and mobility choices such as cycling or driving, that both negotiate risk and assert autonomy (Phadke, Khan & Ranade, 2011). Yet these practices do not all operate at the same analytical level. Some primarily register vulnerability and sediment self-regulation; others negotiate risk and assert autonomy; only some accumulate into relational and symbolic shifts that begin to reconfigure space more directly. Bodies as portals names precisely this movement across levels, from embodied exposure to situated remaking. By carving safer, more autonomous, and affectively supportive niches within patriarchal urban structures, women's everyday tactics incrementally reshape Milan's urban landscape toward nuanced empowerment and subtle redefinition (Massey, 1994; Siwach, 2020; Williams Reid & Konrad, 2004).



Operating as a compact diagram of the body-as-portal, Luisa's conceptualisation of the relationship between women's bodies, public space and fear depicts a segmented walkway that reads as a sequence of thresholds: miniature "doors" that open or close possible routes. The three vignettes map a learned grammar of passage: "If I believe in myself I can get anywhere" figures self-belief as a key that unlocks movement; "If I show myself confident nothing happens to me" frames confident self-presentation as a performative technique for managing exposure; "If I feel fear I stop and fall... into whirling immobility." These techniques that ease passage (self-belief, confident comportment, containment of fear) are not only spatial tactics but identity work, through which subjects narrate themselves, a theme the next chapter develops. The drawing therefore shows how posture, pace, self-display and self-belief reconfigure the body-city interface, opening and closing passage. In this sense, the body does not just cross doors; it becomes a passageway that exceeds familiar dichotomies (inclusion/exclusion, vulnerability/resistance) through which urban possibilities and selves are continually made and re-made. Read through bodies as portals, the body is therefore also where spatial scripts and self-narrations meet, pivoting from navigation to self-making and so setting up the next chapter's focus on selves and identity.



## Chapter 6

# Findings and Discussion on Situated Choreographies: A Feminist Rhythmanalysis of Identities, Memory, and Belonging in Urban Public Spaces

This chapter asks how the self is made and remade in Milan's public spaces through practices of memory, familiarity, and belonging. If Chapter 5 focused on the body as the site where gendered urban power is registered, negotiated, and reworked, this chapter turns to the self in motion and to identity as the more socially legible sedimentation of women's ongoing negotiations with temporal rhythms, classed infrastructures, racialised gazes and sounds, and responsibilities of care (Ahmed, 2004; Butler, 1990; 1993; Lefebvre, 1974; 2004; Massey, 2005). The shift is not away from embodiment but toward the everyday behavioural edits through which women sustain mobility and make themselves viable in the city: timing, routing, pace, dress, companionship, budgeting, and the anticipatory labour of planning (Kern, 2020; Valentine, 1989). Advancing a feminist rhythmanalysis of the self in motion, the chapter argues that safety is not simply felt in space but composed through recurring alignments of light, density, routine, cost, familiarity, legibility, and relational support, alignments that sediment into affective memoryscapes and everyday heuristics of belonging (Ahmed, 2004; Jacobs, 1961; Lefebvre, 1992; Pain, 2001; Valentine, 1989). In this sense, the self does not appear as stable possessions but as processual and uneven achievements, made and unmade within the temporal, material, and moral architectures that choreograph who can linger, who must keep moving, and who can afford an escape route. Identity, in turn, accrues as the more socially legible form these negotiations assume over time (Butler, 1990; 1993; Kern, 2020; Massey, 2005). The political implication follows directly from this analysis: if fear is organised not only through individual vigilance but through rhythms, infrastructures, and social recognisability, then designing for safety requires moving beyond vigilance planning toward infrastructures of care where lighting, timetables, proximate services, and convivial uses that thicken co-presence and reduce the privatised labour of "feeling safe" (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Tronto, 1993).

### Temporal Boundaries and Affective Memoryscapes in Gendering Urban Rhythms

This section approaches time not as a neutral backdrop to urban life but as an infrastructure through which space becomes differentially available, legible, and habitable. Time is treated here as infrastructure in a specific sense: it sequences visibility, co-presence, and exposure and, through repetition, sediments into affective memoryscapes that orient when, how, and with whom the city can be used. Rather than treating fear as a reaction to fixed places, the section reads women's narratives rhythmically: safety and unease emerge from changing alignments between light, density, routine, built form, and socially recognisable publics. Following Lefebvre (1992), rhythms are not only cyclical (day/night, seasons) or linear (work schedules, return journeys, routines), but lived couplings of body and environment; following Massey (2005), these couplings are relational, produced through who and what comes into co-presence. Ahmed (2004) helps explain why reassurance and apprehension attach not only to places but to hours, atmospheres, and repeated passages, while Valentine (1989) and Pain (1997; 2001) show how such temporal knowledges sediment into ordinary vigilance, itinerary design, and calibrated uses of the city. Read in this way, temporal boundaries are also affective and epistemic boundaries. They distribute recognisability, reachability, and exposure; they shape when the city feels open, when it contracts, and when movement remains viable only through anticipation and adjustment. Through repetition, these temporal negotiations sediment into



affective memoryscapes: practical, embodied heuristics through which women learn when to linger, what to avoid, how long to stay, and under what conditions a route remains usable. Put differently, urban security is temporal: it shifts with daily schedules, seasonal rhythms, and biographical change, and through repetition these timings sediment into affective memoryscapes: practical heuristics for when and how the city can be used.

This temporal organisation becomes legible in participants' ordinary practices of walking, shopping, crossing neighbourhoods, and reading who is present at different hours. For example, Agnese, during her interview, expressed a distinct attunement to the temporal texture of everyday life:

*“During the day there’s the big chaos, the frenzy. I also like to observe the different hours of the day. Since I don’t have a typical office job, I sometimes realise that I walk around certain areas at hours when only elderly people are around, or only children and families.”*

Also Kuru, during her interview, performed an embodied reading of temporal inclusion and exclusion that revealed how gendered safety was negotiated not only spatially but rhythmically:

*“When I go grocery shopping at decent hours, I only find elderly people or those who are retired. I get to experience it much more. I don’t have the feeling of being in danger.”*

Elena, during her interview, described a similar awareness of how social presence translated into affective reassurance:

*“Certainly, light and the time at which one inhabits a space contribute to my sense of calm in that space, and also the fact that I perceive certain types of people—such as families, people similar to me, but also elderly people—yes, that is, people about whom I can say: ‘okay, they always inspire confidence in me’.”*

Taken together, these accounts show that time does not matter simply because it divides day from night, but because it organises the social legibility of space. Agnese notices that different hours stage different publics and atmospheres; Kuru translates that staging into a practical criterion of use through her reference to “decent hours”; Elena makes explicit the affective grammar through which such publics become reassuring, familiar, or at least readable. The point, then, is not daylight in the abstract, but the rhythmic organisation of co-presence. Certain hours gather bodies that appear ordinary, predictable, and potentially available as witnesses, while others thin out that relational field and leave movement more exposed to uncertainty. In this sense, repeated temporal alignments do not abolish risk, but they reduce indeterminacy: they make urban time more legible, and therefore more usable, sedimenting into the practical heuristics through which women learn when a space can be crossed, inhabited, or lingered in (Ahmed, 2004; Lefebvre, 1992; Pain, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 1989).

One of the main media through which this temporal organisation becomes affectively intelligible is light. More than an optical condition, light works here as a collective sensory infrastructure: it synchronises individual bodies with the city's rhythms, widens lines of sight, and makes particular forms of co-presence available and readable. In this regard, Zeta, during her interview, reflected on the affective power of light itself:

*“I’m afraid of the dark. In general it gives me a tremendous sense of insecurity [...] the light helps me, by contrast; that is, lit or bright spaces feel safe, they give me a sense of safety. And also, maybe, overly large spaces make me insecure—like the square in front of the central station.”*



Beyond the specific unease produced by spatial vastness, Zeta's account shows that light is not simply an optical condition but a socially mediated one. It widens lines of sight, makes co-presence more readable, and lowers the anticipatory labour required to cross a space. Darkness, by contrast, does not only present an obstacle for visibility but also alters the relation between the body, the environment, and possible others, ultimately re-casting familiar geographies as more demanding, less legible and more exposed to uncertainty (Anderson, 2009; Grosz, 1995; Lefebvre, 1992). Joy, during her interview, articulated this contrast as an embodied fluctuation in awareness, describing how light and visibility directly regulated her bodily sense of safety:

*“It depends on the time of day. Inevitably in the evening I clearly feel much more vulnerable... sometimes to the point of taking my keys and holding them tightly in my pocket. Deserted areas, I don't like them at all... During the day I feel very calm; I go through all parts of the city, even the peripheral or less frequented ones-I'm calm. Then at night my perception clearly changes a lot, so I'm on alert in general.”*

Read this way, her account casts vigilance as rhythmic—an embodied calibration to absence and darkness that materialises in micro-gestures of self-protection. During her interview, Eleonora precisely framed this temporal shift in terms of risk and duration. For her, danger was not only spatial but durational—prolonged and thickened by the night:

*“At night it's different... it's as if you're put in danger for longer. You're more likely to run into trouble in forty-five minutes than in ten. So if I go for a walk, I prefer to do it during the day, not in the evening”*

Eleonora's comment suggested that nocturnal risk was not perceived as an isolated event but as an extended exposure-time itself stretching danger. Thus, night also amplifies duration risk: when exposure lengthens, the same route accrues different stakes. Here, time itself stretches danger, demanding itinerary design rather than mere spatial choice. Read through this lens, duration demands logistics: routes are rehearsed, return legs are secured, windows of movement are narrowed to 'safer' hours, and low-density stretches are avoided or buffered. Calipso, during her interview, articulated the same tension through a pragmatic awareness of planning and control, revealing how fear reshaped her mobility practices:

*“I notice the difference between moving around by day and by night. During the day there are many more people around, so you feel safer; at night—even in a metropolitan city—there are places where there's literally no one. If I have to cross the city in the evening, I plan it—especially the way back. For me the worries really start late at night: up to ten or midnight it's okay; it's after midnight that you think 'who knows what could happen'.”*

Her account further exemplifies what Kern (2020) terms “spatial vigilance”: a sort of feminist consciousness of risk enacted through planning, route calculation, and self-surveillance. Such vigilance thus scales up from the body to the itinerary, sedimenting into patterned choices about routes, hours, and returns. Within this shared grammar of light and fear, several participants reported avoiding specific places at particular times. Also Monica, during her interview, echoed this sentiment:

*“During the day I feel at ease—so much so that I even go to areas where in the evening I wouldn't go. In the evening I feel a little more limited in my movements; I try to prefer busy areas, maybe with bars where there's activity, and I try to avoid the spaces that then become deserted.”*



Linda, in her interview, makes this temporal–spatial boundary explicit in relation to parks that take a pivotal role in illustrating the mediation of form and light as, by day, family presence reframes them as shared commons, and by night, they become sites of under-visibility:

*“The park-well, at night I would never go into a park. I live near Parco Trotter... it’s really my second home... but at night I truly wouldn’t go. Besides the fact it’s closed, it’s full of little lanes and alleyways... I wouldn’t go. And likewise I wouldn’t go into any other park, even if it’s open and public at night cause it’s easier to hide, to blend in.”*

Taken together, these accounts show that the day/night difference works less as a binary than as a threshold. As light drains and density thins, the same route accrues different stakes: exposure lengthens, exits matter more, and return journeys become logistical problems rather than spontaneous continuations of the day. Light, here, is not merely optical but infrastructural and affective: it arranges lines of sight, makes certain forms of co-presence available, and modulates what kinds of attention the environment can sustain (Anderson, 2009; Grosz, 1995). Night, correspondingly, does not simply invert the day; it recomposes its rhythms, redistributing vigilance across the body, the route, and the timetable. Fear, then, is not attached to space alone but to the timing, duration, and social composition through which space is encountered (Kern, 2020; Lefebvre, 1992).



*“I made, let’s say, a drawing that brings together the elements we talked about. It has two counterparts: one for the day (on the left, with the sun) and one for the night (on the right, with the moon). Along the fold-the border between the two pages-I placed a vertical bar that represents the perception of fear, like a gauge. Fear is much lower when one is in a woman’s body in an environment with light and with people and cars around. By contrast, in the exact same place at night-when those elements are missing-the perception of fear rises sharply. The woman’s body-poor woman-I drew a bit exaggerated; apart from the daytime part it almost looks like a giant, giant monster. But the point of the diagram is the contrast: light and human presence reduce fear, while darkness and emptiness make it increase.”*

Joy’s drawing condenses the argument visually by translating dispersed testimonies into a single rhythmic gauge. Fear does not rise in abstract darkness, but when light, traffic, and human presence recede together. What changes is not the place in itself, but the relational conditions through which it is crossed: visibility, reachability, and the density of possible witnesses. The diagram



therefore makes palpable how urban time is lived as a differential distribution of exposure rather than as a fixed judgement on place.

Solitude and darkness are often intertwined as affective amplifiers: the urban night, emptied of its social rhythm, became a mirror in which the self's vulnerability was magnified. The hinge here is also density as several accounts emphasise that what feels risky at night is not only darkness but being alone and the thinning of social presence. During her interview, Anna described this phenomenon precisely:

*“Paradoxically, the idea of being alone gives me more of a sense of insecurity... and then, I think a variable that in my case matters a lot is the darkness-precisely the fact of being in the dark, of not seeing well. But I'd be inclined to say perhaps the fact of being alone in a fairly empty space where you can't see people well; obviously this can be influenced by the fact that it might be evening and dark. And I repeat: at Stazione Centrale I feel safe at six, not now because it's dark, but at two in the afternoon, easily, with no problems. And very often I take a route in Centrale to go do visits in that area, and I do them during the day and I'm very calm, even though I go along a street near Centrale that's not exactly a great street. I feel fairly safe, even if I'm alone. Maybe doing that street alone in the evening with fewer people would scare me more. And I clearly wouldn't do it. Paradoxically, what scares me more is the fact that there are fewer people around.”*

If Anna foregrounds solitude, Laura during her interview made the visibility mechanism explicit, linking reduced crowding and low light to a felt under-visibility:

*“In the evening I'm certainly always more on alert... in the evening, when there's even less visibility, I'm afraid of being seen less... also... the lower crowding... there are fewer people around and I feel less safe.”*

Extending this logic, Effemme, in her interview, underscored isolation as decisively temporal, noting that what may be tolerable by day becomes apprehensive once evening sets in:

*“The fact of finding myself alone, isolated, with absolutely no one, gives me a bit of fear in general, especially if... at hours... of a certain kind... maybe during the day I could... have a different perception. But if it's already evening and I'm alone in a completely isolated space...”*

Servis, during her interview, crystallised a paradox insisting that an empty street can feel more dangerous than one with at least some people present:

*“A completely empty street scares me much more than if there's a person there, paradoxically. Precisely because if someone suddenly shows up, there's no one you can ask for help.”*

Along these lines, Marianna explained in her interview:

*“By day it feels easier to get help-simply because there's more foot traffic.”*

Across these accounts, night-time insecurity emerges less from darkness alone than from shifts in the composition of co-presence. Anna, Laura, Effemme, Servis, and Marianna all show that what becomes unsettling is not only reduced visibility, but the thinning of reachable others: fewer witnesses, fewer interruptions, fewer possibilities of aid. Safety, in this sense, remains profoundly



relational. It does not arise from formal surveillance or from the mere built environment, but from the practical availability of recognisable and potentially responsive others (Pain, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 1989). Yet these narratives also complicate any simple idea that “more people” automatically means more safety. Strangers may be experienced simultaneously as possible threats and as indispensable sources of reassurance, revealing the ambivalence of urban co-presence in gendered space (Butler, 1990; Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004).

*“When I go into the station I have a goal: everyone is an obstacle, I’m in a hurry, I take the stairs and haul my suitcase. The moment I exit and I’m calmer and I become much more aware of who is moving around me: the taxis, the queues, the people around... [pointing on the map to the taxi/motorbike corner/exits/locals/buses where we usually meet for the walks] All these stimuli are too much for me; I know that when I arrive I’ll be hit by this slap of stimuli. For me those ten square metres condense all the chaos of Centrale station.”*

Density overload, over-amplified scale and diffusion can be tiring and disorienting as Nana stated during a focus group describing the taxi–motorbike corner outside Stazione Centrale. Crowding can erode situational control; vastness can diffuse recognition; and proximity can feel invasive even absent explicit threat. Participants further distinguished between the number of bodies and the kind of co-presence desired as crowds could feel oppressive, yet void and desolation were rarely desired. Calipso for example, during her interview, admitted she sought to calibrate disliking too many people yet avoiding total emptiness:

*“I don’t like places that are particularly crowded, but when I’m moving around I need there to be at least one person on my street. I mean, it’s often happened that I get home and say I didn’t meet anyone on my way back because there could be a person with bad intentions.”*

Across these accounts, safety is contingent on three interrelated dimensions: the composition of publics, the arrangement of bodies and lines of sight, and the affective climate that ensued. For others, just proxemics can be decisive –as Elena stated in her interview, showing that spatial intimacy can unsettle even without overt aggression:

*“Proxemics-how close people are to me. I’m not a very physical, very touchy person. I’m not. And so when I happen to find myself in a very crowded space, or in any case where someone ends up close to me, that’s what makes me uncomfortable. Even when I’m walking in any direction and I feel someone very close-someone who’s just there minding their own business, nothing to do with me. That’s the thing that makes me uncomfortable.”*

What these accounts add is that such calibrations do not remain situational: they accumulate. Across interviews and collective mapping, women weighed density, light, lines of sight, and the presence of “reachable others” not only in the moment, but through remembered episodes, repeated crossings, and circulating stories about where one can linger, pass through, or seek help (Pain, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 1989). Through repetition, these judgements sediment into affective memoryscapes that organise anticipation and conduct, linking immediate perception to accumulated experience and inherited narratives of place (Condon, Lieber, and Maillochon, 2007). At stake, then, is the relation between memory and perception: places are sensed not only through direct encounter, but through what has been lived, heard, and carried forward. During her interview, Luisa made this explicit:



*“Like the park where we went which I kind of attributed a bit of danger to, because all the parks near stations are like that. But Anna’s account [she told during a focus group that she often goes there with her lunchbox, with her colleagues] made it a really nice place for me. In fact, I went back there alone with my lunchbox because I had to catch a train. Then the class was postponed. I said, well, I didn’t feel like eating on the train; since I was arriving almost two hours early, I said, I’ll sit there. And in fact it’s very calm, just as she described. There were also lots of children... so by experiencing it, I said to myself: yes, it could be a safe place. Then, living it, I said: yes, it is a safe place; it lowered a bit that idea of a dangerous place I had. Because I think it’s always this thing of beliefs that then become... others’ beliefs and then they become our beliefs.”*

Extending the idea that imaginaries of places are produced through talk, Nicoletta observed during her interview:

*“I think-though I might be wrong-that the perception of safety and insecurity is very often built on imaginaries, which also stratify on the basis of the conversations you have with other people.”*

Perception is thus mediated by memory-both our own and the second-hand memories that circulate in conversation. In this light, fear is not a direct response to ‘objective’ danger but, following Valentine (1989), an interpretive practice situated in gendered narratives of space.

Familiarity is one of the ways in which circulating imaginaries are revised in practice. Repeated passage, local points of reference, and minor relations of recognition do not erase fear, but they can lower uncertainty, soften inherited stigma, and turn abstract reputations into situated knowledge. Demonstrating how perceptions of spatial security are deeply connected to personal experiences and local knowledge, Kuru and Tati explicitly rejected external narratives depicting their neighbourhood near Stazione Centrale as dangerous or undesirable. Beatrice further discussed how students arriving from other cities are frequently discouraged from living near Centrale due to presumed insecurity. While critically rejecting this negative portrayal, she simultaneously admits warning her friends from outside Milan about potential pickpocketing risks in the area. Reflecting on her experience in Rozzano, a neighbourhood she previously did not know, Luisa, during her interview, recounted: “everyone warned me, saying it was a bad area. It’s not that I was afraid of who I might meet, but rather concerned about practicalities,” such as finding her friend’s house or basic services she might need. She then recalled another instance in Romolo, a similarly unfamiliar and not-so-central area, when her phone battery died and she felt vulnerable and disoriented while trying to locate a bookstore because she did not know where she could go for help. Luisa reflected:

*“In my opinion, familiarity makes a big difference; if you’re unfamiliar with a place, you automatically experience it differently. It’s not so much about the place itself but about lacking points of reference.”*

Viola echoed this affective dimension of unfamiliarity, noting during her interview:

*“Unknown space makes me feel a bit unsafe... being familiar with what surrounds me really affects me. [...] And it often happened to me that as soon as I entered this area, I felt immediately okay. Even if I wasn’t actually home yet physically, it was as if I already felt safe”*

From unfamiliarity to habit, Siria framed reassurance as a function of repeated exposure:



*“By now I know the area so well that even the station doesn’t bother me anymore.  
It’s all about habit.”*

Then, the logic condenses in Monica’s succinct remark:

*“Familiarity makes you feel safer.”*

Another example illustrating how familiarity with a space mitigates the emotional impact of negative external narratives is provided by Agnese during a focus group. When she first moved to Milan, she lived on one side of the Central Station area. Once, needing to catch a bus to the airport from the opposite side, she took a taxi simply to cross one of the tunnels, admitting she was initially scared:

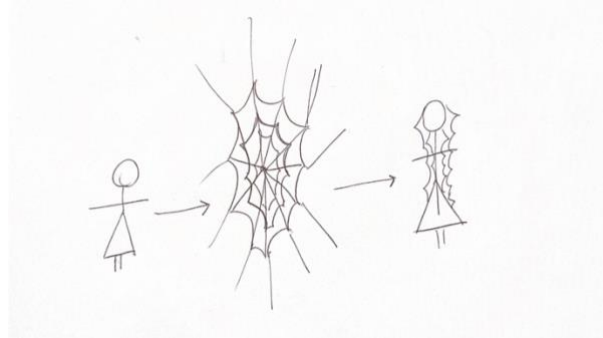
*“because I didn’t know what I might encounter. Later, after living there, I crossed those tunnels countless times under many different conditions, at night, alone, and eventually realized nothing ever happened to me. Now I just walk; I’ve made those paths mine.”*

Then, Giuliana, replying to Agnese, stated:

*“When you spend time in a place and get to know the people who are there, it becomes your neighbourhood. I know the shopkeepers in my area—they greet me, I greet them. It’s something that makes you feel at home, even if you weren’t born there.”*

All these narratives highlight the powerful role spatial familiarity plays in shaping spatial belonging and emotional security within urban environments. Coming from Salerno, Eleonora instead lives now around Stazione Garibaldi and openly acknowledges a lingering unease each time she arrives at Stazione Centrale, despite never having personally experienced danger there. This illustrates how the lack of local familiarity amplifies feelings of vulnerability at key urban transit points, underscoring the critical interplay between spatial familiarity and emotional security. Personally, living and researching in two spaces I was not initially very familiar with gradually reshaped my perception of them and of what it means to inhabit them. Over time, I came to know their rhythms, people, and routines—to the point that I could anticipate what to expect at a certain time of day or week, realising that the relationship between safety, familiarity, and belonging was not only observed in others but gradually experienced in my own daily navigation of these spaces.

As Carlotta vividly captured through both words and drawing, fear of the night “sticks” (Ahmed, 2004) like a spiderweb clinging to the body across time and through memory:



*“I drew this female figure crossing through a kind of spiderweb. That woman is me, okay? It’s how I deal with my fear... as if I had to walk through a spiderweb*



*like an arachnophobe, okay? You go on facing the situation, but these webs stick to you -even for the smallest thing, any kind of safety measure there might be in the streets. We're talking about the night, I mean -you carry that web with you, and sometimes it can even build up a bit, in the sense that if something once happened to you, then you remember it and it stays on you. It's a crossing: you do it, but you always drag along that fear."*

Carlotta's image shows that fear is not only situational but residual: it lingers, accumulates, and accompanies movement as a sticky interpretive layer. Yet this temporal residue does not remain unchanged. Across the life course, women also re-read what kinds of risk matter most, how much uncertainty they are willing to absorb, and under what conditions night-time mobility remains acceptable. Fear, in other words, is not only remembered but also biographically re-tuned:

*"The presence of people, and of women, especially when I was younger, made me feel calmer. Even now it does, only perhaps a bit less, because I think I'm at risk in different ways. With age some dynamics change: you fear physical violence less and robbery more..."*

Beyond co-presence, within time, also age and life-course reorient how Chiara inhabits urban space—a dynamic also evident across other testimonies in this study. Along these lines, during her interview, Anna Maria observed:

*"I used to hitchhike everywhere, now I plan every step."*

During her interview, Serena captured a recent shift from spontaneity to logistical calculation:

*"I really like going to a venue that's in south Milan... Only that if I'm not certain I can get back by car with other people, I avoid going out there in the evening, because the distance is long. And I'm not at ease saying 'I'll take the night public transport.' This especially in the last two years, I think, because up until two/three years ago the perception of safety was different."*

In her interview, Servis further offered a life-course contrast moving from youthful night work, when danger felt remote, to a present in which sparser crowds re-activate caution:

*"Well, let's say that when you're a kid you don't really have much of a sense of danger, much less. So when I developed my sense of danger, between twenty and thirty, I was working at night, so I didn't have this perception so strongly because, plainly, I was mainly moving around at night, you know, and so I never felt it that much. Then of course, as I was saying, the fact that there are far fewer people around, in some cases, in some situations, you say: 'okay, calm,' but it's an exceptional case more than a normality."*

During her interview, Cristina extended this trajectory translating experience into precautionary protocols that curb exposure:

*"Maybe earlier I was a bit more reckless; now if I know that I have to go to a place that isn't the best, I take my car. I mean, now I tend much more to walk a bit on eggshells, I don't know how to put it"*

These reflections indicate that nocturnal fear is historically situated and life-course dependent. References such as 'especially in the last two years' signal an evolving relation between safety, gender, and the temporal use of the city: night travel ceases to index youthful adventure and becomes



a problem of logistics and reliability (transport, distance, co-presence). In this sense, age and life stage recalibrate spatial risk (Valentine, 1989), shifting practices from improvisation to advance planning. Reflecting on how ageing has reshaped her spatial engagement, Eleonora in her interview poignantly remarked:

*“I don’t know if it’s because I’m older now and more attentive, but I really perceive the city as more dangerous...”*

These considerations illustrate a broader trend wherein ageing reshapes mobility patterns, introducing careful planning and heightened caution in previously spontaneous urban explorations. Similarly, Giuliana during her interview recalled how her mother highlighted the increased reluctance among older women to participate in evening outings, a shift driven predominantly by heightened perceptions of risk and fear. While Valentine (1989) would suggest older women may experience heightened vulnerability, necessitating closer examination of how ageing intensifies gendered spatial restrictions; Jacobs (1961) would argue that this is due to profound social implications of spatial policies that fail to consider older women’s needs, thereby compounding their exclusion and reinforcing their spatial vulnerability. During fieldwork, this trend was further evidenced by the noticeable absence of interview participants born before 1964. Additionally, observations at markets and train stations led to encounters with older women who, suggesting caution interacting within public spaces, appeared quite elusive and reluctant to engage in conversation beyond circumstantial interactions such as commenting on the wait time for taxis, noting the number of shops in the new station, attending to the remarkable quality of tomatoes, or inquiring about the price of turnips.

Temporal boundaries intersect also with cyclical seasonal rhythms: heat and daylight fold into safety practices, recalibrating what to wear, how to move, and when to return. Delilah, for example, during her interview, highlighted how seasonal heat for her used to fold into anticipatory decisions about dress, with summer intensifying calculus:

*“If I’m out until the evening, I kind of think about the fact that, if I’m going home alone, there are spots in my area that aren’t great. So there was a period when I thought about this a bit, and it influenced how I dressed-maybe even more so in summer.”*

During her interview, Serena nuanced this by companionship and location, an aspect that will be further explored in the following section. In her account, summer permits more ‘free’ dressing, yet peripheral areas and being alone reinstate constraint:

*“So, in summer... in the end whether because of the heat or for other reasons. Anyway, you maybe dress a bit shorter, a bit more airy and you say: ‘Listen, I’m hot.’ I mean, why should I limit my ability to not suffer the heat? And so maybe there’s more of a tendency to say: ‘okay, I’ll go out as I feel,’ not with crotch-length shorts, so to speak, but still maybe more, more free. Of course, if you go to peripheral areas, like this venue I like to go to which is in a peripheral area, I feel less at ease and not to dress too little. So, also the area in the city conditions you. Certainly company as well, whether you’re on your own or with more people, how many people that has an influence”*

Agnese in her interview further linked summer dress to the activation of local micro-publics:

*“In summer I often go out without a bra, with tops, or fairly wide skirts, wide trousers that kind of flutter, etc. Honestly, in summer I can say this: the ‘community’ under my building is more active. Why? Because I’m more*



*undressed. That's true, I can say that, apart from the fact it's hotter, so they're more outside and I'm more inside-and then it's summer. It does happen to me more often, actually, probably because I'm more scantily dressed."*

All together these accounts show temporal rhythms as affective infrastructures that distribute reassurance and exposure unevenly across the day, across remembered reputations of place, and across biographical stages. Light, density, routine, familiarity, season, and age do not operate separately; they braid into practical heuristics through which women decide when to leave, what to wear, which route to take, whether to linger, and how to return. What emerges is a temporal cartography of urban belonging in which day and night, crowding and emptiness, routine and exception are not opposites but shifting calibrations of legibility, co-presence, and risk. Fear, in this sense, is neither purely subjective nor reducible to place: it is rhythmically produced through the patterned availability of visibility, recognisability, memory, and viable return. Through repetition, these calibrations sediment into affective memoryscapes that make some uses of the city feel possible and others too costly, too uncertain, or too exposed.

### Conditional Belonging through Classed Infrastructures and Moral Geographies

Building on the previous section's discussion of temporal boundaries and affective memoryscapes, this section argues that women's belonging in Milan is conditional not only because infrastructures are unevenly distributed, but because they distribute time unevenly. Read rhythmically, class is not an external social variable added onto mobility; it is what determines who can extend the day, compress the night, absorb delay, buy an escape route, or secure proximity. Transport schedules, housing markets, peripheral service ecologies, and private mobility do not simply organise movement: they sort exposure by converting safety into a differential capacity to re-time, buffer, or override urban rhythms (Kern, 2020; Tronto, 1993). In this sense, classed infrastructures operate as temporal buffers. For some women, risk can be reframed as inconvenience through taxis, cars, closer housing, or access to dense and well-served areas; for others, mobility remains tied to timetables, waiting, companionship, and anticipatory labour. These uneven timings sediment into aesthetic and moral judgements about what counts as a "good" area, a respectable route, or a legitimate presence, linking infrastructural inequality to moral geographies of belonging (Ahmed, 2004; Fusco, 2021; Pitch, 2004; Skeggs, 1997). The section therefore traces how class enters women's urban lives both materially and affectively: as mobility resource, as housing advantage, as proximity, as care capacity, and as the power to inhabit the city with a wider margin for error.

For many participants, access to urban life is a time-bound negotiation governed by transport schedules, safety perceptions, and economic flexibility. For those without private mobility, the city's infrastructures literally dictate the boundaries of freedom: one's right to linger or move freely ends when the metro closes. Belonging thus acquires a chronological texture, tied to the ability to synchronise one's movements with the city's temporal infrastructures. As Kuru remarked in her interview:

*"When I moved here, I gave up owning a car. In Milan, having a car is a problem with parking, fines and traffic... then you realise that with the metro and the bike you can get everywhere, but you depend on timetables and on the times when it's safe to move."*

During her interview, Arianna similarly highlights the ambivalence of time dependency within public infrastructures that both enable and constrain autonomy:



*“Since I don’t have a car, I always check: the metro closes at midnight, trams run until 1:30 a.m. ... I have to plan accordingly. If I have to come back late, I try not to do it alone or I find someone to give me a lift. It also depends on the area and on how I feel at that moment.”*

Taken together, these routines show how class enters urban life as a differential capacity to live with time. As if the night compresses margins for error: safe windows narrow, delays become costlier, and planning becomes compulsory rather than optional. What differs is not whether women perceive risk, but whether they can buffer it. Those with access to cars, taxi money, or residential proximity can convert delay into inconvenience; those without such resources must absorb it through anticipation, self-regulation, or renunciation. In this sense, safety is translated into time and cost. Urban freedom becomes chronologically uneven, tied not only to timetables but to the unequal means available for overriding them (Kern, 2020; Tronto, 1993). For some participants living in peripheral areas without a car, such as Shige, the city becomes effectively usable only during the day. Anna, likewise, describes an infrastructural dependency that turns evening participation into something contingent on lifts, rides, or renunciation altogether:

*“I live in the outskirts and there are no buses on Sundays... so if I have to go somewhere, I need a car or a ride. I can’t afford taxis every time.”*

While Anna’s account foregrounds infrastructural dependency at the urban edge, Servis makes explicit the class privilege that turns insecurity into something one can pay to avoid:

*“Living in Milan, I’ve always had both a car and a scooter, so I don’t have problems moving around. Having a certain purchasing power makes me feel safe, because if I don’t feel safe, I take a taxi. In the last instance, there’s always an escape route.”*

Here the capacity to afford safety (e.g. to purchase a taxi or private ride) appears as a classed privilege that compensates for unreliable public systems. Safety becomes commodified, revealing a neoliberal logic in which belonging is increasingly experienced as something one can purchase rather than claim as a right (Kern, 2020). Kuru, in her interview, further foregrounded how mobility is mediated by economic flexibility:

*“I don’t have a car, so I use trains, bikes, and sharing services. But if I have to return late and there are no public transports, I take a taxi... it depends on whether I can afford it.”*

Nicoletta extends this logic to privilege:

*“If I have to come back late, I don’t take public transport, I take a taxi if I’m alone. I can do it because I’m objectively privileged. I recognise it’s my privilege to pay for a taxi home, and not everyone can afford that.”*

Monica, instead, reinterprets privilege as responsibility:

*“Being one of the few among my friends who has a car, what I do to protect them is go and pick them up and I make sure their trip is safe too.”*

Monica’s account shows that class privilege does not remain purely individual: it can circulate horizontally as care. Access to a car, spare time, and route flexibility becomes the capacity to escort, pick up, and extend safety to others. This is analytically important because it reveals the ambivalence of classed mobility resources. On the one hand, they redistribute protection within peer networks and



thicken reciprocity; on the other, they normalise the privatisation of safety by turning personal resources into the de facto infrastructure of care (Kern, 2020; Tronto, 1993). Privilege thus appears not only as possession but as a moral and relational capacity to buffer the temporal vulnerabilities of others.

Considering mobility as a relational dimension in which care, cost, and safety are continuously balanced, the micro-negotiations of movement mirror the broader spatial logics through which class determines not only how women traverse the city but also where they can dwell within it. In other words, classed access to mobility converts the “right to linger” into a purchasable capacity-to buy time, proximity, or a ride (Kern, 2020; Skeggs, 1997; Tronto, 1993). In both mobility and settlement, safety thus becomes an economic privilege, materially expressed through rent prices, transport accessibility and neighbourhood reputation. Difred articulated this explicitly in her interview:

*“Safety is absolutely also a class issue. The fact that streets are unsafe even influences housing decisions. You have to pay more to live in an area where you feel safer. Those who can afford housing in safer neighbourhoods do not suffer, whereas those who cannot afford it suffer significantly more.”*

Difred further noted that “public housing assignments based on income brackets create neighbourhoods populated exclusively by disadvantaged people, with all the negative consequences that follow.” Along these lines, Laura, during her interview stated:

*“Those who can pay for a flat in a safe neighbourhood do so. Those who can’t, stay where they are.”*

Difred and Laura’s accounts together show that class buffers risk not only in movement but in dwelling. Housing becomes a way of pre-empting exposure: to pay more is to purchase proximity, legibility, and a wider margin for error, while those relegated to peripheral or stigmatised areas inherit longer journeys, thinner services, and tighter temporal constraints. In this sense, peripherality is not only geographic distance but temporal compression.

Housing distribution based on income can thus exacerbate class-based spatial segregation and reinforce the stigmatization of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, influencing perceptions of these areas as inherently “dangerous” or “degraded” (Pitch, 2004). These peripheral spaces frequently become stigmatized through external narratives, contributing to negative perceptions that do not necessarily reflect lived realities (Pitch, 2004). Tati explicitly critiques these exaggerated portrayals, ironically remarking how certain non-central areas of Milan are labelled “as if literally they were the Bronx” by media coverages when there are alike or even better other peripheral districts-bringing the example of the neighbourhoods where her boyfriend lives in Turin which full of “a way much more critical fragilities”. And Luisa, echoing Tati’s critique of externally imposed stereotypes, observes:

*“my boyfriend is from Quarto, and everyone told me it’s an area full of criminals, of drug dealers. But I can say that, at least where he lives, it’s actually a quiet street.”*

Consequently, safety itself becomes more and more an economic privilege, deepening social inequalities by restricting access to safer neighbourhoods and intensifying women’s spatial vulnerabilities (Criado-Perez, 2019; Fusco, 2021; Kern, 2020). In the social production of a space, urban planning indeed concretely embodies and reproduces class inequalities, framing safety as an economic privilege embedded within spatial structures (Lefebvre, 1968).

Peripheral urban experiences and infrastructural inequalities further complicate women’s embodied relationships with urban space not only by lengthening distances, but by thickening the



anticipatory labour required to cross them. At the urban edge, classed unevenness is lived affectively and corporeally: peripheral destinations alter dress, departure times, route choice, and sometimes the very willingness to go. In these settings, spatial stigmatization intersects with bodily presentation and autonomy because areas read as badly served, poorly lit, or socially exposed are also areas in which women expect to be seen differently and must therefore calibrate themselves differently. Peripherality, in other words, is not merely geographic distance; it is an affective and moral regime through which mobility becomes more effortful, self-conscious, and temporally constrained. This can already be sensed in Nilde's remark that she would feel "less at ease" if she lived in a peripheral area, and it becomes more explicit in Serena's account:

*"certainly, peripheral areas influence me. If a venue is in a peripheral area, I feel less comfortable dressing in ways that show my body."*

Serena's remark shows that peripheral geographies do not simply require longer journeys; they also reorganise self-presentation. Clothing, posture, and movement are recalibrated according to anticipated exposure and spatial respectability. Kuru adds the temporal layer to this same process: peripheral destinations are not only farther away, they become usable only at certain hours, when daylight and service rhythms still offer a partial buffer against uncertainty:

*"if I had to reach Bisceglie by metro, I wouldn't consider going at seven in the evening; I'd choose to travel at three in the afternoon when it's still daylight."*

As also underlined by Monica admitting:

*"If I have to go to San Siro and I don't have the car, I have to take public transport-that sometimes makes me change my plans. It's really a matter of time and convenience, because if you go by car it takes ten minutes, by public transport it can take an hour and a half, and at night it's not ideal."*

In their interview, both Kuru and Monica illustrated how mobility choices are structured by infrastructural unevenness and classed convenience, which further delimit the temporalities of women's urban autonomy. Nicoletta elaborates further on how peripheral navigation becomes a cognitive practice of care and anticipation, revealing the mental labour that sustains women's conditional sense of safety and belonging. Pointing out that peripheral areas, characterized predominantly by residential neighbourhoods lacking essential services, require additional strategic planning, she stated in her interview:

*"for example, when I need to visit peripheral locations for project site visits, I carefully select which streets to take, consciously avoiding minor, isolated roads."*

Peripheral negotiations of mobility and safety also find a visual and affective articulation in Nicoletta's AI-based artwork, developed as part of our research activities exploring the intersections of women's bodies, fear, and public spaces:



*“I wanted to experiment with artificial intelligence by generating an image responding to the prompt ‘Women - Public Space - Fear.’ This was because AI often produces images and outputs that reiterate and reinforce stereotypes. Yet I found it interesting to see how the image it generated already contained some of the questions that had emerged in our discussion on the use and perception of safety and insecurity in public space. ‘Who owns space?’ echoes the question posed by Barbara Kruger in her work ‘Who owns what?’ Space is not neutral; it is the material reflection of the culture that has produced it. These days we are hearing news of yet more femicides, one of which involved a woman who was followed by her attacker. The issue of hidden, unlit, unsafe, blind or unfrequented spaces-these are all spatial, design, and use-related questions that demand reflection. By training I am an architect, so for me thinking about the relationship between women, public space, and fear has to do with a strongly experiential dimension, tied to movement and to the relationship between body and space, in both material, psychological, and sensory terms. To see and to be seen perhaps encapsulates the very idea of safety and accessibility, but also of visibility and the representation of women’s bodies in space-as an idea of empowerment.”*

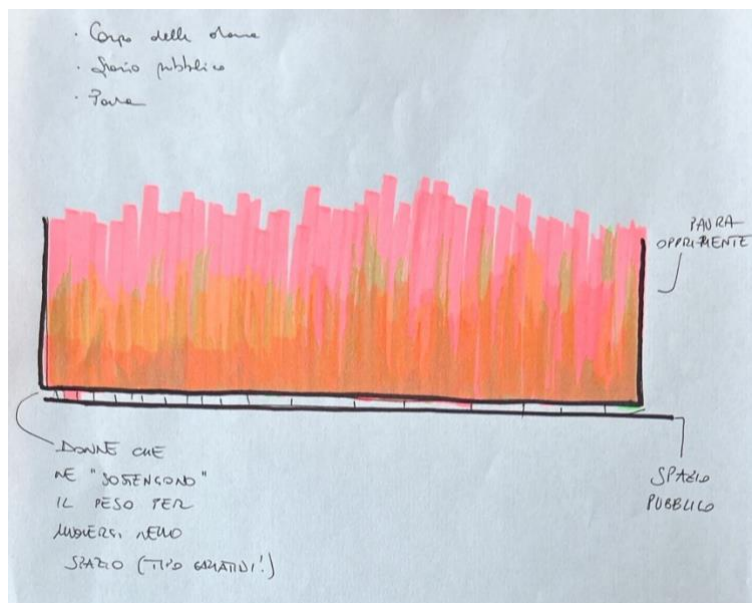
Stemming from the question “*A chi appartiene lo spazio?*”<sup>52</sup>, Nicoletta’s AI experiment stages a paradox central to conditional belonging: the very devices that promise order-fences, cameras, “clear” sight lines-also generate hidden zones where gendered threat is both imagined and materialised. Women’s trajectories, traced in red, are disciplined by surveillance (*CCTV*) and by the moral gaze (*visuali*), while the spectral figures personify the diffuse, ambient presence of gendered violence (*violenza di genere*). Thus her formulation captures the ambivalence at the heart of feminist spatial politics discussed in the previous chapter: visibility is simultaneously a condition of empowerment and an instrument of regulation. But also, through her architectural lens, Nicoletta pictures an economy of visibility that privileges certain bodies while rendering others vulnerable or invisible. Rather than portraying individual peril, the image depicts a broader governance of movement: a classed and gendered infrastructure that determines who may linger, who must keep moving, and who can afford an escape route. This moralised partition transforms private provision-

<sup>52</sup> Trad. lit. “Who owns the space?”



taxis, cars, gated pathways-into acts of prudence and care, displacing collective responsibility for safety onto individual capacity, or better, a purchasable and moralised privilege rather than a universal right (Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004). Crystallising the dynamics observed in other participants' accounts, this image exposes the cultural logics that sustain it-the entanglement of visibility, surveillance, and respectability that continues to define women's access to urban space. Read alongside the earlier accounts of timetables, taxis, and residential proximity, the image also makes visible a classed politics of exit: safety depends not only on seeing and being seen, but on having the infrastructural and economic means to leave when visibility fails. Conditional belonging therefore appears not simply as access to space, but as an unequal capacity to reroute, improvise, and absorb uncertainty.

If Nicoletta's image renders conditional belonging from the side of surveillance and infrastructural ordering, Giuliana's graph renders it from the side of lived calibration. The oscillation between fear and belonging appears here not as a private mood but as a moving gradient assembled through visibility, familiarity, support, timing, and material constraint. Her diagram is powerful precisely because it translates uneven urban conditions into a scalar and mobile affective form:



*"I didn't really make a drawing-it's more like a graph, because for me these three elements move together. I placed women's bodies on one axis and public space on the other, and then drew fear as a curve that rises and falls depending on proximity and distance. When you are more exposed, more visible the curve rises; when you feel protected or within a familiar context, it drops. I wanted to show that fear isn't constant: you don't always feel it, it depends on how you move, where you are, and who is around you. It's like a function that changes over time. I used arrows to show that movement is continuous, that the body is never still but adapts, bends, contracts, or expands according to the space.*

*So fear is dynamic; it isn't a wall, it's something that moves with you."*

The graph translates this oscillation into motion itself. Fear emerges not as a fixed emotional state but as a situated and mobile affect, one that expands or contracts through spatial practice, echoing Ahmed's (2004) understanding of emotions as orientations that move bodies in relation to others. Its rise and fall across the axes of visibility, familiarity, and distance also resonates with Massey's (2005) conceptualisation of space as processual and relational, continually produced



through embodied trajectories. The dense vertical strokes form a kind of “parapet” of fear whose height varies with context. Along the base (representing public space) women sustain its weight as they move, embodying the continuous labour of adjustment that underpins everyday mobility. The drawing renders fear as a relational practice rather than an inner state, a fluctuating surcharge generated by infrastructures, timetables, and moral surveillance. In this sense, fear becomes legible as situated labour, a form of affective work shaped by material conditions and classed accessibility: economic buffers such as taxis, cars, or spatial proximity lower the parapet, while infrastructural scarcity and distance make it rise. What appears as an “emotional” wall is thus assembled from material variables such as lighting, service density, transport frequency, and cost. Those who can buy time or closeness flatten the gradient; those who cannot must bear its weight through anticipatory work and self-regulation. Giuliana’s diagram ultimately converts private feeling into public inequality, revealing fear as a classed translation device: when infrastructures thin out, the parapet thickens; when proximity, lighting, and density increase, it recedes. Belonging, in this visual language, appears as a felt gradient produced by the friction between emotion and infrastructure.

As Zeta noted elsewhere, familiarity can domesticate spaces that are not conventionally “beautiful,” while Alex reminds us that what counts as ugly, hostile, or alienating is itself classed. Underscoring the intersections between class privilege, moral economies of space, and individual emotional reactions to urban aesthetics, they explain how class-based perceptions influence their spatial experiences:

*“There is a bit of classism inherited from my family: cold lighting puts me much more on alert compared to warm lighting because it evokes a more hostile, less domestic, and more alienating environment.”*

Urban environments operate therefore as morally charged terrains in which aesthetic sensibilities, infrastructural arrangements, and discursive regimes converge to shape affective hierarchies of safety and discomfort. As Pitch (2004) notes, aesthetic and moral orders are often mutually reinforcing: lighting, cleanliness, and architectural visibility acquire normative value, signalling who belongs and who is perceived as “out of place.” These affective and moral codings are further amplified by media narratives and urban policies that aestheticise security and normalise exclusion through the language of improvement and decorum. Participants’ adjustments in peripheral areas—timing a trip for daylight, dressing to minimise visibility—show how peripherality functions not only as spatial marginality but also as an aesthetic and moral regime. Infrastructural scarcity (e.g. sparser services, dimmer lighting, fewer “eyes on the street” -Jacobs, 1961) intensifies the demand to perform respectability. In these settings, women learn to anticipate the moral gaze of others, recalibrating posture, clothing, and routes to pre-empt misrecognition or exposure. Such anticipatory labour, which central districts can often outsource to density, illumination, and commerce, becomes a subtle yet persistent mode of bodily and temporal self-regulation: an everyday moral choreography through which classed propriety and spatial belonging are enacted and maintained.

Noting how economic privilege insulates individuals from discomforting urban realities, Servis points out the controversial situations of privilege in which she arrived at the station by taxi and found homeless people in front of her:

*“Sometimes I arrive by taxi and there are homeless people right in front of the station. I feel bad, but I also think: how is it possible that there isn’t a place for them?”*

Nuvola expands upon this by highlighting how economic resources and spatial privilege intersect with moral discomfort and urban aesthetics:



*“Especially at night, when you see people sleeping outside, maybe in alcoves, it’s not that they scare you, but it isn’t pleasant either... You think: is it possible there isn’t a place for them? It’s not fear, it’s discomfort.”*

Nuvola’s reaction exemplifies how emotional unease is not merely about fear but about moral ambivalence. As Pitch (2004) argues, the moralisation of urban insecurity transforms structural inequalities into individual responsibilities: fear becomes a civic duty, and safety a moral performance. Within this moral framework, discomfort toward poverty or disorder is reframed as a sign of civic awareness and self-protection, relocating responsibility for insecurity from institutions to individual bodies. Such affective responses are further amplified by what Fusco (2021) terms urban decorum, which clarifies how notions of aesthetic propriety and moral acceptability intersect with class dynamics. In Pitch’s account (2004), such adjustments are not only pragmatic; they are moralised, folding aesthetic orders (cleanliness, lighting, “decorum”) into judgments of who is out of place. Urban decorum thus operates as a normative framework that regulates which bodies and behaviours are deemed appropriate in public spaces, deepening class-based divisions and moral judgments within the urban context. This nuanced moral economy helps explain how infrastructural inadequacy and visible poverty generate tension and ambivalence, complicating women’s emotional and spatial experiences.

The recurring question *“isn’t there a place for them?”* condenses this moral stance: a form of spatialised empathy that is at once compassionate and distancing. As the matter is where others belong instead of why they are displaced, inequality is framed as a matter of misplacement rather than structure, empathically sustaining a politics of order over a politics of justice (Pitch 2004; Fusco, 2021). Moreover, these dynamics of moralised vision find a linguistic echo in participants’ own wording. The fact that both Servis and Nuvola articulate the same question reveals a shared moral grammar shaped by classed notions of spatial order. Their empathy is expressed through the idiom of placement, translating structural injustice into a spatial problem of where others should be. This phrasing performs a subtle form of boundary work (Ahmed, 2004), reinforcing the distinction between the moral observer and those perceived as out of place. Within this affective logic, the capacity to feel disturbed by disorder becomes itself a marker of respectability (Skeggs, 1997), producing a sense of belonging affirmed through exclusion. In this way, the “no place for them” refrain encapsulates how middle-class women inhabit the moral city through compassionate distance.

If Servis and Nuvola articulate distance through moral discomfort, Agnese’s interview reported a dystopic unease that translates that same moral tension into affective alienation, or better, an emotional symptom of classed urban fragmentation:

*“I’m sorry. I realize that my mood changes when I perceive people who don’t have dignified living conditions. I mean, generally it makes me feel bad, but not because it frightens me, it’s more like, just like cars do. I mean, it’s not that they necessarily scare me, but they give me an unpleasant feeling of dystopia, I don’t know how to describe it... I mean, no, I’ve noticed that sometimes lately cities have been giving me this sense of alienation, of dystopia, and mainly I associate it with the flow of cars and with the people I unfortunately see who don’t have decent living conditions, okay?”*

Bauman’s (2005; 2006) reflections on liquid modernity and urban alienation help clarify Agnese’s sense of dystopia as more than a private emotional reaction. In her account, visible poverty and the incessant flow of traffic do not appear as discrete threats, but as symptomatic manifestations of an urban order marked by fragmentation, consumerism, and weakened forms of collective sociality. What unsettles her is not simply disorder as such, but the affective perception of a city in which comfort, dignity, and spatial legitimacy are unevenly distributed. Lefebvre’s notion of the



“right to the city” (1968) sharpens this reading further: the visible presence of homelessness exposes not only material deprivation, but the classed organisation of urban belonging, through which some are enabled to inhabit the city safely and comfortably while others are relegated to its margins. In this sense, Agnese’s discomfort registers both moral unease and affective alienation, making socio-spatial inequality palpable in everyday perception.

During one and a half years of fieldwork, the relative absence of homeless women was striking. This absence can be linked, at least in part, to specialised municipal services designed to remove women from street homelessness more quickly, often in the name of protection and sometimes in relation to caregiving responsibilities. While these dedicated initiatives effectively remove women from street homelessness more rapidly and systematically than men, this very efficiency implicitly reinforces perceptions that urban streets are fundamentally unsafe and unsuitable for women. Following Skeggs’ (1997) notion of respectability as a profoundly classed moral economy that systematically constrains lower-class women’s legitimacy and freedom in public spaces, the absence of homeless women further reveals how institutional interventions uphold not only gendered but deeply classed notions of appropriate femininity. In other words, this phenomenon underscores the intersectional dimensions of class-based norms that limit women’s rightful presence and autonomy in urban environments. Consequently, although such services provide critical assistance, they inadvertently perpetuate gendered notions of respectability, vulnerability and spatial exclusion, reinforcing the broader discourse that the public realm remains inherently unwelcoming to women’s presence and visibility, especially when coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This section has examined how women’s belonging in the contemporary city emerges as both conditional and temporal through classed and gendered infrastructures that mediate mobility, safety, and emotional security. Access to the city is not a right equally distributed but a negotiation shaped by economic means, infrastructural unevenness, and moral expectations of care and respectability (Lefebvre, 1968; Skeggs, 1997; Tronto, 1993). Participants’ narratives highlighted that infrastructures are never neutral: they are classed assemblages of movement and emotion, determining who can move with comfort and who must constantly calculate routes, costs, and risks. The power to “buy” time (through a taxi, a car, or a closer flat) translates into the power to reframe risk as inconvenience, while those without this buffer are compelled to plan, anticipate, and self-regulate. These classed timings sediment into aesthetic and moral judgements—what looks orderly, who appears out of place, and which route is deemed “respectable.” Within these spatial hierarchies, belonging becomes contingent on material access and social recognition: a conditional attachment sustained by moral economies of safety, reciprocity, and self-regulation (Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004; Skeggs, 1997). In other words, the infrastructural production of conditional belonging is simultaneously a moral production. By sorting, sequencing, and pricing movement, these same infrastructures also reproduce symbolic and moral boundaries that define legitimacy in urban life (Ahmed, 2004; Fusco, 2021; Pitch, 2004). The accounts examined further reveal how class privilege operates not only through access to mobility but through the capacity to inhabit space respectably and securely. Infrastructures thus materialise the moral geographies of class, embedding inequality into the very design of safety and care. This intertwining of class, morality, and spatial belonging sets the ground for the next section, which turns to the ways racialisation and language further articulate and contest these moral economies of space.

### Racialisation, Language and Sonic Bordering in Rhythms of Legibility

If the previous sections showed that urban fear is temporal and unevenly distributed, this section argues that it is also rhythmic in sonic and recognitional registers. In stations, tunnels, queues, and late-night thresholds, language, accent, volume, and intelligibility become part of how proximity is judged and belonging is sorted. Building on Ahmed’s (2004) affective economies, Haraway’s



(1988) situated knowledge, and feminist readings of respectability and moral geographies (Kern, 2020; Pitch, 2004; Skeggs, 1997), the section examines how visibility and audibility converge in everyday processes of racialisation. What matters is not only who is seen, but who is heard as legible, ordinary, or “in place,” and who instead becomes opaque, suspect, or out of place. The term sonic bordering is here used to name this everyday sorting through audibility, whereby linguistic opacity becomes a proxy for unpredictability and risk. Read rhythmically, these judgements intensify in moments of infrastructural strain (such as waiting, crossing, leaving, lingering late) when women must interpret voices, accents, and volumes quickly and under uneven conditions of visibility and support. The section traces how these sonic and moral economies organise fear and belonging, but also how reflexivity, critique, and relational care can unsettle their automaticity.

The intersection of origin, race, and linguistic identity adds a further layer to women’s embodied experiences of public space, showing how danger is often read through already circulating scripts of race, origin, and recognisability. Agnese, during a focus group, reflected on her life in a multicultural neighbourhood, explicitly distanced herself from experiencing fear related to the gaze of men from the local community:

*“There are many non-Italian people in the area, but I don’t think that’s the problem, it’s that there’s no supervision, so people perceive them as the problem. It’s a social issue, not a racial one. In my neighbourhood there are groups of black people; it’s not considered a well-frequented area, but no one has ever bothered me. Once a man followed me, but not aggressively, I know that in some countries it’s a way of flirting, so it didn’t upset me too much.”*

Later, in her interview, she tentatively reinterpreted that episode through a cultural explanation she had encountered in a documentary:

*“in some parts of Africa, it’s culturally acceptable for a young man to approach and follow you briefly, attempting to initiate conversation.”*

Tati instead, during her interview, highlighted the existence of entrenched stereotypes of the “molester”:

*“There’s always the stereotype of the harasser, and it’s often associated with men of African origin. But if someone is from the Maghreb and has lighter skin, they can be mistaken for someone from southern Italy: prejudice shifts depending on appearance.”*

This remark reveals that perceptions of danger or threat and related sexual or violent stereotypes are not related to actual behaviour but rather to socially constructed narratives and logics surrounding race, origin, regional distinctions and physical appearance that create multiple layers of prejudice and discrimination (hooks, 2000). Taken together, Agnese and Tati show that racialisation operates through differential legibility: phenotype, origin, regional coding, and skin tone shape how male presence is rapidly interpreted in public space, independently of actual behaviour.

Carlotta, during her interview, highlighted how her unease stems from being unable to comprehend conversations around her when surrounded by groups of men speaking an unfamiliar language. This linguistic barrier amplifies her sense of uncertainty and vulnerability in public spaces:

*“Ugly as it is to say, in my view it’s no longer even a matter of black, white, yellow, green: it’s not racism, but more a matter of... I get scared when I see people who don’t speak my language; they might walk close to me, and I can’t understand what they’re saying. That’s what really puts me on alert. I’m more*



*afraid when I hear people speaking a language I don't understand. I get anxious because I can't understand or catch what they're saying, I can't tell whether they're talking about me or arguing with each other. It feels as if I lose control of the situation."*

On how language mediates fear and belonging in the city, Nana during a focus group, recalled an episode from her working life stating:

*"There were many heated discussions in a language that isn't mine. Leaving the co-working space late at night in Via Gluck made me feel uneasy; I wouldn't do it again. They weren't threatening, just loud. But when you don't understand what's being said, everything feels sharper. The city sounds different when it's not in your language."*

Her reflection prompted a broader conversation about linguistic opacity and the feeling of exclusion it can produce. Chiara responded thoughtfully:

*"When you don't understand what others are saying, you immediately feel excluded. It's as if language defines who has power and who doesn't."*

Beatrice nodded and, connecting that sense of unease to her own experience, followed up:

*"Language is power. When I hear men speaking Arabic or other languages I don't understand, I feel excluded and vulnerable; if they spoke Italian, it probably wouldn't bother me. It's a matter of comprehension and control. Even just hearing different languages changes how you perceive things. It makes you realise the city doesn't belong to you but not to anyone else either. It belongs to everyone and to no one, and that can be unsettling."*

If racialisation is often first imagined through sight (e.g. the visible markers of skin, origin, or dress), these accounts show that hearing and understanding also delineate affective frontiers of belonging. The ear, as much as the eye, mediates who is perceived as "in place" or "out of place." In this context, language operates not merely as a communicative medium but as a spatial epistemology, defining who can know, interpret, and be heard. Through the affective stickiness described by Ahmed (2004), apprehension adheres to particular voices and sounds, while Haraway (1988) illuminates its epistemic dimension: what cannot be translated becomes unknowable and thus suspect. Racialisation and language further sort bodies by legibility, installing moral economies in which some presences are read as respectable while others are pre-emptively problematised (Ahmed, 2004; Haraway, 1988; hooks, 1992). This is not mere bias but a sonic technique of urban ordering—an embodied politics through which hearing itself becomes a site of moral differentiation and spatial exclusion. In these moments, linguistic opacity thus functions as a proxy for unpredictability, displacing insecurity onto racialised and classed bodies. The everyday sorting of people through audibility, in which language, accent, and volume operate as affective cues of proximity and danger, can be identified as what I call *sonic bordering*. In situations of infrastructural strain—waiting at dimly lit bus stops, crossing underpasses, or walking alone at night—the ear becomes a sensor of anticipation, trained to make rapid judgements where vision falters.

In the same focus group, Joy explicitly acknowledged how racialised perceptions influence her embodied responses in public spaces. She admitted experiencing an immediate increase in alertness upon encountering groups of immigrants near train stations but consciously seeks to counteract this reaction:



*“When I see groups of immigrants outside the station, my level of alertness immediately rises, but then I tell myself it’s not fair to generalize, they’re just people standing there.”*

In another focus group, Zeta deepened this introspective analysis by critically reflecting on internalised racism during the focus group discussion, confessing openly:

*“We grew up with certain images: if you see a group of Black boys, your mind immediately assumes they might be dangerous. It’s awful, but it’s an automatic reflex. I’ve been reflecting internally on how much of my reaction is internalised racism and how much is cultural. We’re on alert around non-white people; if they’re Asian I don’t feel alarmed, but if I walk past a Moroccan shop I feel more watched. I’m not proud of it but it’s almost automatic. I wonder how much comes from what we see, what we’re told.”*

Additionally, Zeta later clarified during her interview a significant aspect of her perception of insecurity, emphasizing:

*“perhaps something I hadn’t explicitly articulated before is that most often, I’ve felt insecure in relation to foreign people, precisely because they are often among the most marginalised individuals, particularly noticeable near construction sites where I experienced staring and catcalling”.*

As Ahmed (2004) reminds us, fear and anxiety are not private emotions but collective circulations of affective economies through which danger attaches itself to racialised and gendered bodies. Joy’s self-awareness exposes this process in motion: fear “sticks” to migrant bodies through repetition, while reflexive recognition only partially loosens its hold. Zeta’s account exemplifies what Ahmed terms stranger fetishism, whereby the racialised figure of the stranger becomes the repository of social anxiety rather than an actual source of threat. Her description of an “automatic reflex” reveals how such affects are socially taught and culturally sustained-habits of perception that reproduce racial boundaries under the guise of vigilance. Similarly, in Nana, Beatrice and Joy’s focus group, Chiara also highlighted how the institutional removal of migrants significantly shapes the perception of public spaces as exclusionary and reinforces feelings of insecurity, adding:

*“There’s a whole discourse that uses women’s fear to justify control and removal. The problem isn’t the people-it’s how we talk about them. When people say Centrale is dangerous, it’s often because of the flow of migrants. Railway stations are places of passage and refuge, but they’re narrated as threats. It’s a toxic narrative.”*

As Kern (2020) notes, the rhetoric of protection often operates as a moral technology through which urban design and policing practices become racialised and legitimised. However, during focus groups several participants also remarked that diversity and mixed uses can heighten their sense of safety, not because difference is inherently protective, but because heterogeneity tends to produce density, mutual visibility, and multiple forms of by-stander presence (Jacobs, 1961). At the same time, participants’ accounts during focus groups suggest a gap between policy initiatives targeting security and their lived realities. At multiple moments in the field, participants articulated sharp critiques of heavy patrols, conspicuous CCTV, branded stewardship, and other performative safety infrastructures, that stage order and management leaving gendered harassment largely unaddressed. Indeed, several studies reported that standards for lighting, timetables and interchange rarely model women’s routes, shifting risk management onto individuals (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Criado-



Perez, 2019). Police presence was often reported both in Garibaldi and in Centrale as evident yet ineffective in deterring street harassment as well as their intense and selective enforcement directed at migrants. As Zeta eloquently once put it:

*“Honestly, I feel safer outside the station than inside, because police always stop migrants, not those who harass you. It’s as if surveillance were meant to control, not to protect.”*

If Joy, Zeta, and Chiara expose how racialised vigilance is learned, reflexive, and institutionally amplified, Kuru and Shige show how proximity, familiarity, and care can recalibrate that same field of perception. The category of “order” thus appears not as neutral, but as something lived through specific racial hierarchies and unequal possibilities of relation. This becomes visible in Kuru’s professional and personal familiarity with migrant life around Centrale, and even more sharply in Shige’s account of safety as solidarity rather than surveillance. During the earlier mapping exercise, Kuru had identified specific ethnic presences and spatial concentrations around the station, making visible how everyday awareness of migrant life intersects with the politics of visibility and control in public space. Shige, a woman with a migrant background herself, offers a contrasting and deeply relational narrative that unsettles dominant discourses of vulnerability and fear. Engaged in voluntary work assisting migrant youth around Centrale, she articulates a sense of calm grounded not in avoidance but in connection:

*“I often go to Centrale looking for these young people who sometimes we can’t find because they’re sleeping under bridges or similar places. I’m always calm and never afraid, because by helping, I don’t think someone would hurt me or something bad would happen to me, because I’m doing something good.”*

Shige’s redefinition of safety through solidarity resonates with hooks’s (2009) notion of belonging as an ethical and relational practice rather than a right of possession. Her calmness does not stem from surveillance or control but from care and mutual recognition, reframing safety as collective responsibility. What she performs is a different risk calculus grounded in reciprocity through which exposure becomes co-presence and vulnerability becomes care. In contrast to logics that render space “safe” through policing or visibility, Shige’s account shows that safety can also emerge from relational embeddedness: from knowing names, routines, and needs. Rather than purging disorder to create safety, she leans into the complexity of the social fabric, turning shared precarity into a form of duty. She inhabits the border through connection rather than separation, reclaiming Centrale as a site of shared responsibility and ethical care (Anzaldúa, 1987).

All these narratives show how race, language, and belonging are organised through moral and affective economies in which fear circulates through both sight and sound. Relational encounters mediated by audibility, visibility, and institutional narratives actively remake the city’s affective geography, attaching suspicion, familiarity, or legitimacy to particular bodies and presences. Yet the section has also shown that these scripts are neither total nor immutable: reflexive recognition, critique of selective policing, and practices of solidarity (such as Shige’s ethics of care or Agnese’s situated openness) interrupt the automaticity with which suspicion attaches to racialised others. Through this lens, moral economies of urban fear appear not as fixed systems, but as relational configurations continuously negotiated through proximity, opacity, empathy, and critique. If these economies help define who is heard, trusted, or feared, women’s everyday practices also reveal how such boundaries can be re-signified through care, reflexivity, and political attention. The next section turns to how these collective dynamics are sedimented, negotiated, and reworked in the making of the self in motion.



Situating Agency and Identity in Feminist Urban Geographies

Building on the previous sections, this section treats agency and the self not as attributes women simply possess, but as capacities and formations assembled in motion through urban infrastructures. These infrastructures both enable and time movement, yet they also offload the labour of safety onto individuals, turning agency into a gendered work of coordination across routes, closing hours, companions, budgets, gear, and available exits (Foucault, 1977, 1988; Pain, 2001; Rose, 1999). Against this responsabilisation, participants also assemble relational infrastructures of care (such as lifts, phone calls, shared routes, informal check-in systems, collective discussion...) through which safety is partially re-collectivised (Kern, 2020; Tronto, 1993). Read through feminist urban geography, agency appears here as the uneven capacity to move, adapt, refuse, and re-route under conditions shaped by time, class, racialisation, and moral judgement. The self, likewise, is formed in movement rather than prior to it, while identity names the more socially legible sedimentation of repeated negotiations through which women are read within the city (e.g. dress, pace, posture, audibility, companionship, and anticipation- see Butler, 1990, 1993; Massey, 2005; Valentine, 1989).

Because infrastructures both enable and time movement, agency often appears as a quotidian gendered form of unpaid safety work: a classed logistical exercise of coordination across closing hours, staggered services, companions, budgets, and rides (Kern, 2020; Pain, 2001). Demanding a place where women do not have to carry extra workload of feeling safe, Eleonora stated during her interview:

*“I shouldn’t have to ‘feel safe’ in the street, I want to live it normally, without having to seek safety.”*

Her claim exposes (and refuses) the neoliberal responsabilisation that downloads the costs of safety onto individual bodies rather than urban systems (Rose, 1999). Chiara, Eleonora, Kuru, Monica, and Nicoletta similarly argued in their interviews that assigning this burden to women is inequitable. Linda’s drawing makes women’s responsabilisation of safety particularly visible:



*“This would be a kind of bubble that represents fear, as if you feel a little surrounded by this sensation. Of course I’m talking about Milan; if I go to my hometown I don’t feel surrounded by fear at all... The city is represented by the buildings... the park-and, well, at night I would never go into a park. And then the boxing gloves, I did boxing so I think I can manage a bit. It’s clear that if you find yourself in a difficult situation the defensive moves might not work perfectly, but it gives me a bit of a boost. I did it as a sport, not as a safety*



*measure, absolutely. Still, I feel a bit more prepared. Prepared, but in any case, symbolically, it means being ready to face danger... Maybe it's making a phone call, or pepper spray...*

Touching on themes developed in the previous sections (such as place familiarity, day/night rhythms, and the ambivalent status of the park) Linda's drawing places herself at the centre of the sketch, surrounded by a bubble of fear that mediates her relation to public space. Like several other visual materials (Appendix: 180-182), the drawing renders fear as an affective perimeter rather than a discrete event, suggesting that urban infrastructures do not simply organise movement but also tune emotion and shape what feels crossable, inhabitable, or avoidable (Lefebvre, 1974). The boxing gloves are crucial in this regard. They promise preparedness and a temporary enlargement of agency, yet they also signal the condition that makes such preparation necessary. As affective props, they shore up a felt boundary of control; as tactics, they help secure passage through deficient systems (de Certeau, 1984); and as body-project technologies, they exemplify the responsabilisation of safety within a wider security dispositif (Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1988; Rose, 1999). Linda's drawing therefore condenses the section's central ambivalence: agency is neither pure autonomy nor mere constraint, but an adaptive capacity forged within uneven infrastructures that women are still expected to manage personally. On this note, while justifying herself for having taken a free self-defence course, Difred, during her interview stated:

*"since the situation isn't as it should be, we have to adapt, we can decide to adapt, but it isn't right."*

If Linda visualises this burden as preparedness, Difred names its injustice more explicitly: adaptation may be necessary, but it should not be normalised as the price women pay for access to the city.

Describing pressure as collectively deliberated practice rather than passive compliance while sustaining refusal for this normative horizon, her statement condenses the ambivalence of agency under responsabilisation. Read through Foucault's technologies of the self (1988), such adaptations translate urban insecurity into body projects: confidence, stance, readiness become useful tactics for "securing" passage. In this sense, adaptation is a contingent choreography that moves bodies through deficient infrastructures while insisting that the burden should not rest on them. Agency therefore becomes a sort of adaptive micro-politics of the ordinary: the everyday labour of timing, accompaniment and calculation that converts infrastructural conditions into manageable routes; but also the politics of design, the insistence, already enacted in practice, on a city organised around care rather than decorum (de Certeau, 1984; Tronto, 1993). Between adaptation, "vigilance planning" (Kern, 2020) and refusal, the materials also show an alternative horizon made of infrastructures of care that reduce the need for vigilance by thickening reciprocity. Sharing lifts, walking together, circulating route intelligence, staying on the phone, forming neighbourhood threads to check-in or lend a car: agency assumes recognisable collective and relational forms. Travelling along circuits of care (such as the ones discussed in Chapter 5 e.g. texting on arrival, sharing live locations, collecting friends by car, walking friends home or to the station) that redistribute risk and resources across networks, these practices do not merely express solidarity but they also prototype another urban order in which safety is relational and infrastructural rather than moralised and privatised. On this note, Luisa during her interview even reported the actual creation of a new material infrastructure:

*"We had a group of people who made themselves available; there was even a chart, so you knew exactly who you could call."*



Weaving together many of the topics discussed so far (day/night; peer-policing gaze; the ambivalent location of the park; co-presence), Serena's drawing stages a generative process:



*“Women’s bodies are undermined by fear, so I actually drew some women who stand close together and try to support each other. But fear is like a lightning bolt: it breaks the bonds you have with other women. There are also those who have a more critical gaze on how you dress, and this can break sisterhood. Because we also judge each other, and this weakens that network of safety that’s created when we support one another. Anyway, I drew some things to think a bit. I thought of an open space, a park, and a space for dialogue. This drawing starts from a problem and maybe leads to a solution, so I drew the sun and the moon. Usually one is more afraid in the dark; the sun lights up this part with the possible solutions. So, educate, organise courses, protect the rights we’ve already gained... talking about it is also a form of protection. Because, in my opinion, if you don’t talk about these things they just stay inside you, whereas in this way they also become shared”*

Serena's drawing stages fear not as an individual sensation alone, but as a force that can fracture or strengthen collective arrangements. The lightning bolt visualises how anxiety interrupts circuits of support; the clustered women, speech bubbles, and the open park suggest that dialogue, co-presence, and mutual recognition can also reassemble them. Importantly, the drawing refuses any simple opposition between women as support and women as judges: the peer-policing gaze shows how surveillance is horizontalised, diffused through everyday interactions, and capable of corroding solidarity from within. Yet the sun–moon sequence also marks a temporal movement from vulnerability toward collective intelligibility, implying that illumination is a condition for problem-solving. Safety thus appears here not as a personal virtue, but as a relational and infrastructural achievement that must be sustained collectively.

Caregiving intensifies this argument by showing that agency is always relationally distributed. Moving with or for a child recalibrates attention, speed, route choice, and bodily posture, making visible a cartography of care that standard urban design rarely accommodates (Bondi, Davidson, & Smith, 2005; Pain, 2001). In these accounts, the city is re-read through dependency, responsibility, and heightened attentiveness: Linda feels safer with her child, Alex feels more alert because of the



child's presence, and Clara describes how motherhood has transformed ordinary walking into a more vigilant and environmentally aware practice. Caregiving, then, does not simply add vulnerability; it reorganises what counts as viable movement and makes infrastructural deficits newly legible.

Participants did not merely diagnose problems; across interviews, focus groups, and maps they repeatedly advanced concrete alternatives. Their proposals included enhancing green pockets, prioritising warm and continuous lighting, activating “in-between” spaces with uses that attract diverse presences, investing in proximate and low-cost nightlife, and fostering forms of presence that exceed policing. In both Garibaldi and Centrale, annotations clustered around specific thresholds (such as parks, forecourts, tunnels, station edges) where affective discomfort was tightly linked to environmental indicators, service rhythms, and patterns of co-presence. Participatory mapping therefore did more than record fear: it translated situated negotiation into collectively legible design criteria, turning women's everyday adjustments into infrastructural propositions for a city organised around care rather than decorum.

Complementing this, several participants conceptualised safety as a co-production of infrastructure and lived experience. As Luisa put it during her interview:

*“I think that by sharing these emotional states women can do something to make a street safe not only at the mental level but also at the architectural level. The two things need to go hand in hand, because I can feel mentally safe on a street, but it still might not be architecturally safe.”*

Additionally, a strong thread across interviews framed safety also as a collective and institutional responsibility rather than an individual virtue. For example, Chiara argued that “safe streets are made by society,” calling for non-repressive frameworks and social change that explicitly involves men; Anna Maria, Monica, and Kuru likewise shifted the responsibility to culture, the State, and men's education, while Nicoletta stressed non-sexist, non-violent male behaviours as essential precondition and Agnese pointed to “critical mass” in public space as a collective force that heightens perceived safety.

Another drawing that centred the figure of the woman and positioned fear as mediating element is Alex's one:





*“So, the first thing I actually drew was the wavy perimeter that’s fear. Meaning, inside there should be a body which is absent. Partly because I didn’t know how to draw it, but now that I look at it again, I see it complete; it makes sense. So let’s go element by element:*

*The whole wavy border is fear: generally present, always there to a greater or lesser extent depending on the situation. And what’s drawn inside are, in part, its effects on the body: lots of thoughts, a lot of confusion, recurring thoughts, the fact that you can’t stop thinking... That you always have to be on alert for everything -not only alert to everything, but also taking note of everything around you.*

*The lightning bolts would be at heart level partly for the pain, but also because the thought I had while drawing was precisely: what’s the long-term effect that fear, or this constant state of tension, has on bodies of the people who are socialised as women? Because women are more prone to autoimmune diseases and so, I’m not a doctor, but other people have also said: could it be that we all have these autoimmune diseases because we live constantly in fear, in a state of alertness? We’re never relaxed.*

*The drop of blood, obviously, would be at the level of the womb, the vulva, so it’s meant to recall menstruation, but also to represent that attraction which is, at the same time, a kind of repulsion toward the female body. Meaning, there’s a lot of attention on the female body, a lot of sexualisation of what’s recognised as feminine attributes: breasts, womb, vulva, all of that. But then, the moment you enter a completely natural phase like menstruation: total repulsion.*

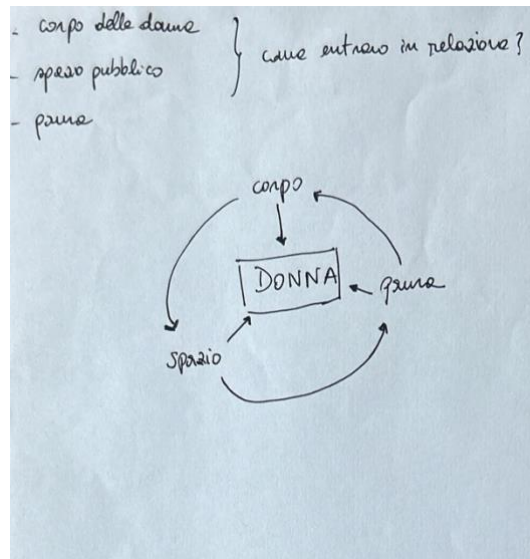
*The wings on the feet, I’d say, are quite self-explanatory... about alertness and the fear you feel in certain moments. The black ribbon was meant to represent a kind of road -always a bit off to the side... The streetlamp is, obviously, a source of light, or rather an attempt to shed light which isn’t always enough. And all the coloured dots are people but I didn’t feel like drawing them too close together nor too close in perspective either.”*

Alex’s drawing accurately shows how the self in motion is assembled under conditions of constant alert. The wavy perimeter, recurring thoughts, wings at the feet, road, streetlamp, and dispersed figures visualise vigilance as a durable cognitive, affective, and spatial labour. Without treating the reference to autoimmune illness as a medical claim, the drawing makes palpable how participants experience responsabilisation as something that settles in the body and reorganises attention, pace, anticipation, and self-perception over time. The road and streetlamp evoke the material infrastructures through which movement remains only partially secured, while the scattered figures remind us that agency is always relationally mediated by distance, witness, and possible co-presence. In this sense, the drawing bridges responsabilisation and self-formation: it shows how a sense of self is iteratively composed through what must be noticed, anticipated, concealed, endured, and kept in motion. Identity, in turn, emerges as the more socially legible sedimentation of these repeated adjustments to rhythms, infrastructures, moral readings, and unequal margins of manoeuvre.

At the same time, identity is coproduced through stories, status, race and linguistic bordering that operates as much through the ear as through the eye (Anzaldúa, 1987; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1992; Lugones, 2010). Extending identity work beyond vision and representation to audibility, the previous sections have shown that accounts heard from others, media narratives, and shared diagrams

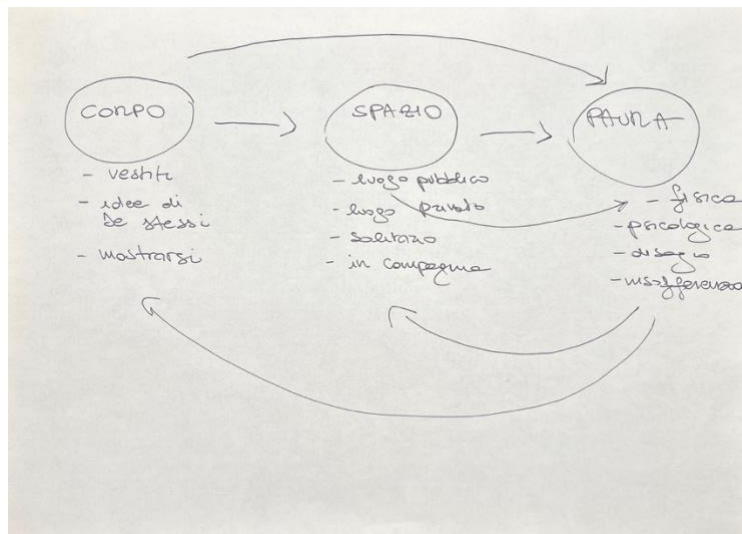


re-write places as much as direct experience does, producing “second-hand memories” that shape how one anticipates and senses space. But also how racialisation operates through sonic bordering and how identity is audibly negotiated: being (un)heard and (un)understood shapes one’s felt legitimacy and the reading of others. Moreover, reflexive moments (e.g. when participants name internalised racism) indicate that identity is also a site of contrast and challenge. Identity is not merely located in space but an ongoing embodied, affectively mediated process of bodies, things and times continually formed through an affective negotiation with the city’s material forms, urban rhythms and moral readings. As Effemme put it in her drawing:



*“I placed the woman at the center and it’s a simple concept, almost a vicious circle: body, space, and fear influence one another. Then I added some arrows to show that it’s never a one-way process, but a continuous one. That is, space changes the body, but the way you inhabit it can also change the space.”*

Identity here is precisely conceived as the more socially legible sedimentation of ongoing embodied and affectively mediated negotiations with the city’s material forms, urban rhythms, and moral readings. By placing “woman” at the centre and linking body, space, and fear through arrows of continuous feedback, Effemme’s diagram refuses any linear cause-and-effect account and instead figures the self as a moving composition coproduced in and through circulation (Massey, 1994): each passage recalibrates posture, dress, pace, and itinerary, while those very adjustments feed back into how places are felt, read, and used. Beatrice’s schematic extends this reciprocity by showing how embodiment, self-presentation, and companionship are continuously edited in tandem with space:



“Basically, three concepts and how they might be linked, and what you can find within each of them. Starting with the body, I obviously think of the woman’s body. And maybe ideas that came up during the interview. If I think of the body, I think of clothes and of how a woman wants/doesn’t want to show herself. She feels obliged to show or not show herself, or better, the idea a woman has of herself and of her body leads her to show or not show herself in a certain way. As for space, I thought it can be a public place or a private place... a space where you’re alone or with company. And fear can be not only physical but also psychological so can be a discomfort, an intolerance towards something... someone. Someone saying something to you, maybe about your body, about where you are, where you should go. And then I thought about how they connect to one another: the way you’re dressed-your perception of yourself and how you can present yourself can have an effect on where you go, with whom you go. And where you go, with whom you go, can affect your fear, your sense of fear. Or the body can be directly connected to your sense of fear. But then, while I was thinking about this, I realized the reverse could also be true: the fear you have to begin with can affect your body... or the spaces-where you go and with whom. So it’s a bit difficult to pin down the direction of the connection.”

Selfhood here appears as an itinerary of edits (garments layered or removed, companions recruited or released, routes elongated to catch light or narrowed to keep witnesses within reach) that register an ongoing affective attunement to rhythms and atmospheres (Anderson, 2009; Lefebvre, 1992). With this drawing, Beatrice advances a pragmatic taxonomy -body (clothing/self-idea)<sup>53</sup>; space (public/private; alone/with company)<sup>54</sup>; fear (physical/psychological)<sup>55</sup>- and, crucially, highlights causal reversibility. This “reverse”, that is also alluded in Effemme’s last sentence, is crucial and decisive: anticipatory threat is not a passive response to context but a configurational force that pre-figures posture, gait and coverage, and that sediments into mnemonic maps of the desirable and the avoidable. Women’s actions appear as more than responses to context: they are configurational gestures that prefigure posture, gait, coverage, and companionship, and that, through repetition, sediment into affective memoryscapes of the desirable and the avoidable. In this sense, the

<sup>53</sup> In the drawing: “corpo” - “vestiti” - “idea di se stessi”

<sup>54</sup> In the drawing: “spazio” - “luogo pubblico” - “luogo privato” - “solitario” - “in compagnia”

<sup>55</sup> In the drawing: “paura” - “fisica” - “psicologica”



self is negotiated through iterative edits that are practical, affective, and performative, while identity names the pattern of social legibility that these repeated adjustments sediment over time (Butler, 1990; 1993).

All these accounts situate agency at the intersection of responsabilisation and care, and locate the self within geographies of fear and gender performativity. Agency emerges not as simple freedom, but as an uneven, distributed, and relational capacity to coordinate, adapt, refuse, and seek support under conditions women did not choose. In the friction between classed infrastructures and moral economies of care, women route, re-route, and reach for others, turning movement into a situated choreography of vigilance, accompaniment, calculation, and mutual support. The self, likewise, is formed in transit through iterative edits of dress, pace, posture, audibility, company, and anticipation, while identity names the more socially legible sedimentation of those adjustments as they are read within the city (Butler, 1990, 1993; Goffman, 1977; Massey, 1994, 2005; Valentine, 1989). Infrastructures discipline these capacities by attaching moral worth to prudence, readiness, and calculative self-management, shifting the labour of “feeling safe” onto individual women as if it were a private virtue rather than a public effect (Bartky, 1990; Foucault, 1977, 1988; Pain, 2001; Pitch, 2004). Yet these materials also show that vigilance and refusal remain tactical rather than final solutions: participants translate infrastructural gaps into everyday arrangements of protection and access, crafting relational infrastructures of care that both reproduce and reconfigure urban order (de Certeau, 1984; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). The self in motion, then, is neither fully autonomous nor merely constrained, but a stratified and relational achievement assembled across bodies, timings, routes, stories, and supports. To situate agency and identity within feminist urban geographies therefore means reading these iterative compositions not only as analytic findings, but as political design clues for a city organised around care, co-presence, and mutual maintenance.

## Conclusion - The Self in Motion

Across walks, interviews, focus groups, and drawings, this chapter has developed a feminist rhythmanalysis of the self in motion. Rather than treating the self as a stable interior, identity as a fixed possession, or agency as an individual attribute, it has shown how movement is negotiated through urban rhythms, infrastructures, and moral expectations, and how selves take shape within these negotiations. First, time emerged as infrastructure: day and night, routine and exception, season and life-course distribute visibility, co-presence, and exposure, sedimenting into affective memoryscapes that orient when, how, and with whom the city can be used (Ahmed, 2004; Lefebvre, 1992; Massey, 2005; Pain, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 1989). Second, class appeared as a temporal buffer: taxis, cars, housing proximity, and denser service ecologies enable some women to absorb delay and reframe risk as inconvenience, while others must plan, anticipate, and renounce. Third, racialisation and language showed that belonging is also sorted through audibility: voices, accents, opacity, and volume become part of how proximity is judged, making sonic bordering a crucial dimension of urban fear and legibility. Fourth, agency emerged at the intersection of responsabilisation and care: women are asked to translate infrastructural deficits into preparedness, yet they also build relational infrastructures of support that partially re-collectivise safety.

What follows from these findings is not that identity disappears into movement, but that it accrues as the socially legible sedimentation of rhythmic, infrastructural, and relational negotiations with the city. Agency, likewise, is not simple freedom but the uneven capacity to coordinate, adapt, refuse, and seek care under conditions women did not choose. Here, the self in motion names the lived process through which those negotiations are inhabited, revised, and made durable across timings, bodies, stories, supports, and moral economies of legibility. The chapter’s contribution therefore lies in conceptualization of the self as a relational and processual formation made in movement: through memory, familiarity, cost, recognisability, audibility, and care. In this sense, the



self is not simply located in the city, but continuously made and remade through the conditions that render movement more or less viable. Or, as Nicoletta captured it during her interview:

*“It’s a bodily and psychological relation that happens through movement, through the act of walking.”*



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion: Towards Our Definition of Space

This dissertation has shown that women experience Milan's public spaces through a relational, multisensory, and rhythmic urban ecology in which visibility, mobility, and belonging are continuously negotiated through embodied calibrations and infrastructural cues (Kern, 2020; Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 2005). Women's everyday presence in the city is shaped not only by discrete episodes of fear or violence, but by patterned discomforts, anticipatory labours, and spatial negotiations that are socially produced, historically sedimented, and infrastructurally mediated. In and around Milan's stations, bodies become implicated both materially (in movement, pace, attire, and modes of mobility) and symbolically, through respectability scripts and moral expectations. Sites of hypervisibility, spaces of internalised regulation, and everyday tactics of negotiation and resistance show how women's bodies are at once targets of governance and situated mediators of urban knowledge. In this sense, women's micro-tactics (such as altered itineraries, strategic phone calls, cycling at night, travelling together) and meso-tactics (such as community mappings and the occupation of edges, benches, and thresholds) emerge as relational practices through which urban space is continually adjusted, endured, and at times reworked (Tronto, 1993).

Women's experiences of public space are therefore not exhausted by the opposition between fear and safety, nor by the mapping of supposedly safe or unsafe places. What the analysis foregrounds instead are the relational and infrastructural effects of everyday urban life, coproduced through rhythms, surveillance regimes, moral economies, embodied negotiations, and uneven conditions of recognition. One of the dissertation's central contributions lies therefore in shifting attention away from the visible markers through which urban insecurity is conventionally diagnosed and towards the patterned labour of anticipation, recalibration, endurance, and care through which women inhabit and critically read the city. Public space, from this perspective, appears less as a stable setting in which vulnerability can be measured than as a field in which exposure, recognition, and belonging are continuously negotiated and unevenly distributed (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Condon, Lieber & Maillachon, 2007; Kern, 2020).

Read together, the findings answer the four sub-questions by showing that women's relationship with public space and their sense of self are continuously made through one another. Repeated negotiations over routes, pace, timing, visibility, and proximity sediment into forms of selfhood and belonging, while the body remains the threshold through which urban power is materially felt and managed. Within this threshold, women both adapt to and resist social expectations, modifying dress, companionship, itineraries, and rhythms, yet also reclaiming space through tactical presence, co-presence, cycling, and other everyday acts of insistence. Fear therefore appears less as a response to isolated danger than as a socially produced orientation, shaped by gendered norms, infrastructures, and moral economies, through which public space is inhabited, endured, and sometimes transformed.

Conceptually, the dissertation brings its findings together through two interconnected formulations, while treating fear as the relational orientation that cuts across and binds them. Bodies as portals names more than embodiment *per se*: it identifies the body as the threshold through which urban power relations are registered, interpreted, contested and transformed. Moving through space, bodies mediate between materialities and abstract urban orders, translating light, sidewalks, parks, sounds, scales, stairs and tunnels into situated forms of knowledge. The notion of bodies as portals does not simply relabel embodied experience but rather foregrounds the body as an epistemic threshold through which fleeting sensations (e.g. exposure, proximity, glances, hesitations, accelerations, flinches...) become legible as signs of how spatial orders are reproduced, negotiated



and reconfigured. In this sense, embodiment is both epistemic and political: it is through the body that the city becomes sensible, decipherable, and, potentially, reworkable.

If bodies as portals names the embodied threshold through which urban orders are sensed, interpreted, and negotiated, the self in motion names the more durable formation those repeated negotiations take as they sediment into memory, recognisability, and situated agency. The self in motion conceptualises the self as a rhythmic and infrastructurally attuned relational formation, shaped through rerouting, recalibration, refusal, endurance, and adjustment under uneven urban conditions. More concretely, light and darkness organise lines of sight and possibilities of recognition; language and sound enact forms of sonic bordering that calibrate proximity and trust; and scale, crowding, and monumentality register as situational control or vulnerability. Read in these terms, the self in motion can be considered as a mobile repository of urban encounters, the primary site where shifting intersection of past experiences and immediate spatial negotiations are registered and stored. Across these formulations, fear appears to be a transversal relational orientation that binds bodies, infrastructures, rhythms, and moral economies. Fear is diagnostic insofar as it reveals where spatial orders fail, whose presence is rendered precarious, and how urban arrangements distribute exposure and recognition; yet it is generative not in any celebratory sense, but insofar as it reorganises tactics, solidarities, and claims to space under constrained conditions.

Empirically, the dissertation is grounded in a deliberately narrow comparative focus on Stazione Centrale and Stazione Garibaldi, two highly infrastructural and symbolically charged urban settings in which visibility, mobility, surveillance, vulnerability, classed infrastructures, racialised encounters, and practices of care are especially condensed. This focus has allowed the study to trace not only how monumental scale, transit logics, redevelopment, and securitisation are registered in the grain of everyday movements, hesitations, recalibrations, and claims to presence, but also how fear, discomfort, and belonging are coproduced through ordinary itineraries, transfers, thresholds, and interstitial spaces. Precisely because these stations condense circulation, beautification, exclusion, and governance, they offer a privileged vantage point from which to read the contradictions of Milan's contemporary urban transformation and neoliberal urbanism (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; D'Ambrosio Clementelli, 2023). They also emerge not only as sites of vulnerability, but as long-standing spaces of women's work, transit, solidarity, and claim-making, in which familiarity and ethical forms of care can partially recalibrate exposure and urban fear. Just as importantly, the empirical material shows that women's urban lives are shaped less by spectacular episodes of violence alone than by socially sedimented forms of anticipatory labour and embodied adjustment through which presence in the city is sustained, negotiated, or withdrawn. In this sense, the question of day and night is less a simple binary than a way of grasping how temporal rhythms and changing alignments of light, density, familiarity, and social recognisability pattern access, exposure, attention, and dwelling.

Methodologically, the dissertation advances feminist participatory urbanism by integrating ethnography, interviews, photovoice, photo-elicitation, and emotional and community mapping in order to render visible the multisensory, rhythmic, and affect-laden geographies of fear, discomfort, and belonging. This methodological assemblage was built on purpose to investigate and frame trajectories, encounters, and shared calibrations through which selves are negotiated, identities accrue as socially legible forms, and spaces are co-constituted. In this sense, the methods do more than simply document women's experiences: they approach these situated accounts as epistemologically generative, meaning that the participants' lived realities are the very foundation upon which my analytical framework is built (Haraway, 1988). They also allow for moments of restitution, co-reflection, and collective interpretation through which participants could recognise, refine, and at times challenge the analytical framing of their own experiences. At the same time, the dissertation has shown that feminist participation is neither seamless nor universally accessible. Instead of smoothing over these difficulties, I treat these methodological frictions as constitutive of the research



process. They highlight the inevitable tensions and exclusions inherent in any attempt to produce situated urban knowledge (Nicolazzi & Leone, 2025).

Practically and politically, the dissertation invites a shift from control-centred security towards care-centred safety: away from policy frameworks organised around order, surveillance, and risk management, and toward feminist understandings of safety as a relational, infrastructural, and care-centred condition of urban inhabitation. If the self in motion is taken seriously, policy can no longer focus only on bounded “dangerous places” or on abstractly defined “vulnerable groups”, but must attend to the routes, transfers, thresholds, and temporalities through which women stitch together work, care, leisure, and social life. What is at stake is not simply women’s presence in the city, but the conditions under which that presence can be sustained without disproportionate anticipatory labour, self-policing, or tactical exhaustion. The conditions that make care-centred safety possible, however, are not evenly distributed, but mediated by classed infrastructures, proximity, linguistic familiarity, and social recognisability. These shape who can turn risk into inconvenience and who must instead absorb it as ordinary anticipatory labour. The question for public administrations and urban institutions is therefore not only where women are, but under what conditions they can remain present in urban life: at what hours, along which routes, through what transfers, and at what cost. Spatial equality, in this sense, is a matter of social justice: infrastructures do not simply organise movement, but distribute recognition, exposure, access, and the very terms under which urban participation becomes possible. Altered routes, strategic phone calls, changes of pace, travelling together, and other everyday recalibrations should therefore be read as situated diagnoses of how infrastructures distribute exposure and shelter, recognition and neglect, permeability and entrapment. A first implication, then, concerns the security–safety nexus: everyday safety is not primarily guaranteed by force, nor exhausted by the management of visible disorder, but produced when bodies in motion can rely on inhabited, legible, and permeable environments that do not punish slowness, hesitation, waiting, or dwelling.

Rather than allowing women’s fear to be mobilised in support of punitive and exclusionary agendas, their everyday tactics should be read as situated design briefs for different urban futures in which safety emerges through reciprocity, presence, legibility, and shared responsibility rather than punitive scapegoating or witch hunting through intensified responsabilisation imposed on women themselves (Condon, Lieber & Maillochon, 2007; Foucault, 1977; 1988; Tronto, 1993). Read in this way, altered itineraries, tactical phone calls, co-walking, and timing adjustments are not merely private compensations for public failure, but practical input for imagining and creating a different urbanism. In practical terms, care-centred safety requires less a checklist of defensive devices than the ordinary urban conditions that make women’s presence sustainable without disproportionate anticipatory labour. This means mixed and inhabited uses across hours, continuous and readable lighting, active and permeable edges, waiting and interchange spaces in which one can pause without feeling stranded or overexposed, and reliable night mobility across routes, transfers, and interstitial spaces (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2021; Jacobs, 1961; Tronto, 1993). What matters, in other words, is not simply the visibility of space, but its legibility, reciprocity, and degree of ordinary co-presence. Safety emerges here not from intensified control, but from urban arrangements that do not punish slowness, hesitation, waiting, or dwelling, and that redistribute the work of “feeling safe” away from women alone. The task, then, is to sustain co-presence, recognisability, and everyday conviviality so that safety is redistributed as a shared urban condition rather than a purchasable good or the outcome of women’s anticipatory labour.

From this perspective, dominant responses to urban insecurity appear analytically and politically inadequate. Lighting, surveillance, gating, and militarised presence may address visible public disorder, yet they often redistribute discomfort rather than reduce it, compelling women to intensify their own vigilance and self-policing. Historically, appeals to women’s security have often been folded back into paternalistic and surveillance-oriented logics, so that what is framed as



protection ends up reorganising women's presence through control. The problem is therefore not only political, but also semantic, epistemological, and ontological: once security becomes the dominant register, the relational, infrastructural, and affective conditions through which safety is actually produced become harder to name and easier to obscure. Women's testimonies, maps, and photographs show that fear is patterned not only by incidents, but by shifting combinations of hour, crowd, illumination, sound, language, respectability, and infrastructural legibility. Participants' accounts further show how media and institutional narratives around "dangerous" stations, degradation, or illegality can sediment into anticipatory orientations that exceed recorded incidents while leaving other forms of harm less visible. This produces a vicious circle: fear legitimates securitisation, securitisation amplifies atmospheres of danger and degradation, and those atmospheres, in turn, intensify anticipatory vigilance rather than reducing it.

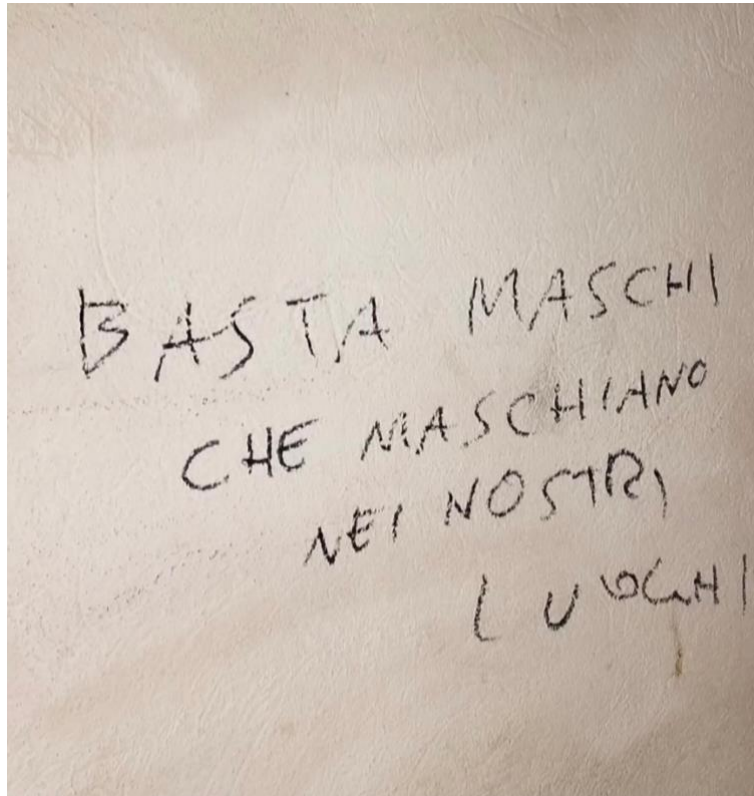
Safety, in this sense, cannot be reduced either to the removal of a threatening figure or to the management of supposedly dangerous subjects; it belongs instead to a relational urban ecology made of rhythms, proximities, perceptions, infrastructures of care, and mutual recognition. Participants' accounts also suggest that women's fear in public space cannot be read in isolation from the wider gendered organisation of everyday life. What is lived in streets, stations, underpasses, and return journeys is entangled with relations of work, care, intimacy, and dependency that continue to organise women's time, autonomy, and room for manoeuvre. Public administrations and urban institutions seeking to address women's safety must therefore move beyond both the inherited split between "public" risk and "private" harm and the reduction of safety to static crime indicators. Vulnerability, as the material shows, is not exhausted by bounded "dangerous places" or aggregate rates, but patterned along specific itineraries through shifting combinations of hour, crowd, illumination, sound, cleanliness, familiarity, and infrastructural legibility. To take women's accounts seriously, then, means treating safety less as a fixed property of places than as a relational and rhythmic condition produced across routes, thresholds, and everyday negotiations.

This dissertation is necessarily limited by the specificity of its empirical setting, by the profile of those who were able to participate, and by the researcher's own positionality. The focus on Stazione Centrale and Garibaldi offers a privileged view of highly infrastructural and securitised urban settings, but cannot straightforwardly be extended to peripheral neighbourhoods, other Italian cities, or different national contexts. Likewise, despite efforts to diversify recruitment, the material over-represents women who are Italian-identified, relatively stably housed, and able to carve out time for participation, while elder, undocumented and more precariously employed women remain less present in the analysis. These absences are not incidental, but point to the same structural inequalities that also organise mobility, visibility, and access to public space. The analysis is further shaped by the researcher's positionality (as a white, able-bodied, Italian, non-migrant woman embedded in local activist and professional networks, and thus simultaneously insider and outsider) and by the conjuncture in which fieldwork took place, marked by the post-pandemic reconfiguration of everyday mobilities and by renewed political and media attention to urban security and migration. The research therefore offers not a definitive account of how women experience public spaces, but a situated and partial one, whose analytical value lies precisely in making visible how gendered urban life is mediated by uneven positionalities, infrastructures, and conditions of participation. Nonetheless, these findings are analytically transferable, offering a framework that can be adapted to other urban settings by accounting for their unique temporalities and infrastructures. Future feminist urban research should deepen this intersectional reach and co-produce knowledge more directly with those whose mobility is most constrained by borders, labour precarity, welfare regimes, and institutional mistrust.

Through this work, space has therefore emerged not as a neutral container or stable backdrop, but as a lived, relational, and rhythmic arrangement of routes, infrastructures, affects, and moral expectations through which women calibrate movement, recognise exposure, compose belonging,



and negotiate selves whose identities accrue through repeated adjustments. What is conventionally described as “public space” is recast as a dense and uneven arrangement of thresholds, scripts, atmospheres, and material supports, stitched together by everyday practices of moving, waiting, watching, accompanying, and caring. If these chapters move towards our definition of space, then “our” names not a universal category of women, but the situated and coproduced standpoint that emerges from the accounts, movements, maps, and images gathered in this dissertation. This is why the dissertation develops the conceptual formulations of bodies as portals and the self in motion: not simply to restate that space matters, but to show how urban power is worked through embodied negotiations and how fear, care, and belonging are coproduced in the grain of everyday life. Space, then, appears less as a stable object than as an ongoing event of relation in which power and possibility are continuously redistributed. In this sense, the city is not only what we move through, but what we continuously redefine through our embodied presence in its routes, thresholds, and everyday spaces.



Picture taken in Genoa when attending the Summer School for young Urban Sociologists in September 2023

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*“Enough men who man in our spaces.”*

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The expression *“Basta maschi che maschiano nei nostri luoghi”* plays with the Italian neologism *maschiare* -literally “to man” -used ironically to name the everyday performances of masculine entitlement that occupy and dominate shared spaces. It is not an attack on men *per se*, but on a pattern of behaviour that turns public and collective spaces into arenas of masculine assertion. The phrase thus calls for reappropriating these spaces as relational, inclusive and de-patriarchalised.



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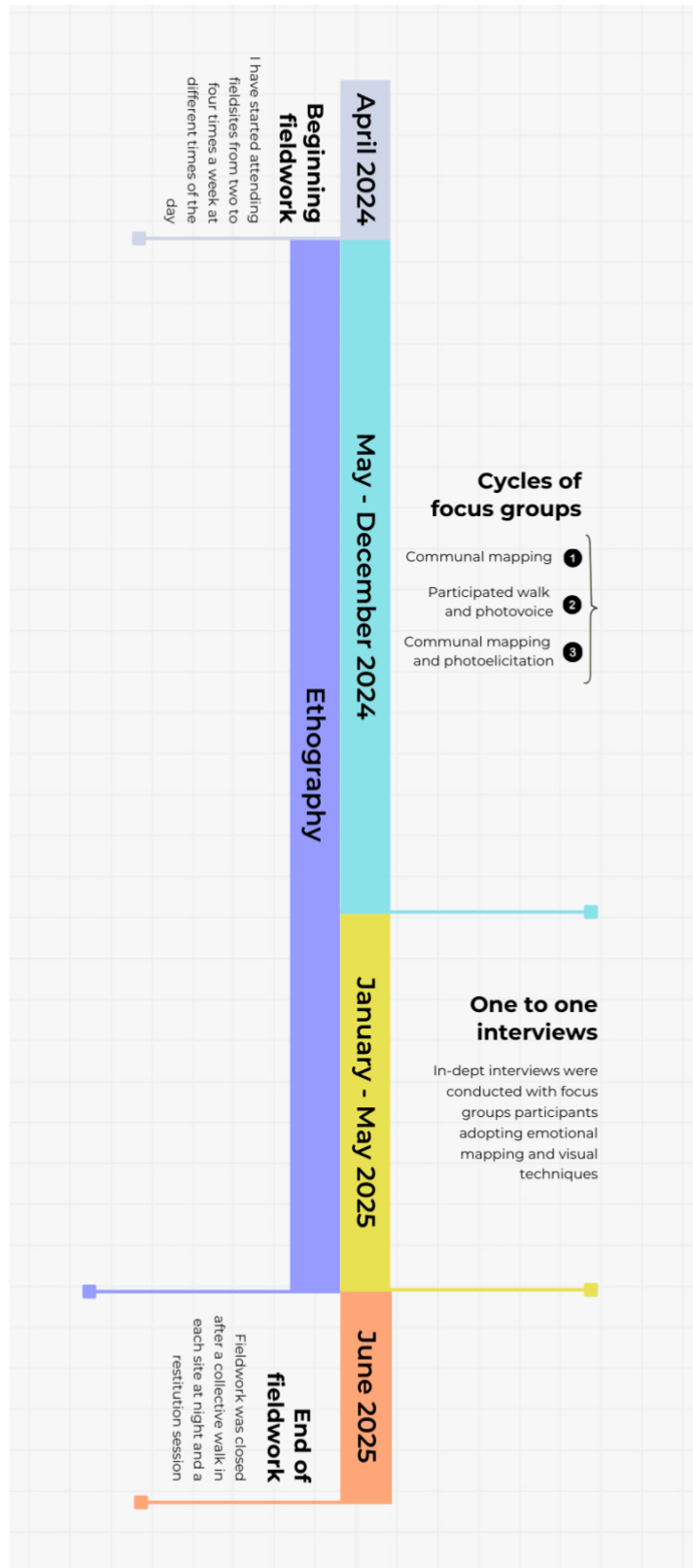


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## Appendix

### Data Collection Timeline





## Calls to Participate

### Email Sample for Local Institutions and Associations

**Oggetto:** *Collaborazione su ricerca dottorale – Sicurezza e genere negli spazi pubblici di Milano*

Gentile [NOME E COGNOME/ASSOCIAZIONE],

*Spero questa email vi trovi bene.*

*Mi chiamo Marta Maria Nicolazzi e sono sociologa dottoranda presso l'Università Statale di Milano. Il mio progetto di ricerca, dal titolo "Body, Self and Space: How women's fear articulates in Milanese public spaces", indaga le diverse forme di paura percepite dalle donne negli spazi pubblici di Milano e le implicazioni di questo fenomeno nella loro vita quotidiana.*

*Attraverso un approccio qualitativo basato su osservazioni etnografiche, focus group e interviste individuali, mi concentrerò in particolare sulle esperienze di donne maggiorenni che vivono, studiano o lavorano da almeno un anno nelle aree limitrofe a **Stazione Centrale/Garibaldi**. L'obiettivo è comprendere i processi che producono e riproducono la paura nello spazio urbano, le loro origini e fondamenti, nonché le eventuali ripercussioni sull'identità e sul comportamento delle persone coinvolte.*

*In questo contesto, mi chiedevo se foste disponibili a un incontro per valutare possibili sinergie e modalità di coinvolgimento attraverso i vostri canali e tra le vostre utenti. Credo che il vostro contributo possa essere fondamentale per ampliare il dibattito sulla sicurezza urbana e le politiche di genere, favorendo una maggiore inclusività degli spazi pubblici.*

*Resto a disposizione per qualsiasi approfondimento e sarei felice di confrontarmi con voi su questo tema. In attesa di un vostro gentile riscontro, vi ringrazio per l'attenzione e vi invio i miei più cordiali saluti.*

*M. M. Nicolazzi*

*PhD Student within the Network for the Advancement of Social and Political Studies (NASP) of the University of Milan; enrolled in the Sociology and Methodology of Social Science (SOMET) program*

### Text Sample for Personal Network

*Ciao sono Marta Maria Nicolazzi, sociologa dottoranda dell'università Statale. Sto facendo una ricerca sulla percezione dello spazio pubblico da parte di chi si è socializzata donna o è stata assegnata femmina alla nascita.*

*Se vivi, studi o lavori nelle zone di Stazione Centrale o Stazione Garibaldi e ti va di darmi una mano contattami all'email [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)*

*La partecipazione è assolutamente volontaria e non ci sono vincoli a partecipare.*

*Per favore diffondi questo messaggio a quante più persone pensi possano essere interessate o conoscere qualcuna che...*

*Grazie di cuore ❤️*



## Fliers and Posters

**Vivi, studi o lavori in zona stazione centrale o stazione garibaldi?**

Se ti identifichi come donna, sei socializzata donna o sei stata assegnata femmina alla nascita e vuoi partecipare ad uno studio sulla percezione del quartiere scrivi a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it) o scamerizza qui:

**Il corpo delle donne nello spazio pubblico: una ricerca.**

**PARTECIPA**

**PARTECIPA AD UNA RICERCA SULLE DONNE E LO SPAZIO PUBBLICO**

## Social Media Post Example

**cercasi partecipanti volontarie per dottorato di ricerca**

Il mio dottorato di ricerca in sociologia e metodologia delle scienze sociali dal titolo **"Il corpo, l'io e lo spazio"** prende in esame diverse forme di paura percepita dalle donne nello spazio pubblico milanese e le implicazioni che questo fenomeno ha per la loro vita quotidiana.

La ricerca si baserà su dati qualitativi raccolti attraverso osservazioni etnografiche delle zone selezionate, focus groups ed interviste individuali con **persone maggiorenni che si identificano come donne o sono state assegnate femmine alla nascita** che...

...vivono, studiano o lavorano da almeno un anno nelle aree limitrofe a **Stazione Centrale**

...vivono, studiano o lavorano da almeno un anno nelle aree limitrofe a **Stazione Porta Garibaldi**

Nella speranza di creare sinergie che contribuiscano a rendere gli spazi pubblici più inclusivi. Il tuo contributo è importante.

**Per partecipare compila il form**

Se non dovessi rientrare nel campione, condividi questo post: ogni passaparola è essenziale!

**Grazie.**



## Registration Form

### Modulo di adesione

Ciao! Se sei arrivata fino qui è perché stai valutando di partecipare al progetto di ricerca, dal titolo **"Il corpo, l'io e lo spazio"** di Marta Maria Nicolazzi, sociologa dottoranda presso l'Università Statale di Milano, all'interno di NASP (Network for the Advancement of Social and Political Studies).

Lo studio prende esame diverse forme di paura percepite dalle donne nello spazio pubblico milanese e le implicazioni che questo fenomeno ha per la loro vita quotidiana.

La ricerca si baserà su dati qualitativi raccolti attraverso *osservazioni etnografiche della zona, focus groups e interviste individuali con persone maggiorenti che si identificano come donne, sono socializzate donne o sono state assegnate femmine alla nascita e che vivono, studiano o lavorano nelle aree limitrofe a Stazione Centrale o Stazione Porta Garibaldi da almeno un anno.*

Attraverso il form sottostante potete dimostrarvi interessate a partecipare. Compilatelo e verrete ricontattate!

Qualora non foste all'interno del campione di riferimento potete supportare la causa con dei preziosi passaparola.

Grazie per il vostro contributo, resto a disposizione.

Per domande, approfondimenti o informazioni contattatemi a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)

[nicolazzi.marta@gmail.com](mailto:nicolazzi.marta@gmail.com) [Switch accounts](#)

Not shared

\* Indicates required question

You can find it at:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdL1Hw\\_dOuEnL2oCKpfVpFE-w3iSIhSa5cijYR-HcDQbB8Hbg/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdL1Hw_dOuEnL2oCKpfVpFE-w3iSIhSa5cijYR-HcDQbB8Hbg/viewform)

## Preliminary Online Questionnaire

### "Fear and The City": il corpo, l'io e lo spazio

Ciao! Mi chiamo Marta Nicolazzi, sono una sociologa e sto facendo una ricerca di dottorato presso l'Università Statale di Milano, all'interno di NASP (Network for the Advancement of Social and Political Studies) investigando come la paura influenza i comportamenti e le identità delle donne Milanesi nello spazio pubblico.

Per descrivere, comprendere ed interpretare la pluralità di esperienze delle donne nello spazio pubblico, ho e avrò quindi bisogno di voi e dei vostri vissuti a partire dalla compilazione di questo questionario.

- In tutta la prima parte, se ti troverai davanti ad una domanda a cui preferisci non rispondere lasciala in bianco
- La seconda parte del questionario è prettamente di raccolta anagrafica e serve a validare il mio campione
- A meno che tu non scelga di lasciarmi la tua email per essere contattata per gli stadi successivi della ricerca -quali focus groups ed interviste- le tue risposte saranno completamente anonime
- Tutte le informazioni raccolte verranno comunque gestite solo ed esclusivamente dalla sottoscritta

Per domande, approfondimenti o informazioni contattatemi a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)

Grazie per il vostro tempo e per le vostre condivisioni!!!

[nicolazzi.marta@gmail.com](mailto:nicolazzi.marta@gmail.com) [Switch accounts](#)

Not shared

\* Indicates required question

You can find it at:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1nn4UfFJuh\\_d-gc5ok6MtL4-e8z26VBq2sdmigbOfCh8/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1nn4UfFJuh_d-gc5ok6MtL4-e8z26VBq2sdmigbOfCh8/edit)



Invitation to the Restitution Event

**Venerdì 17 Ottobre**  
**Dalle 19 alle 20:30**

Presso il CAM Falcone e Borsellino  
Corso Garibaldi 27, 20121 Milano (MI)



L'incontro sarà un momento di restituzione e condivisione dei risultati della ricerca *Bodies, Selves and Spaces: Gendered Experiences of Milanese Urban Settings*, condotta da **Marta Maria Nicolazzi**, dottoranda in Sociologia all'Università degli Studi di Milano. Attraverso interviste, focus group e camminate esplorative, lo studio ha indagato come le donne vivono e raccontano lo spazio urbano milanese, con particolare attenzione a Stazione Centrale e Stazione Garibaldi.

Durante l'evento verranno presentati i principali risultati e una selezione di artefatti prodotti nei workshop e nei percorsi partecipativi. L'incontro, aperto alla cittadinanza, è rivolto in particolare alle persone che hanno preso parte alla ricerca, per restituire in forma collettiva e anonima i risultati, creare uno spazio di ascolto reciproco e raccogliere feedback condivisi.



Participants' Table

Name	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Nationality	Profession	Field	Relationship with the field	Milan born & raised
Agnese	29	Cisgender	Lesbian/ Pansexual	Italian	PhD candidate	Centrale	Lives	No
Alex	38	Non binary	Bisexual/ Pansexual	Italian	Employee	Garibaldi	Works	Yes
Anna	27	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Employee	Centrale	Works	No
Anna Maria	61	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	University Professor	Garibaldi	Lives	No
Arianna	28	Cisgender	Lesbian	Italian	Psychologist	Garibaldi	Studies	Yes
Audrey	37	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Public administrator	Centrale & Garibaldi	Works in Centrale; lives in Garibaldi	Yes
Beatrice	27	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	PhD candidate	Centrale	Lives	Yes
Calipso	31	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian / Greek <sup>56</sup>	Human Resources	Garibaldi	Lives	Yes
Carlotta	31	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Photographer	Garibaldi	Lives	Yes
Chiara	58	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Employee	Centrale	Works	No
Clara	35	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Employee	Centrale	Lives (until 2021 worked in Garibaldi)	Yes
Delilah	31	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian / American <sup>57</sup>	University Professor	Garibaldi	Lives, studies and works	Yes
Difred	33	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Postdoctoral candidate	Garibaldi	Lives	Yes
Effemme	27	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Bank corporate governance	Centrale	Works	No
Elena	31	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Communication specialist	Centrale	Lives	No
Eleonora	29	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Researcher (market)	Garibaldi	Lives	No
Giada	36	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Lawyer	Garibaldi	Works	Yes
Giuliana	40	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Researcher (design)	Centrale	Lives	No
Ida	29	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Market Analyst	Centrale	Lives	Yes
Isabelle	24	Transgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Fashion Stylist	Garibaldi	Lives	No
Joy	29	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Researcher (clinical)	Centrale	Works	No
Kuru	35	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Migrant Reception Center Manager	Centrale	Lives	No
Laura	34	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Architect	Centrale	Lives	No
Linda	38	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Legal advisor	Garibaldi	Works	No
Luisa	28	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	University student	Centrale	Lives	Yes
Miele	30	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Copywriter	Garibaldi	Lives and works	No
Monica	30	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Journalist	Centrale	Lives	No
Nanà	38	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Service designer	Centrale	Lives	No
Nicoletta	30	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	PhD candidate	Garibaldi	Lives	Yes
Nilde	42	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Copywriter	Centrale	Works (lived in the area)	No
Nuvola	62	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Nursing manager	Centrale	Works	No
Serena	32	Cisgender	"As of today" Heterosexual	Italian/ Moroccan <sup>58</sup>	Fundraiser	Garibaldi	Lives	Yes
Servis	31	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Shopassistant & Municipal Councilor	Centrale	Lives	Yes
Shige	55	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Somala	Cultural mediator	Centrale & Garibaldi	Works	No
Siria	42	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Journalist	Centrale	Works	No
Tati	29	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	University student & Municipal Councilor	Centrale	Lives, studies and works	Yes
Viola	31	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Social media manager	Garibaldi	Lives and works	Yes
Zeta	28	Cisgender	Heterosexual	Italian	Employee	Centrale	Works	No

<sup>56</sup> Italian father and Greek mother

<sup>57</sup> Grandmother was born in the USA from Italian parents who took part in the 20<sup>th</sup> mass migration

<sup>58</sup> Second generation



### **INFORMAZIONI RELATIVE AL TRATTAMENTO DEI DATI PERSONALI NEL PROGETTO DI RICERCA AI SENSI DELL'ART. 13 DEL REGOLAMENTO UE 2016/679 PER I FOCUS GROUPS**

Ai sensi dell'art. 13 del Regolamento UE 2016/679 ("GDPR"), relativo alla protezione delle persone fisiche con riguardo al trattamento dei dati personali, nonché alla libera circolazione di tali dati e che abroga la direttiva 95/46/CE, e ai sensi del D. lgs. n. 196/2003 (così come modificato dal D. lgs. n. 101/2018), l'Università degli Studi di Milano informa di come saranno trattati i vostri dati personali nell'ambito della ricerca dal titolo *Body, Self and Space: How women's fear articulates in Milanese public spaces*.

#### **Titolare del trattamento e Responsabile per la protezione dei dati (RPD)**

Titolare del trattamento dei dati è l'Università degli Studi di Milano, nella persona del Rettore Elio Franzini, Via Festa del Perdono n. 7, 20122 Milano, [unimi@postecert.it](mailto:unimi@postecert.it)

Ai sensi degli art. 37 e seguenti del Regolamento UE 2016/679, l'Ateneo ha nominato il Responsabile per la protezione dei dati (RPD) individuato nell'Avv. Pierluigi Perri, c/o Dipartimento "Cesare Beccaria", Via Festa del Perdono n. 3, 20122 Milano, e-mail [dpo@unimi.it](mailto:dpo@unimi.it)

#### **Finalità, tipologia di dati e base giuridica del trattamento**

Per le finalità della ricerca spiegate nel foglio informativo, la ricercatrice dovrà trattare alcuni dati personali che La riguardano come il Suo nome e cognome, il Suo contatto, la sua età, l'identificarsi come donna o sia stata assegnata femmina alla nascita ed il vivere, lavorare o studiare nella zona indicata.

Durante le attività potrebbero emergere altri dati che possono includere elementi sensibili, come opinioni politiche, convinzioni filosofiche o religiose, status giuridico o sociale, origini o provenienza dei soggetti o di terzi. Queste informazioni verranno raccolte solo se risulteranno necessarie per gli scopi della ricerca.

La base giuridica del trattamento è il consenso dell'interessato al trattamento dei propri dati personali ai sensi dell'art. 6 c. 1 lett. A) del Reg. UE 2016/679. In qualunque momento può revocare il consenso al trattamento dei propri dati personali inviando una mail a [dpo@unimi.it](mailto:dpo@unimi.it) o al referente scientifico del progetto scrivendo una email a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it) -in questo caso sarà impossibile per lei continuare a partecipare al progetto di ricerca.

#### **Raccolta dati**

Prima dell'inizio della prima attività verrà compilata una breve scheda anagrafica che registrerà la Sua età, se si identifica come donna o è stata assegnata femmina alla nascita e se vive, studia o lavora in zona Stazione Centrale o Stazione Garibaldi.

La Sua partecipazione in relazione alle altre donne coinvolte produrrà una serie di materiali cartacei come appunti, fotografia o mappe.

Durante i tre *focus groups* sarà presente NOME E COGNOME, che in qualità di assistente alla ricercatrice, la aiuterà nella raccolta dati durante gli incontri, redigendo una sorta di verbale dell'incontro che prenda nota delle varie interazioni tra le partecipanti.



NOME E COGNOME manterrà totale riservatezza e consegnerà gli appunti raccolti alla ricercatrice al termine dell'incontro.

## **Modalità del trattamento e conservazione dei dati personali**

I dati raccolti saranno trattati nel rispetto dei principi di pertinenza, completezza e non eccedenza in relazione ai fini per i quali sono trattati, anche con l'ausilio di strumenti informatici e telematici atti a memorizzare e gestire i dati stessi, e, comunque, in modo tale da garantirne la sicurezza e tutelare la massima riservatezza della persona interessata.

Nel corso di tutte le fasi della ricerca il ricercatore conoscerà l'identità del partecipante, ma ai fini della conservazione e pubblicazione dei dati ogni partecipante non sarà più riconducibile alle sue dichiarazioni difatti i dati raccolti e le informazioni divulgate saranno sempre sotto forma di pseudonimo e generalizzate per cui sarà impossibile attribuirli ad una persona fisica identificata o identificabile.

Le partecipanti saranno quindi associate a degli pseudonimi. Le associazioni tra nomi delle partecipanti e relativi identificativi verranno memorizzate in formato elettronico, crittografate e conservate un *hard-disk* protetto da *password* insieme al modulo di consenso e tutti i dati contenenti informazioni personali o sensibili. Questi dati verranno eliminati al conseguimento del dottorato.

I dati prodotti durante i tre incontri ed il materiale derivato verranno invece conservati in un *cloud OneDrive* con doppia autenticazione dell'Università di Milano fino a cinque anni dopo il conseguimento del dottorato. Qualsiasi informazione identificativa o sensibile non direttamente pertinente alla ricerca verrà eliminata dai materiali cartacei (e.g. disegni, mappe, fotografie). Questi ultimi, dopo essere stati digitalizzati e salvati nel *cloud*, verranno distrutti entro una settimana dalla loro produzione, a meno che non sia di Suo gradimento tenerli per ricordo. Se di interesse, è possibile ricevere la digitalizzazione dei vari materiali prodotti.

I dati saranno trattati unicamente dalla referente scientifica del progetto Marta Maria Nicolazzi e non saranno diffusi né trasferiti verso Paesi terzi o organizzazioni internazionali. Neanche l'assistente di ricerca NOME E COGNOME avrà accesso ad alcun database contenente i dati raccolti a nessuno stadio della ricerca.

I dati non saranno ceduti a terzi né durante né alla fine della ricerca ma saranno oggetto di pubblicazione su riviste scientifiche, presentazione a convegni in forma anonima ed aggregata.

## **Diritti dell'Interessata**

E' diritto dell'interessata esercitare ai sensi degli artt. da 15 a 22 del RGPD il diritto di chiedere l'accesso ai dati personali che la riguardano, il diritto di chiedere la rettifica o la cancellazione degli stessi, il diritto di chiedere la limitazione del trattamento, il diritto di opporsi al trattamento, il diritto di chiedere la portabilità dei dati, rivolgendosi al Titolare del trattamento anche per il tramite del Responsabile della Protezione dei dati scrivendo una e mail a [dpo@unimi.it](mailto:dpo@unimi.it) oppure al referente scientifico del progetto scrivendo una e mail a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)

## **Diritto di proporre reclamo a un'Autorità di controllo o a un'Autorità giudiziaria**

Le persone interessate che ritengono che il trattamento dei dati personali a loro riferiti avvenga in violazione di quanto previsto dal Regolamento hanno il diritto di proporre reclamo al Garante come previsto dall'art. 77 del Regolamento stesso o di adire le opportune sedi giudiziarie ai sensi dell'art.79 del Regolamento.



**ESPRESSIONE DI CONSENSO AL TRATTAMENTO DEI DATI PERSONALI**

Io sottoscritto \_\_\_\_\_

letto le informazioni in merito al trattamento dei dati personali fornite ai sensi dell'art. 13 del Reg.

UE 2016/679 e riguardanti la ricerca di cui al foglio informativo dichiaro di aver compreso con esattezza

quanto ivi indicato e in piena libertà e consapevolezza

<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	Al trattamento dei miei dati personali come indicato in questo documento
<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	Alla conservazione digitale dei materiali prodotti (e.g. appunti, disegni, mappe, fotografie)
<input type="checkbox"/>	DESIDERO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON DESIDERO	Ricevere una copia digitale dei materiali prodotti

\_\_\_\_\_  
LUOGO DATA

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRMA PARTECIPANTE

\_\_\_\_\_  
LUOGO DATA

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRMA RESPONSABILE DI PROGETTO



## FOGLIO INFORMATIVO FOCUS GROUPS

*Body, Self and Space: How women's fear articulates in Milanese public spaces.*

Da invitata a partecipare alla ricerca condotta da Marta Maria Nicolazzi all'interno del dottorato di ricerca SOMET – Sociology and Methodology of Social Research, è un Suo diritto essere informata circa lo scopo e le caratteristiche dello studio, sui rischi e benefici dello stesso affinché Lei possa decidere in modo consapevole e libero se partecipare. La invitiamo quindi a leggere attentamente quanto riportato di seguito e l'informativa privacy allegata. La lettura complessiva richiederà circa 10 minuti.

La ricercatrice la potrà guidare attraverso i documenti e sarà a disposizione per rispondere a qualsiasi domanda ed informazione anche successivamente al **+393476700941** o via email [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)

### **Il suo profilo**

- È maggiorenne;
- Si identifica come donna o è stata assegnata femmina alla nascita;
- Vive, studia o lavora in zona Stazione Centrale o Stazione Garibaldi.

### **Scopi ed obiettivi dello studio**

Questo studio prende in esame diverse forme di paura percepite dalle donne nello spazio pubblico milanese e le implicazioni che questo fenomeno ha per la vita quotidiana di queste ultime. Interrogandosi su come si articola la paura delle donne negli spazi pubblici di Milano si ambisce a comprendere quali siano i processi che producono e riproducono la paura delle donne negli/per gli spazi pubblici; che origini e fondamenti hanno questi meccanismi e se comportano implicazioni su identità e comportamenti dei soggetti coinvolti.

### **La sua partecipazione**

La Sua partecipazione è completamente libera e volontaria, il rifiuto di partecipare non comporterà alcuna conseguenza. Non ci sono vincoli espliciti o impliciti a partecipare. Ai fini dell'esito della ricerca Le si chiede l'impegno a partecipare a tutti e tre gli incontri, all'interno dei quali potrà però decidere di non condurre una o più attività come non rispondere ad una o più domande senza dover motivare tale scelta.

Se dovesse cambiare idea e volesse ritirarsi, in qualsiasi momento è libera di farlo senza dover fornire alcuna spiegazione. In caso di ritiro dopo che alcuni dati sono stati raccolti, verrà chiesto il consenso all'utilizzo dei dati raccolti fino a quel momento. A consenso negato i dati saranno distrutti salvo che siano già stati elaborati ai fini della ricerca.

Il suo coinvolgimento nel progetto prevede la partecipazione a tre incontri di gruppo con altre sei/otto partecipanti. Nello specifico Le verrà chiesto:

1. Di interagire insieme con pennarelli e post-it sul cartaceo della mappa del quartiere interrogandoci sul vostro utilizzo degli spazi-due ore;
2. Di partecipare ad una camminata esplorativa di gruppo dell'area designata con particolare focus sui luoghi emersi nel *focus group* precedente, scattando foto e prendendo appunti-due ore;
3. Di riflettere collettivamente sul territorio in questione e sulle esperienze di questi incontri-un'ora.



Data, ora e luoghi degli incontri verranno comunicati in un secondo momento, cercando di accomodare le necessità di tutte le partecipanti. Durante tutti e tre gli incontri sarà presente NOME E COGNOME, che in qualità di assistente di ricerca, supporterà la ricercatrice solo nella raccolta dati relativa a questa attività.

### **Trattamento dei dati personali**

Tutte le informazioni relative al trattamento dei suoi dati personali sono contenute nell'apposita informativa redatta ai sensi dell'art. 13 del Reg. 2016/679 (GDPR) rilasciata unitamente al presente foglio informativo.

### **Potenziali rischi**

Partecipando a questa ricerca non si preventivano potenziali rischi specifici. Va però tenuto in considerazione che, poiché alcune delle domande potrebbero risultare più personali e delicate di altre, potrebbero rievocare in te ricordi poco piacevoli e/o suscitare in te emozioni dolorose. Se in qualsiasi momento ti senti a disagio, puoi saltare la risposta a una domanda o interrompere la partecipazione, temporaneamente o permanentemente.

### **Potenziali benefici**

Partecipare a questo progetto contribuirebbe direttamente alla creazione di pratiche spaziali alternative e nuove forme di conoscenza che ripensino il concetto più ampio di sicurezza e rivendichino gli spazi pubblici come luoghi non solo maschili: verso una città a misura di tuttè!

### **Altre informazioni importanti**

Questo studio è stato approvato dal Comitato Etico dell'Università degli Studi di Milano.

L'originale del Consenso informato da Lei firmato verrà conservato dalla responsabile del presente studio, mentre Lei ha diritto a riceverne una copia.

Può parlare liberamente ad altre persone di questo studio, se lo ritiene necessario o desidera.

Di seguito, i contatti a cui rivolgersi per approfondimenti o in caso di reclami e lamentele:

Titolare del trattamento dei dati Università degli Studi di Milano	Elio Franzini <a href="mailto:rettore@unimi.it">rettore@unimi.it</a>
Responsabile della protezione dei dati Data Protection Officer di Ateneo	Avv. Pierluigi Perri <a href="mailto:dpo@unimi.it">dpo@unimi.it</a>
Referenti scientifiche dello studio	Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto <a href="mailto:raffaella.ferrerocamoletto@unito.it">raffaella.ferrerocamoletto@unito.it</a> Annalisa Murgia <a href="mailto:annalisa.murgia@unimi.it">annalisa.murgia@unimi.it</a>

**Grazie per il tempo dedicato a informarsi sul progetto e per aver preso in considerazione la partecipazione volontaria a questa ricerca.**

Infine, con la presente **dichiaro di aver fornito alla partecipante informazioni complete e spiegazioni dettagliate** circa la natura, le finalità, le procedure e la durata di questo progetto di ricerca attraverso sia **l'informativa di consenso che di privacy**.

In fede,

Data

Marta Maria Nicolazzi



**ESPRESSIONE DI CONSENSO INFORMATO**

Io sottoscritta \_\_\_\_\_ dichiaro di:

- Aver ricevuto copia e letto sia l’informativa privacy che il documento informativo relativo al presente modulo di consenso;
- Aver ricevuto spiegazioni ed informazioni esaurienti in merito alla ricerca in oggetto che mi hanno permesso di comprendere scopi ed obiettivi del progetto come anche rischi e benefici relativi alla mia partecipazione;
- Aver potuto discutere tali spiegazioni, di aver potuto porre tutte le domande che ho ritenuto necessarie e di aver ricevuto in merito risposte soddisfacenti;
- Aver compreso che la mia partecipazione al progetto è completamente volontaria. Non ci sono vincoli espliciti o impliciti a partecipare e posso decidere di non condurre una o più attività come non rispondere ad una o più domande;
- Aver compreso che al fianco della ricercatrice sarà presente un’assistente che sarà coinvolta solo per questa fase di raccolta dati;
- Accettare che i dati raccolti attraverso il mio contributo vengano archiviati con pseudonimo e poi adoperati per pubblicazioni, rapporti e ricerche future mantenendo gli accordi di riservatezza presi attraverso questi moduli;
- Essere stata informata del mio diritto di ritirarmi in qualsiasi momento dalla ricerca senza fornire spiegazioni e senza alcuna conseguenza ma una volta completata la ricerca e analizzati i dati, non sarà più possibile ritirare i dati forniti;

Infine, alla luce delle informazioni che mi sono state fornite:

<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	A partecipare ai focus groups
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\_\_\_\_\_  
LUOGO DATA

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRMA PARTECIPANTE

\_\_\_\_\_  
LUOGO DATA

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRMA RESPONSABILE DI PROGETTO



Scheda Anagrafica

- Pseudonimo: \_\_\_\_\_;
- Anno di nascita \_\_\_\_\_;
- si identifica come donna  è stata assegnata femmina alla nascita;
- vive  lavora  studia in zona Stazione Centrale/ Garibaldi da almeno un anno;
- Origini: \_\_\_\_\_;
- Orientamento sessuale: \_\_\_\_\_;
- Professione: \_\_\_\_\_;



## Focus Groups Outline

Incontro N°1-Conosciamoci attraverso lo spazio

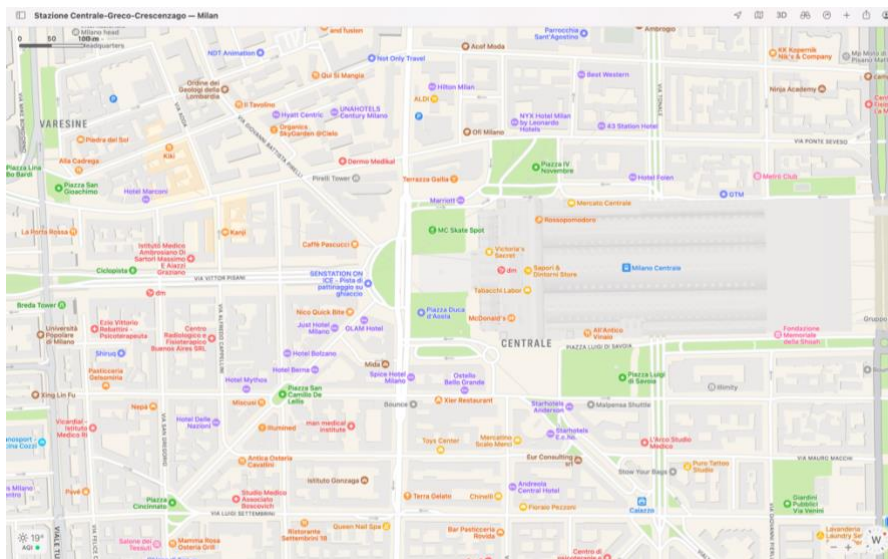
Durata: poco meno di 2 ore

1. Spiegazione e firma moduli consenso e privacy
2. Icebreaker: sottoponendo al gruppo l'immagine sottostante verrà chiesto che cosa rappresenta questo Cluster, a che domanda risponde.

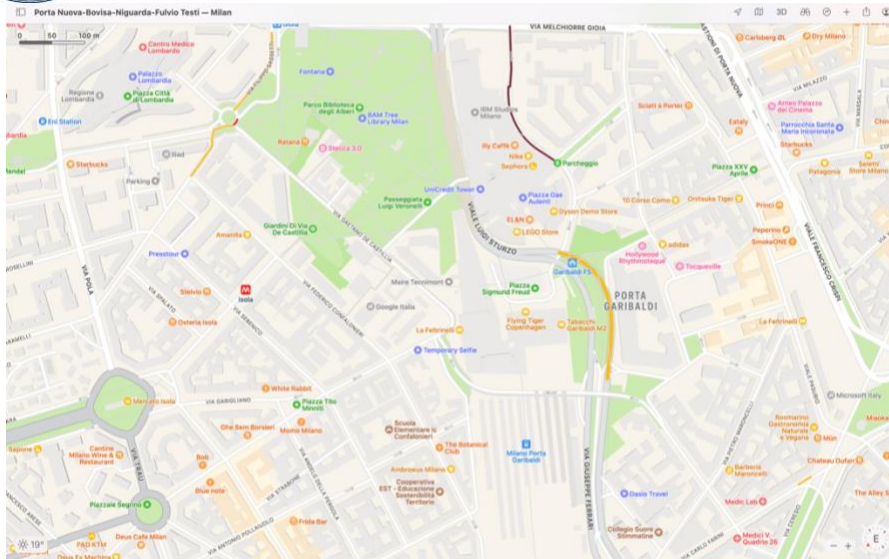


3. Svolgimento: le partecipanti saranno invitate ad interagire con una grande mappa della zona interessata (e.g. vedi esempio per zona nelle foto sottostanti) stampata in A0 con pennarelli ed adesivi. Il focus principale della loro interazione verterà sull'utilizzo degli spazi:

- Quali sono i luoghi che frequentate di più? Perché?
- Ci sono zone che evitate? Perché?
- Quali emozioni vi suscitano i luoghi che avete sottolineato?
- Come interagiscono gli elementi architettonici con le vostre sensazioni negli spazi che avete passato in rassegna finora? E le persone?



Zona Stazione Centrale



Zona Pt. Garibaldi

Incontro N°2-Verso un'etnografia collettiva

Durata: circa un'ora

Svolgimento: percorso di camminata esplorativa per l'area designata-con particolare focus sui luoghi emersi nel focus group precedente-invitando le partecipanti a fotografare e prendere appunti.

Incontro N°3-Tiriamo le fila

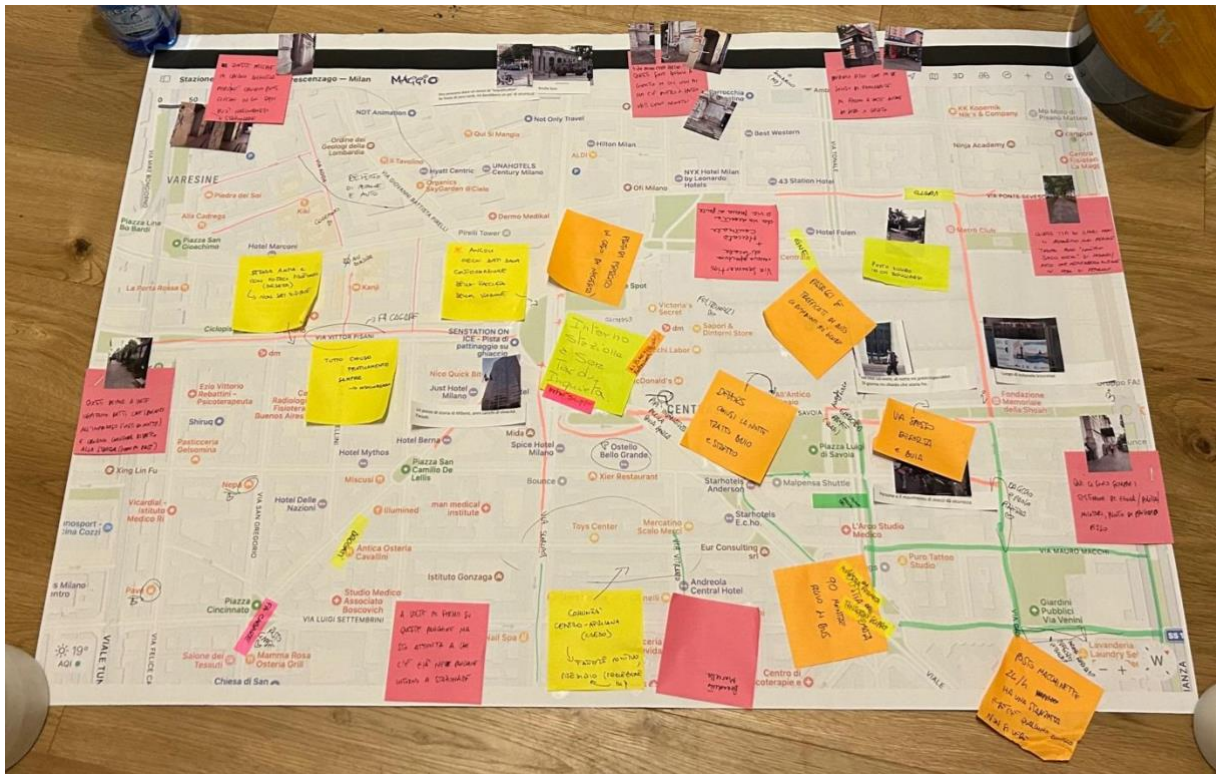
Durata: circa un'ora

Svolgimento: stampe delle foto scattate durante la camminata verranno fornite alle partecipanti assieme alla mappa da loro elaborata nel primo focus group. Verrà chiesto loro di:

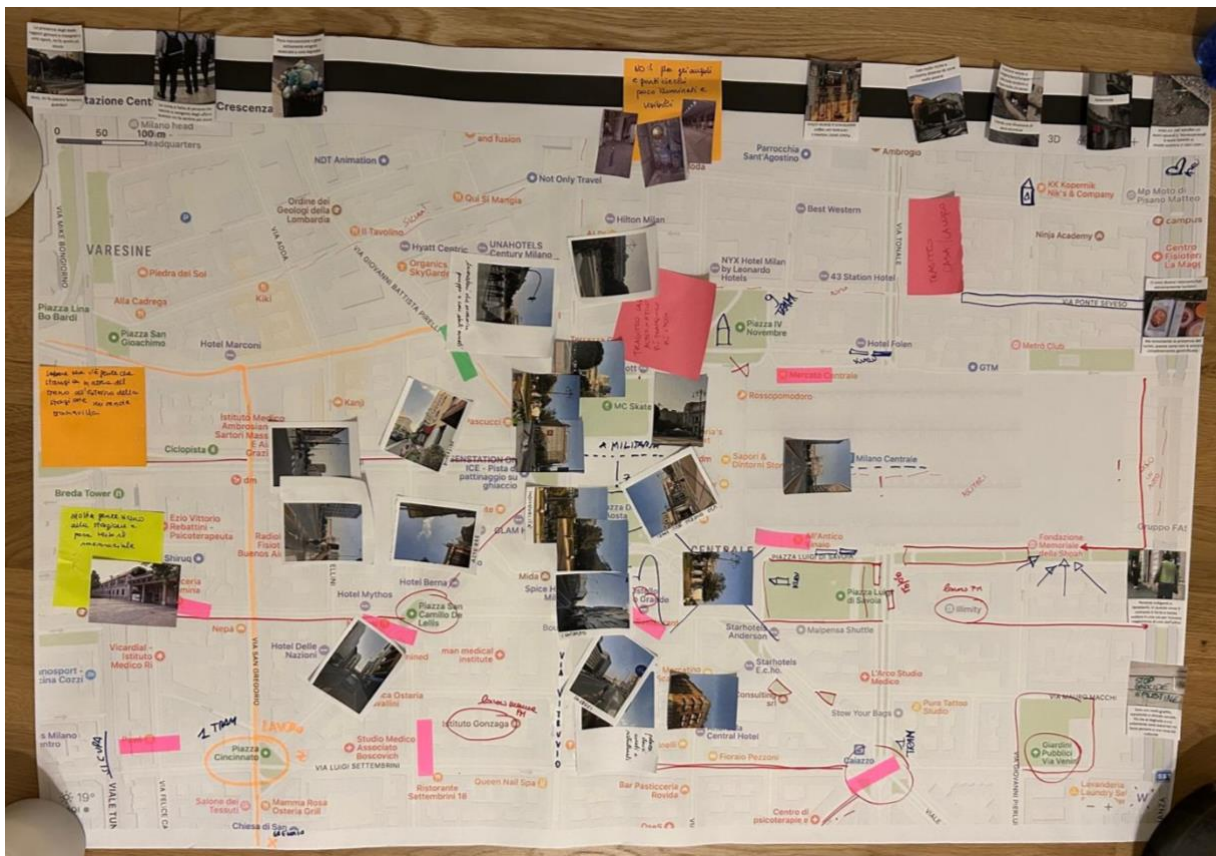
- Elaborare sul perché sono state scattate certe foto;
- Cosa suscitano in loro;
- Se l'autrice della foto desidera può condividere con il gruppo il suo retro-pensiero;
- Chi se la sente può condividere gli appunti che ha preso durante la camminata o anche altre riflessioni collegate all'esperienza con il gruppo;
- Come vi siete sentite a camminare tutte insieme?
- È cambiata la vostra interazione con lo spazio?



Focus Group Maps



Centrale, Maggio 2024

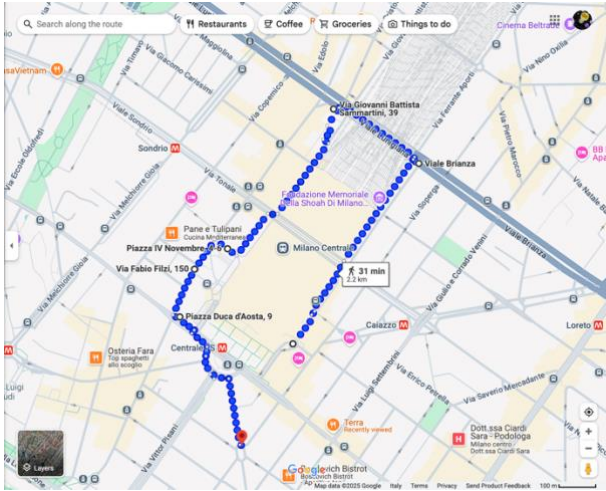


Centrale, Luglio 2024

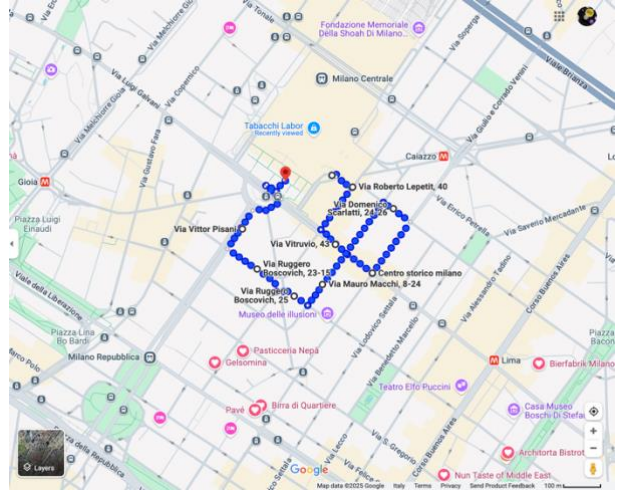




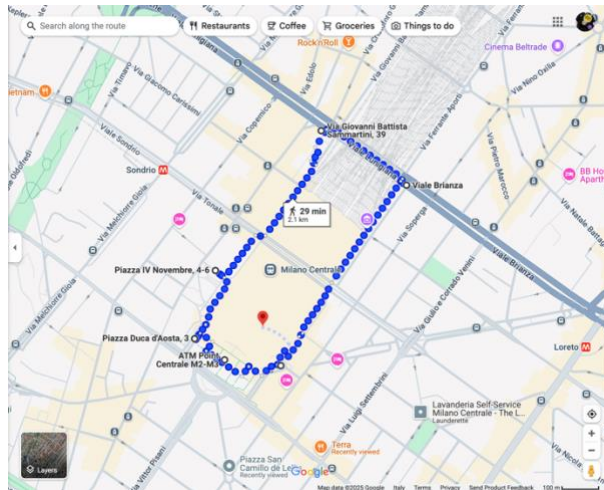
Walking Trajectories



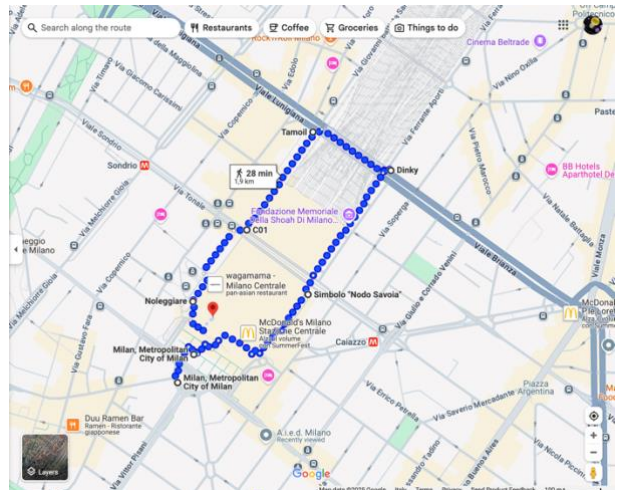
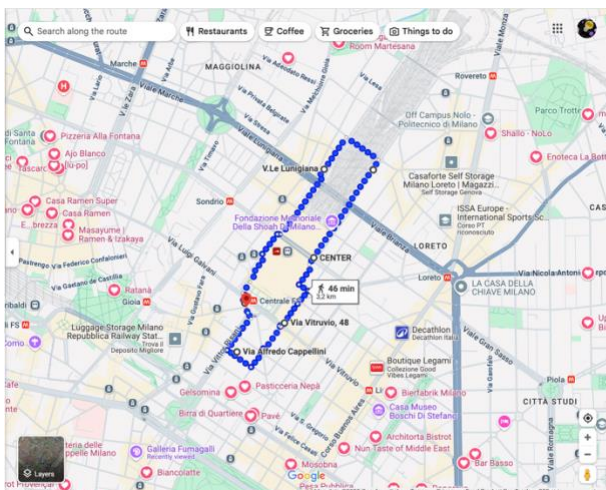
Focus Group Centrale, Maggio 2024



Focus Group Centrale, Luglio 2024



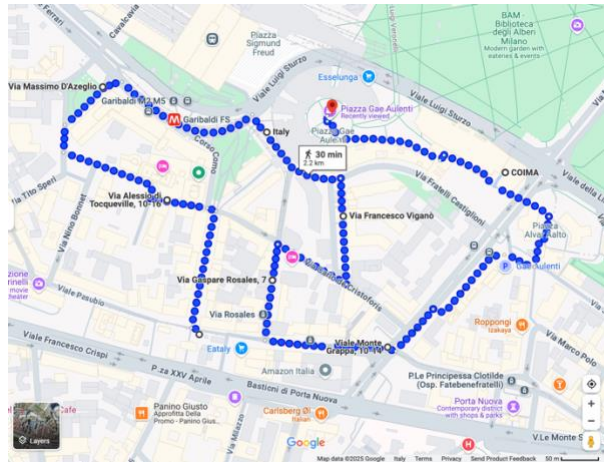
Focus Group Centrale, Novembre 2024



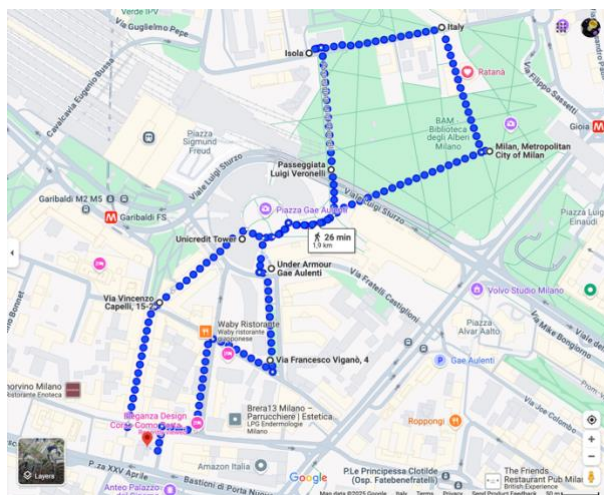


Night walk Centrale, May 2025

Night walk Centrale, June 2025



Focus Group Garibaldi, Giugno 2024



Night walk Garibaldi, Giugno 2025



### **INFORMAZIONI RELATIVE AL TRATTAMENTO DEI DATI PERSONALI NEL PROGETTO DI RICERCA AI SENSI DELL'ART. 13 DEL REGOLAMENTO UE 2016/679 PER LE INTERVISTE**

Ai sensi dell'art. 13 del Regolamento UE 2016/679 ("GDPR"), relativo alla protezione delle persone fisiche con riguardo al trattamento dei dati personali, nonché alla libera circolazione di tali dati e che abroga la direttiva 95/46/CE, e ai sensi del D. lgs. n. 196/2003 (così come modificato dal D. lgs. n. 101/2018), l'Università degli Studi di Milano informa di come saranno trattati i vostri dati personali nell'ambito della ricerca dal titolo *Body, Self and Space: How women's fear articulates in Milanese public spaces*.

#### **Titolare del trattamento e Responsabile per la protezione dei dati (RPD)**

Titolare del trattamento dei dati è l'Università degli Studi di Milano, nella persona del Rettore Elio Franzini, Via Festa del Perdono n. 7, 20122 Milano, [unimi@postecert.it](mailto:unimi@postecert.it)

Ai sensi degli art. 37 e seguenti del Regolamento UE 2016/679, l'Ateneo ha nominato il Responsabile per la protezione dei dati (RPD) individuato nell'Avv. Pierluigi Perri, c/o Dipartimento "Cesare Beccaria", Via Festa del Perdono n. 3, 20122 Milano, e-mail [dpo@unimi.it](mailto:dpo@unimi.it)

#### **Finalità, tipologia di dati e base giuridica del trattamento**

Per le finalità della ricerca spiegate nel foglio informativo, la ricercatrice dovrà trattare alcuni dati personali che La riguardano come il Suo nome e cognome, il Suo contatto, la sua età, l'identificarsi come donna o sia stata assegnata femmina alla nascita ed il vivere, lavorare o studiare nella zona indicata.

Durante le attività potrebbero emergere altri dati che possono includere elementi sensibili, come opinioni politiche, convinzioni filosofiche o religiose, status giuridico o sociale, origini o provenienza dei soggetti o di terzi. Queste informazioni verranno raccolte solo se risulteranno necessarie per gli scopi della ricerca.

La base giuridica del trattamento è il consenso dell'interessato al trattamento dei propri dati personali ai sensi dell'art. 6 c. 1 lett. A) del Reg. UE 2016/679. In qualunque momento può revocare il consenso al trattamento dei propri dati personali inviando una mail a [dpo@unimi.it](mailto:dpo@unimi.it) o al referente scientifico del progetto scrivendo una email a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it) -in questo caso sarà impossibile per lei continuare a partecipare al progetto di ricerca.

#### **Raccolta dati**

La Sua partecipazione consiste nello svolgere un'intervista di circa un'ora che verrà audio-registrata. Nell'ultima fase dell'intervista le verrà chiesto di disegnare una mappa.

#### **Modalità del trattamento e conservazione dei dati personali**

I dati raccolti saranno trattati nel rispetto dei principi di pertinenza, completezza e non eccedenza in relazione ai fini per i quali sono trattati, anche con l'ausilio di strumenti informatici e telematici atti a memorizzare e gestire i dati stessi, e, comunque, in modo tale da garantirne la sicurezza e tutelare la massima riservatezza della persona interessata.

Nel corso di tutte le fasi della ricerca il ricercatore conoscerà l'identità del partecipante, ma ai fini della conservazione e pubblicazione dei dati ogni partecipante non sarà più riconducibile alle sue dichiarazioni difatti i dati raccolti e le informazioni divulgate saranno sempre sotto forma di pseudonimo e generalizzate per cui sarà impossibile attribuirli ad una persona fisica identificata o identificabile.



Le partecipanti saranno quindi associate a degli pseudonimi. Le associazioni tra nomi delle partecipanti e relativi identificativi verranno memorizzate in formato elettronico, crittografate e conservate un *hard-disk* protetto da *password* insieme al modulo di consenso e tutti i dati contenenti informazioni personali o sensibili. Questi dati verranno eliminati al conseguimento del dottorato.

Il *transcript* dell'intervista ed il materiale derivato verranno invece conservati in un *cloud OneDrive* con doppia autenticazione dell'Università di Milano fino a cinque anni dopo il conseguimento del dottorato. Qualsiasi informazione identificativa o sensibile non direttamente pertinente alla ricerca verrà eliminata dal *transcript* e dalla mappa prodotta nell'attività conclusiva. Dopo essere stata digitalizzata e salvata nel *cloud*, la mappa verrà distrutta entro una settimana dalla produzione, a meno che non sia di Suo gradimento tenerli per ricordo. Entro un mese dalla data dell'intervista, il *transcrip* verrà prodotto e salvato nel *cloud* mentre la registrazione corrispondente verrà eliminata. Se fosse interessata è possibile ricevere una copia del *transcrip* come della mappa digitalizzata.

I dati saranno trattati unicamente dalla referente scientifica del progetto Marta Maria Nicolazzi e non saranno diffusi né trasferiti verso Paesi terzi o organizzazioni internazionali.

I dati non saranno ceduti a terzi né durante né alla fine della ricerca ma saranno oggetto di pubblicazione su riviste scientifiche, presentazione a convegni in forma anonima ed aggregata.

### **Diritti dell'Interessata**

E' diritto dell'interessata esercitare ai sensi degli artt. da 15 a 22 del RGPD il diritto di chiedere l'accesso ai dati personali che la riguardano, il diritto di chiedere la rettifica o la cancellazione degli stessi, il diritto di chiedere la limitazione del trattamento, il diritto di opporsi al trattamento, il diritto di chiedere la portabilità dei dati, rivolgendosi al Titolare del trattamento anche per il tramite del Responsabile della Protezione dei dati scrivendo una e mail a [dpo@unimi.it](mailto:dpo@unimi.it) oppure al referente scientifico del progetto scrivendo una e mail a [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)

### **Diritto di proporre reclamo a un'Autorità di controllo o a un'Autorità giudiziaria**

Le persone interessate che ritengono che il trattamento dei dati personali a loro riferiti avvenga in violazione di quanto previsto dal Regolamento hanno il diritto di proporre reclamo al Garante come previsto dall'art. 77 del Regolamento stesso o di adire le opportune sedi giudiziarie ai sensi dell'art.79 del Regolamento.



**ESPRESSIONE DI CONSENSO AL TRATTAMENTO DEI DATI PERSONALI**

Io sottoscritto \_\_\_\_\_

letto le informazioni in merito al trattamento dei dati personali fornite ai sensi dell'art. 13 del Reg.

UE 2016/679 e riguardanti la ricerca di cui al foglio informativo dichiaro di aver compreso con esattezza

quanto ivi indicato e in piena libertà e consapevolezza

<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	Al trattamento dei miei dati personali come indicato in questo documento
<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	Alla conservazione digitale dei materiali prodotti (e.g. registrazione dell'intervista, mappa)
<input type="checkbox"/>	DESIDERO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON DESIDERO	Ricevere una copia del <i>transcrip</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	DESIDERO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON DESIDERO	Ricevere una copia della mappa digitalizzata

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LUOGO DATA

FIRMA PARTECIPANTE

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LUOGO DATA

FIRMA RESPONSABILE DI PROGETTO



## FOGLIO INFORMATIVO INTERVISTE

*Body, Self and Space: How women's fear articulates in Milanese public spaces.*

Da invitata a partecipare alla ricerca condotta da Marta Maria Nicolazzi all'interno del dottorato di ricerca SOMET – Sociology and Methodology of Social Research, è un Suo diritto essere informata circa lo scopo e le caratteristiche dello studio, sui rischi e benefici dello stesso affinché Lei possa decidere in modo consapevole e libero se partecipare. La invitiamo quindi a leggere attentamente quanto riportato di seguito e l'informativa privacy allegata. La lettura complessiva richiederà circa 5 minuti.

La ricercatrice la potrà guidare attraverso i documenti e sarà a disposizione per rispondere a qualsiasi domanda ed informazione anche successivamente al +393476700941 o via email [marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it](mailto:marta.nicolazzi@unimi.it)

### **Il suo profilo**

Ha partecipato ai *focus groups* relativi alla fase precedente del progetto in questione.

### **Scopi ed obiettivi dello studio**

Questo studio prende in esame diverse forme di paura percepite dalle donne nello spazio pubblico milanese e le implicazioni che questo fenomeno ha per la vita quotidiana di queste ultime. Interrogandosi su come si articola la paura delle donne negli spazi pubblici di Milano si ambisce a comprendere quali siano i processi che producono e riproducono la paura delle donne negli/per gli spazi pubblici; che origini e fondamenti hanno questi meccanismi e se comportano implicazioni su identità e comportamenti dei soggetti coinvolti.

### **La sua partecipazione**

La Sua partecipazione prevede un'intervista audio-registrata della durata di circa un'ora che approfondirà temi già trattati negli incontri precedenti come, per esempio, il proprio corpo in un dato spazio della città e le percezioni di (in)sicurezza nello spazio pubblico.

La Sua è completamente libera e volontaria, il rifiuto di partecipare non comporterà alcuna conseguenza. Non ci sono vincoli espliciti o impliciti a partecipare. Inoltre, può decidere di non condurre una o più attività come non rispondere ad una o più domande senza dover motivare tale scelta.

Se dovesse cambiare idea e volesse ritirarsi, in qualsiasi momento è libera di farlo senza dover fornire alcuna spiegazione. In caso di ritiro dopo che alcuni dati sono stati raccolti, verrà chiesto il consenso all'utilizzo dei dati raccolti fino a quel momento. A consenso negato i dati saranno distrutti salvo che siano già stati elaborati ai fini della ricerca.

### **Trattamento dei dati personali**

Tutte le informazioni relative al trattamento dei suoi dati personali sono contenute nell'apposita informativa redatta ai sensi dell'art. 13 del Reg. 2016/679 (GDPR) rilasciata unitamente al presente foglio informativo.

### **Potenziali rischi**

Partecipando a questa ricerca non si preventivano potenziali rischi specifici. Va però tenuto in considerazione che, poiché alcune delle domande potrebbero risultare più personali e delicate di altre, potrebbero rievocare in



te ricordi poco piacevoli e/o suscitare in te emozioni dolorose. Se in qualsiasi momento ti senti a disagio, puoi saltare la risposta a una domanda o interrompere la partecipazione, temporaneamente o permanentemente.

## **Potenziali benefici**

Partecipare a questo progetto contribuirebbe direttamente alla creazione di pratiche spaziali alternative e nuove forme di conoscenza che ripensino il concetto più ampio di sicurezza e rivendichino gli spazi pubblici come luoghi non solo maschili: verso una città a misura di tuttø!

## **Altre informazioni importanti**

Questo studio è stato approvato dal Comitato Etico dell'Università degli Studi di Milano.

L'originale del Consenso informato da Lei firmato verrà conservato dalla responsabile del presente studio, mentre Lei ha diritto a riceverne una copia.

Può parlare liberamente ad altre persone di questo studio, se lo ritiene necessario o desidera.

Di seguito, i contatti a cui rivolgersi per approfondimenti o in caso di reclami e lamentele:

Titolare del trattamento dei dati Università degli Studi di Milano	Elio Franzini <a href="mailto:rettore@unimi.it">rettore@unimi.it</a>
Responsabile della protezione dei dati Data Protection Officer di Ateneo	Avv. Pierluigi Perri <a href="mailto:dpo@unimi.it">dpo@unimi.it</a>
Referenti scientifiche dello studio	Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto <a href="mailto:raffaella.ferrerocamoletto@unito.it">raffaella.ferrerocamoletto@unito.it</a>
	Annalisa Murgia <a href="mailto:annalisa.murgia@unimi.it">annalisa.murgia@unimi.it</a>

**Grazie per il tempo dedicato a informarsi sul progetto e per aver preso in considerazione la partecipazione volontaria a questa ricerca.**

Infine, con la presente **dichiaro di** aver fornito alla partecipante informazioni **complete e spiegazioni dettagliate** circa la natura, le finalità, le procedure e la durata di questo progetto di ricerca attraverso sia **l'informativa di consenso che di privacy**.

In fede,

Data

Marta Maria Nicolazzi



**ESPRESSIONE DI CONSENSO INFORMATO**

Io sottoscritta \_\_\_\_\_ dichiaro di:

- Aver partecipato ai *focus groups* relativi alla fase precedente del progetto in questione;
- Aver ricevuto copia e letto sia l’informativa privacy che il documento informativo relativo al presente modulo di consenso;
- Aver ricevuto spiegazioni ed informazioni esaurienti in merito alla ricerca in oggetto che mi hanno permesso di comprendere scopi ed obiettivi del progetto come anche rischi e benefici relativi alla mia partecipazione;
- Aver potuto discutere tali spiegazioni, di aver potuto porre tutte le domande che ho ritenuto necessarie e di aver ricevuto in merito risposte soddisfacenti;
- Aver compreso che la mia partecipazione al progetto è completamente volontaria. Non ci sono vincoli espliciti o impliciti a partecipare e posso decidere di non condurre una o più attività come non rispondere ad una o più domande;
- Accettare che i dati raccolti attraverso il mio contributo vengano archiviati con pseudonimo e poi adoperati per pubblicazioni, rapporti e ricerche future mantenendo gli accordi di riservatezza presi attraverso questi moduli;
- Essere stata informata del mio diritto di ritirarmi in qualsiasi momento dalla ricerca senza fornire spiegazioni e senza alcuna conseguenza ma una volta completata la ricerca e analizzati i dati, non sarà più possibile ritirare i dati forniti;

Infine, alla luce delle informazioni che mi sono state fornite:

<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	A partecipare ad un’intervista individuale
<input type="checkbox"/>	ACCONSENTO	<input type="checkbox"/>	NON ACCONSENTO	All’audio-registrazione

\_\_\_\_\_  
LUOGO DATA

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRMA PARTECIPANTE

\_\_\_\_\_  
LUOGO DATA

\_\_\_\_\_  
FIRMA RESPONSABILE DI PROGETTO



## Interview Outline

Durata: un'ora circa

### *Introduzione*

- Raccontami quali sono le tue abitudini in questo quartiere
  - Quali sono i luoghi che frequenti di più? Perché?
  - Ci sono zone che tendi a evitare? Se sì, per quale motivo?
  - Come ti fanno sentire i luoghi che hai citato?

### *Il corpo nello spazio*

- Come pianifichi i tuoi spostamenti quotidiani? Quali sono i fattori che tieni principalmente da conto nell'organizzare come ti sposti nella città?
- Come scegli come ti vesti?
- Come i mezzi di trasporto sia pubblici e che privati a tua disposizione impattano i tuoi programmi?
- I racconti di episodi successi ad altre persone influenzano la tua percezione di uno spazio e come lo vivi? Se sì, come?

### *Elementi nelle percezioni*

- Ci sono elementi nello spazio pubblico che ti mettono a disagio? Se sì, quali e come mai?
- Che cosa contribuisce alla tua serenità nello spazio pubblico? Perché?

### *Percezioni su stereotipi giorno/notte & solitudine/ compagnia*

- Come ti senti in giro per la città da sola?
- Come ti senti in giro per la città in compagnia?
- Come ti senti in giro per la città di giorno?
- Come ti senti in giro per la città di notte?

### *Limitazioni e Resistenza*

- Ti è mai successo di aver dovuto rinunciare o limitare o cambiare i tuoi programmi per questioni di sicurezza legate allo spazio pubblico urbano?
- Pensi di aver mai attuato atteggiamenti di auto-protezione o di supporto ad altre donne in spazi pubblici? Vuoi raccontarmeli?
- Cosa ne pensi della frase "le strade sicure le fanno le donne che le attraversano"?

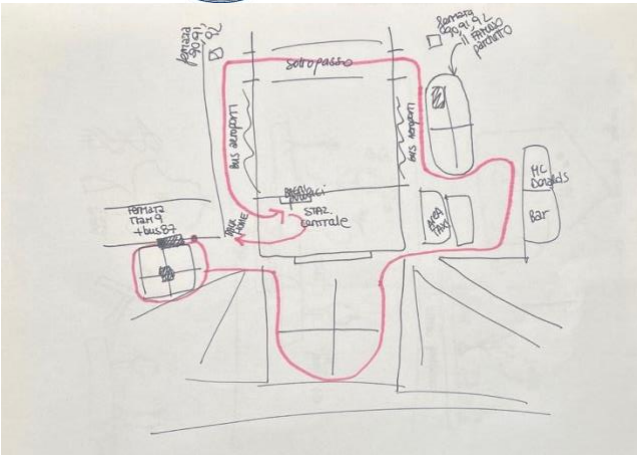
### *Attività conclusive*

- Ci sono questioni che non sono emerse o che non ti sei sentita di condividere in gruppo e che vorresti dirmi?
- Come entrano secondo te in relazione il corpo delle donne, la paura e lo spazio pubblico urbano? Riesci a rappresentarlo?

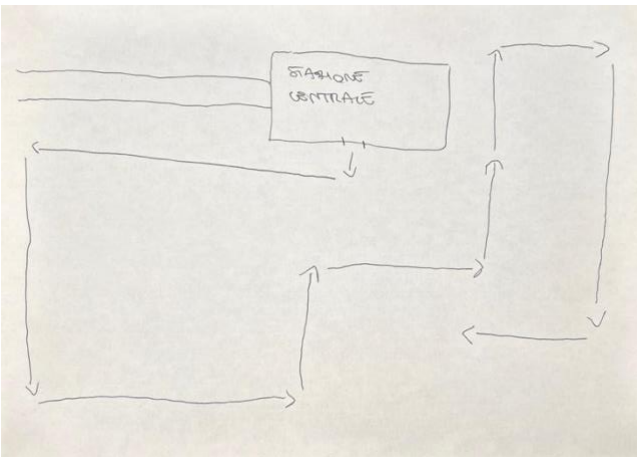
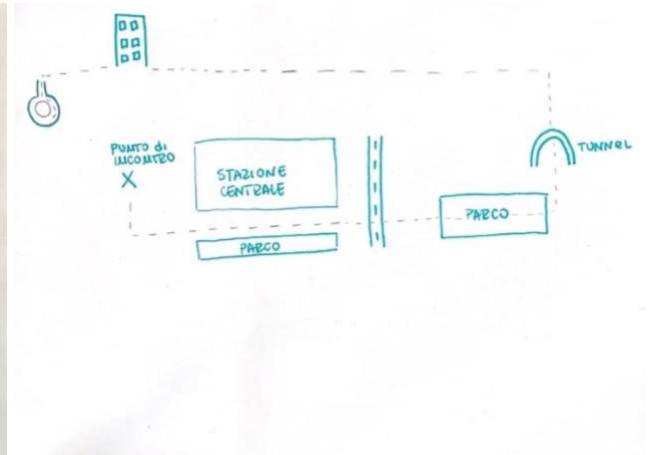
Solo per partecipanti *focus group*:

- E in fine, per favore, ora disegnami la mappa del percorso che abbiamo fatto insieme e raccontamela.

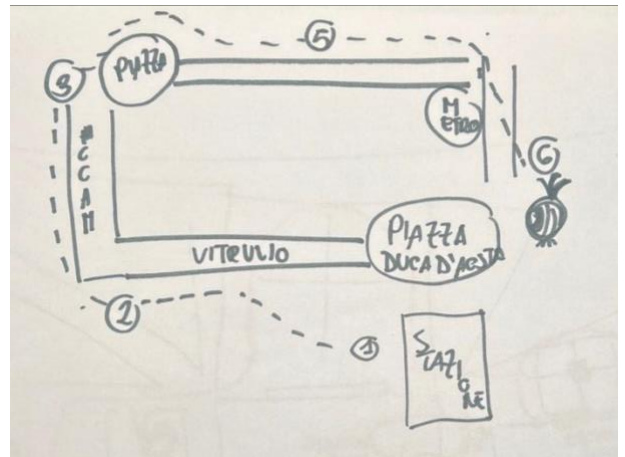


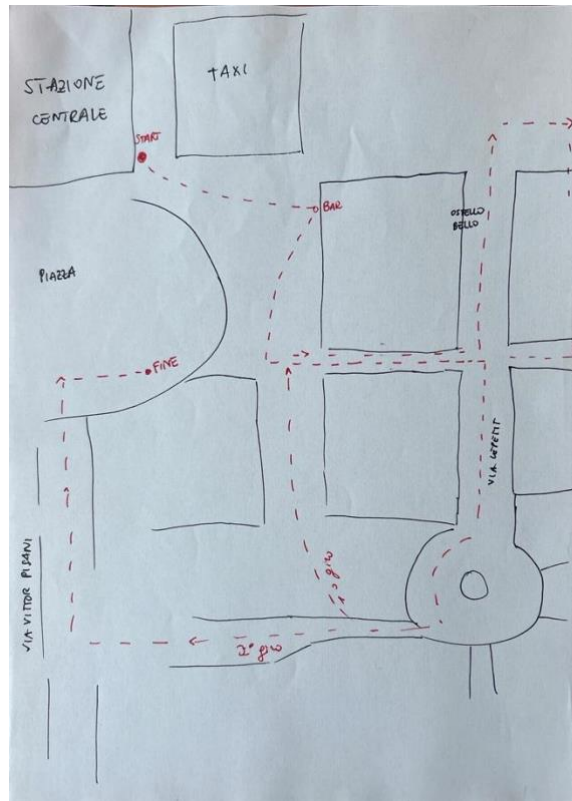
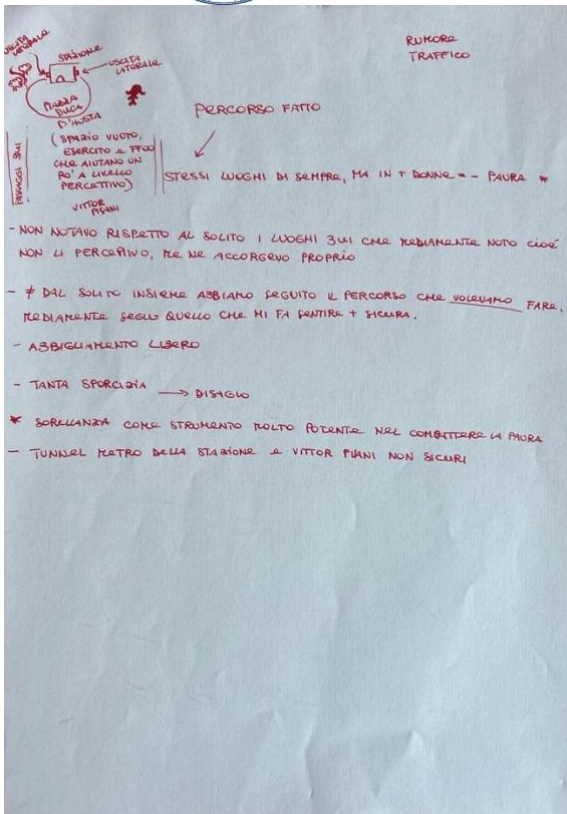


Centrale, Luglio 2024

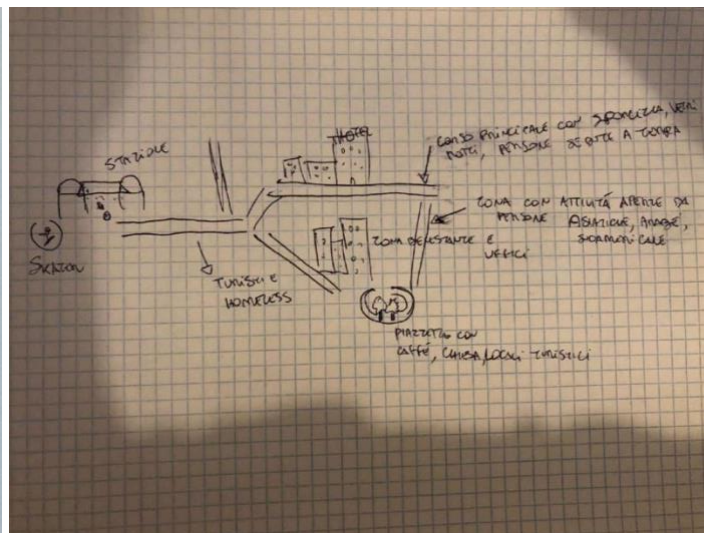
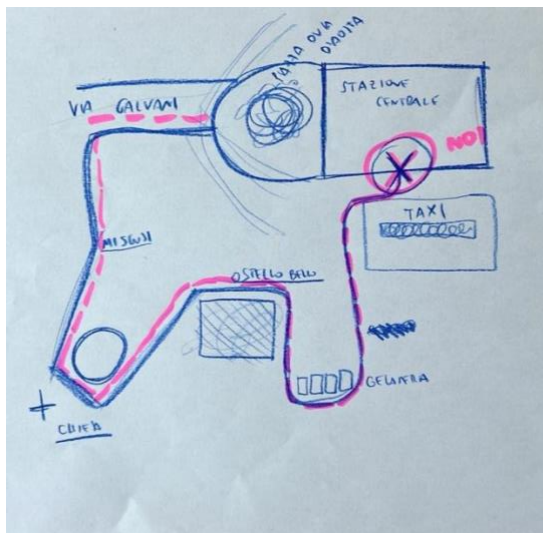


Centrale, Maggio 2024





Centrale, Novembre 2024



Centrale, Maggio 2024

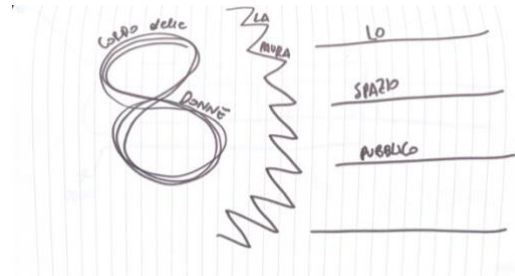
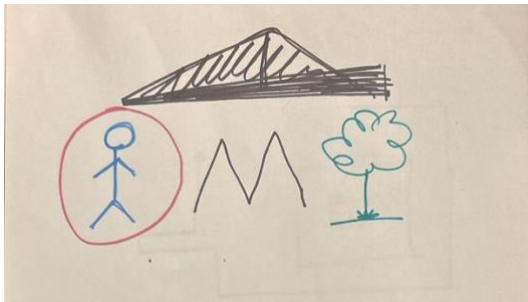




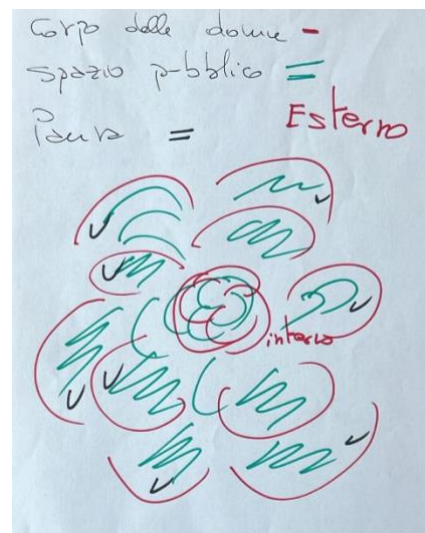
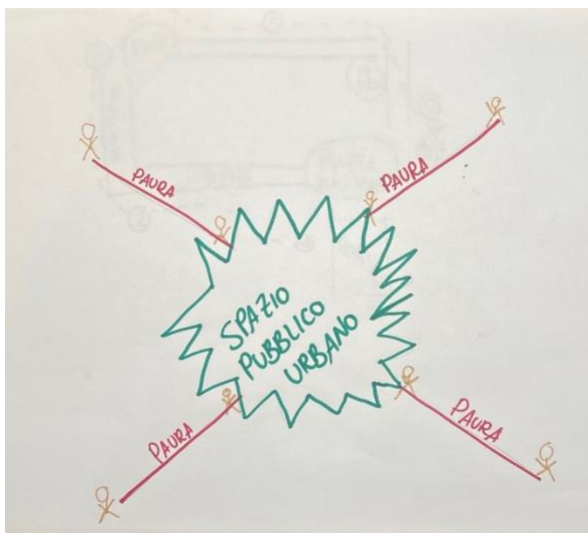




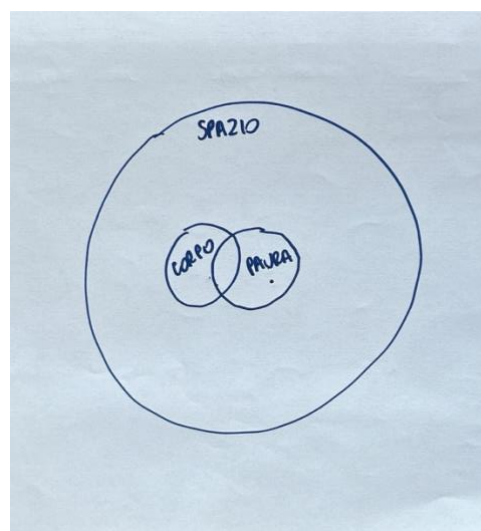
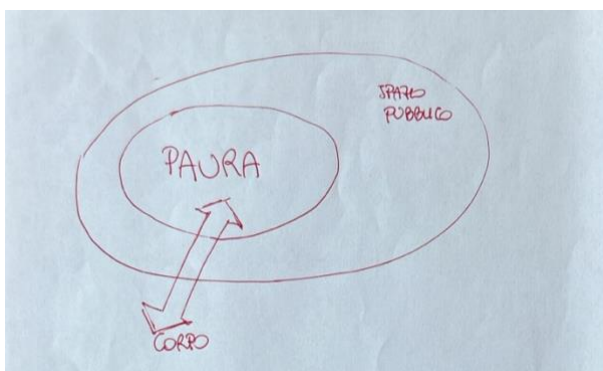
How do you think women's bodies, fear, and public spaces are connected?



As corrugate lines, in both drawings fear has the posture of mediating element.

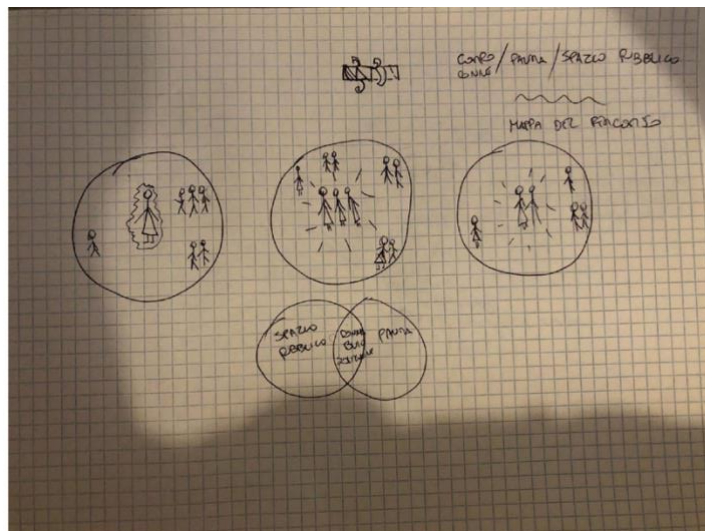
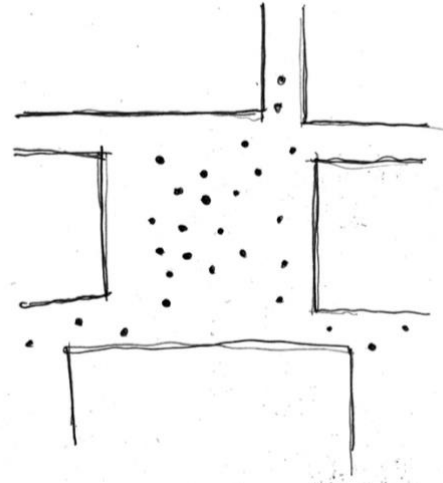
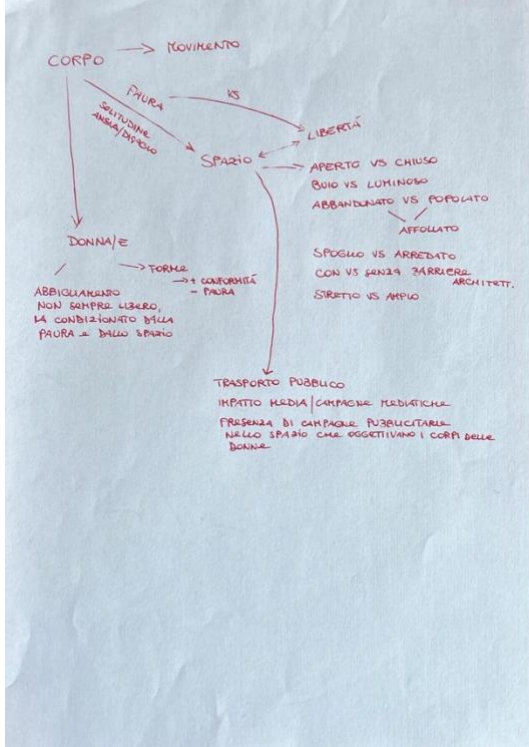


As red lines in the first drawing, as black signs the second: fear here has the posture of mediating element.





Relationship explained through mathematical sets.





This situated account is therefore not only methodological but embodied. Throughout this work, my own body has also been a portal and a self in motion: walking with participants, adjusting my pace in tunnels and concourses, feeling the drag of tiredness after late-night workshops, and learning to read the same routes differently as stories accumulated. Like the women whose testimonies compose this dissertation, I have navigated Centrale and Garibaldi through shifting calibrations of proximity, vulnerability, and solidarity, anchoring the dissertation's claims in the situated, accountable knowledge that my own movements have made possible (Haraway, 1988).