Gendered Urbanness and Women's Self-Defence in Mexico. From the Right to the City to the Right to Be Safe.

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Abstract (English)

This research explores the connection between anti-street harassment activism and the gendered right to access the city. Specifically, I address the political significance of self-defence politics and practices in Mexico City that are ignited by a national and regional women's struggle which reclaims a safer urban experience as a form of both discursive and embodied protest that advocates women's right to navigate the city against the backdrop of a socially and spatially constructed set of power relations that unfold in public spaces.

First, I map the foundational scholarship on the right to the city and its contemporary uses, advances and interrogations, from Henri Lefebvre's coining of the concept to the left academic critiques of the term's dismissal of identity-related differentiations among individuals. Then, I examine the mandates and hands-on strategies of grassroots female activism against street harassment in Mexico City and the role these play in calling upon women to appropriate the streets as a politicized intervention in the city life.

Considering the theoretical conceptualization of the right to the city and guided by the feminist orientations developed by Tovi Fenster and Shelley Buckingham —pioneer scholars of the analysis of the right to the city from a gender perspective— I suggest understanding women's disruptive appropriation of public spaces through anti-street harassment and self-defence culture as a form of political action that recreates the urban environment and contributes to signifying the meaning of the city.

Abstract (French)

Cette recherche explore les liens entre l'activisme contre le harcèlement de rue et les différents niveaux d'accès au droit à la ville selon le genre. Plus précisément, je me penche sur l'importance politique des pratiques et politiques d'autodéfense à Mexico déclenchées par une lutte nationale et régionale qui se bat pour une vie urbaine sûre. Cette lutte prend la forme de manifestations autant discursives que corporelles et incarnées, revendique le droit des femmes de naviguer la ville, et se déploie sur fond d'un ensemble de relations de pouvoir socialement et spatialement construites qui se manifestent dans l'espace public.

Je commence par retracer les textes fondamentaux sur le droit à la ville et ses invocations, avancés et interrogations contemporaines; d'Henri Lefebvre, qui est l'auteur de ce concept, aux universitaires de gauche qui reprochent à ce dernier de ne pas prendre en compte les différences entre les individus. Puis, j'examine les mandats, stratégies pratiques et mouvements féministes populaires contre le harcèlement de rue à Mexico et le rôle qu'ils jouent en appelant les femmes à s'approprier les rues au travers d'intervention politisées dans la vie urbaine.

Prenant en compte les conceptualisations théoriques du droit à la ville et guidée par les orientations féministes développées par Tovi Fenster et Shelley Buckingham—pionnières de l'analyse du droit à la ville sous l'ange du genre—Je propose de comprendre les gestes féminins d'appropriation perturbatrice de l'espace public au moyen d'une culture d'autodéfense contre le harcèlement de rue comme forme d'action politique qui recrée l'espace urbain et contribue à re-signifier le sens de la ville.

Abstract (Spanish)

Este proyecto de investigación explora el vínculo entre el activismo contra el acoso sexual callejero y el acceso a un derecho a la ciudad que es mediado por el género. Específicamente, en esta tesis abordo el significado político del discurso y las prácticas de autodefensa que en la Ciudad de México son impulsadas por un movimiento de mujeres nacional y regional que reclama una experiencia urbana más segura a través de formas de protesta discursiva y física que pugna por el derecho de las mujeres de navegar la ciudad, de cara a una serie de relaciones de poder construidas social y espacialmente y que se despliegan en el espacio público.

En un primer momento, esta investigación rastrea el trabajo académico fundacional sobre el derecho a la ciudad y sus usos, contribuciones e interrogaciones contemporáneas, desde el término acuñado por Henri Lefebvre hasta las críticas que han surgido sobre cómo el concepto ignora las diferenciaciones identitarias entre las personas que habitan la ciudad. Posteriormente, examino los principios y las estrategias prácticas propuestas por el activismo contra el acoso sexual callejero en la Ciudad de México y el papel que ello juega en invitar a otras mujeres a apropiarse de las calles como una intervención politizada a la vida en la ciudad. Tomando en cuenta la conceptualización teórica del derecho a la ciudad y guiada por las orientaciones feministas desarrolladas por Tovi Fenster y Shelley Buckingham (autoras pioneras en el análisis del derecho a la ciudad desde una perspectiva de género), finalmente propongo entender la apropiación disruptiva del espacio público por parte de las mujeres a través de las movilizaciones contra el acoso callejero y a favor de la autodefensa, como una forma de acción política que recrea el entorno urbano y contribuye a resignificar la ciudad.

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The moment when a feeling enters the body / is political.
—*The Blue Ghazals,* Adrienne Rich

Introduction

A First Approach. Why Look at An Identitarian Dimension?

The imagining of cities is often connected to the idea of deliberate exploration and indiscriminate openness to the people who inhabit and navigate them. Specially, the notion of *the public* in urban spaces is grounded in the assumption that those spaces are for everyone, regardless of the particularities of individuals and differences among them. This emancipatory ideal of an equal entitlement for everybody to enjoy the urban landscape is in dialogue with the ideal of universal citizenship outlined by modern political theory, which claims equal political and civil rights for all citizens beyond their group specificities, resulting in a potential understanding of equality in terms of sameness (Young, 1989). However, while this conceptualization of citizenship attempts to homogenize the concession of rights to all people, its fulfillment is actually weakened by multiple dynamics of domination and exclusion based on differentiations of gender, ethnicity, class, age and ability. Thus, urban public spaces exhibit power relations that fracture the exercise of effective citizenship on a regular basis. In this research, I address street harassment as a gender-based expression of exclusion and domination that belongs to the myriad different ways in which inhabitants of a given city are denied an allegedly neutral universal right, in this case, the right to the city (hereafter RTC). Additionally, I examine self-defence discourse and practice as a fundamental strategy that women in Mexico have developed to contest gender-based violence in public spaces and spur other women to action.

Looking at the ways in which women in Mexico City contest public assaults that hinder their right to navigate city spaces in a safe and confident way allows us to acknowledge the plurality of identitarian traits that shape differentiated urban experiences instead of assuming there is a single, neutral and totalizing one. Women's self-defence in Mexico consists at least of two political uses of public spaces: first, a discursive consciousness-raising mobilization in the city through content generation and circulation, street interventions and public expressive acts (where the self-defence politics and ethics are disseminated); and second, a set of practices and behaviours of embodied resistance, within which I locate physical self-defence responses to emerging assaults. Comprising these two sets of resources, women's self-defence culture responds to both street harassment and the forms of violence against women it potentially escalates, as they are not isolated or aleatory cases. Rather, sexual assaults in the streets of Mexico City are a result of the systematic perpetration of diverse forms of violence against women, as well as gender inequalities and discrimination (García, 2016), which materialize, for instance, in the logics of catcalling as a threatening dynamic of intimidation. This is to say, misogynistic public practices like street harassment in everyday life derive from a broader sexist paradigm. One of the roots of structural problems such as street harassment and sexual assaults in public spaces in Mexico is the collective objectification of women's bodies, which appear to be regarded as objects of public scrutiny and non-consensual use. Women's experience in particular aspects of city life, such as local pedestrian mobility, is often restricted by the threat of male violence (Massey, 1994). This restriction causes strong gendered perceptions of risk for women in public spaces, which deeply mark the way in which they experience the city. In other words, gender is an important element that determines women's experiences and senses of space and place (Massey, 1994).

In the case of Mexico City, street harassment has become a sort of normalized everyday environment of discomfort. In response to this environment that perpetuates gender power relations in public spaces in Mexico and Latin America, women have begun to create and mobilize ever more visible resistance strategies to counteract the effects of sexism and misogyny that prevent women from accessing their right to be safe as city dwellers. In so doing, these women engage in various forms of activism that open up a range of communication practices like songwriting, literary compositions, grassroots media-making, DIY *craftivism* and *fabriculture* (Bratich & Brush, 2011), street performance and direct street action as important resources for advocating change. What these resources have in common is that they involve not only epistemic and critical labour, but also manual labour or the direct intervention of women's bodies. As a matter of fact, over the past two decades, the composition of slogans (that are emblazoned with paint on uncovered female protesters' bodies at demonstrations) and the creation of visual resources (that become iconic protest symbols) have been instrumental in unifying and leading women's action, as they help to gather and disseminate their initiatives [Figures 1 and 2].

Figure 1. "If one of us is touched, all of us respond" and "I do not want you to catcall me, I want you to respect me" body-paintings on protesters' arms, chests and bellies at a demonstration in Mexico City, 2015. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

Figure 2. "Defend yourself. Not one [woman] less! Never again!" stencil on a wall in the State of Mexico, 2016. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

Similarly, women's collaborative action includes the creation of materials (such as poems, songs, illustrations, zines and independent press releases) that propagate messages which have originated in site-specific street interventions like street performances and street demonstrations. Therefore, throughout this thesis I will be discussing cultural and activist practices related to the material created by Mexican and Latin American feminist collectives and single activists that include (and are not limited to) The Daughters of Violence, Rebeca Lane, Gaby Baca, Krudas Kubensi, Autoeditoras: Hacemos Femzines and Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista A.C. Feminist materials that are created by these and other activists portray collective standpoints, create a narrative of resistance, promote feminist principles and outline the ethics of responding to expressions of violence against women [Figures 3 and 4].

Figure 3. #StreetWithoutHarassment *Con la misma monenda* song by Nicaraguan singer Gaby Baca and Guatemalan singer Rebeca Lane, 2014. Image source: Luchadoras TV.

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The narratives of these cultural texts have also spread radical politics of self-defence practices for everyday life, through which women are provided with resources for addressing physical violence and are invited to confront their attackers in order to defend themselves from harm. The broad circulation of these dissent messages, which call upon women to enact their rights and abilities, invites us to understand the body as a resource with which to contest

an adversely gendered urban experience and the differentiated access to the right to navigate the city safely.

In this research, I am guided by Tovi Fenster's and Shelley Buckingham's scholarship on the gendered access to the RTC, scholarship on gender, identity and place, studies of spaces of difference and differentiated citizenship, foundational work on feminist geographies, and studies of social movement media ecology. This scholarship has helped me to examine the relation between women's lived experience regarding street harassment in Mexico City's public spaces and women's active responses to contest it. I intend to articulate some answers to the following question: In which ways do women's expressive practices, like those provoked by local and regional self-defence culture, contest the unequal access to the right to the city or advance its fulfillment in Mexico City? In other words, I set out to explore the extent to which women are playing an active role in re-signifying an urban experience that is differentiated by gender in Mexico City. In order to do so, I will zoom in the discourse and hands-on strategies of anti-street harassment activism in the city. In Mexico, this type of activism offers a clear critique of the lack of action on the part of federal and municipal governments whose campaigns have included promises to address issues of safety in the city. Therefore, the construction of my object of study will take into account the effects of such campaigns on women's organized action.

In important ways, the concept of the RTC is framed by ideals of individuals' agency and political participation, where public spaces are a place for appropriation and social change. It is also engaged with other pivotal concepts in collective urban life such as citizenship and democracy. However, while the notion of the RTC was originally used by scholars to designate

a right which all citizens gain by virtue of inhabiting a city (Fenster, 2005), the fulfillment of this right varies across differentiated identities and sociopolitical contexts. In this research, I approach ways in which women's expressive acts advance their access to the right to navigate the city safely. As an initial hypothesis, I argue that public practices of dissent that are created by women in order to advocate for particular causes —like the right not to be sexually assaulted or threatened in city spaces— enrich a larger struggle: the fulfillment of the RTC. In so doing, they also contribute to the revitalization of the concept of the RTC, as it shifts from a fixed normative notion already given to an ongoing set of processes of claiming and resistance. Finally, I argue that politicized practices that involve embodied action —such as street performances and every day physical self-defence responses in the event of an assault— are a fundamental part of the media ecology of women's dissent and protest culture in Mexico City. These practices encourage the re-definition of the meaning of the city for women and women's sense of belonging to the city.

There is vast scholarship on the RTC in disciplines like sociology, geography and urban planning, which is widely acknowledged and cited. However, I consider that the scholarship produced on the RTC with a gender orientation deserves more attention nowadays, given the toxic urban conditions of many cities. In an effort to connect media studies, critical geography and feminist studies, this research intends to engage in conversation with urban studies by framing the RTC within a specific set of women's communication practices in Mexico City. This study aims to shed light on situated formations (D. Haraway, 1988) of place-based alliances and forms of dissent. These are worth studying insofar as they allow us to address the ways in which the political agency of a particular group of citizens shapes the meaning of collective action in urban settings and the types of claims that can be advanced in a specific

local context. This research also helps to look critically at women's organized action in response to a problem largely neglected by local governance. Therefore, this study invites a reflection on women's agency in reshaping urban environments and living conditions in city spaces through expressive acts and collective forms of political organization.

Methodology, Scope and Approach

Methodology

This research has an interdisciplinary approach and its conceptual development draws on the fields of urban sociology, critical geography, media-making studies and feminist studies. The study consisted of two phases: an exploratory phase and an analytical phase. The exploratory phase comprised the composition of the theoretical framework, the completion of the data collection and the archival research necessary to map Mexico City's current situation with respect to women's urban experience. In this phase, I consulted national statistics of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), reports and statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO), international statistics of the non-profit organization Stop Street Harassment (SSH), statistics of the global market research and data company YouGov, a study on gender-based violence in Mexico by the research institute Colegio de México (COLMEX), reports and press releases of the official websites of Mexican government institutes such as the Women's National Institute (INMUJERES), journal articles of the magazine *Dfensor, Magazine of Human Rights*, edited by the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, and a set of articles

from national and international newspapers. I then proceeded to explore narratives of women's local activism, by going through local independent archives and conducting in-depth interviews with some female activists. In order to explore women's creation of grassroots material and protest activities, I consulted the online photographic archive of the feminist collective Producciones y Milagros A.C., the online blog of the Mexican artivist Cerrucha; the Facebook pages of the feminist collectives The Daughters of Violence, Commando Hummingbird, *Autoeditoras: Hacemos Femzines* and Before, a Facebook page that I have run since 2015 and that hosts gender-related news, quotations and women's DIY materials. The analytical phase consisted of textual analysis, interpretation of the results obtained during the exploratory phase, and interpretation of the overall key findings of the study. The library sources I used in both phases were collections, books, journal articles, previous studies and graduate theses. My journalistic sources included news clips, news reports, newspaper articles, press releases, and the journal articles databases Sage Journals and JStor. Other sources I used were documents representing grassroots activism and recent independent reports and press releases.

Scope and Approach

In the 60s and 70s, the concept of the RTC emerged in relation to utopian ideas about the city. The core authors who popularized the term, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Mark Purcell, Jordi Borja, Enrique Ortiz and Fabio Velázquez, did so with a universalist perspective. For these scholars, the RTC is the liberty of all citizens, regardless of their gender, age, race, nationality or other identity traits, to access the resources of the city and exercise collective power to reshape and control urban processes (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, Brenner, & Elden,

2009). Beginning in the 2000s, Shelley Buckingham and Tovi Fenster made relevant contributions to the concept by arguing that, on the one hand, the fulfillment of this right was actually differentiated among the people who inhabit, access and use the city, and on the other, that this right also involved the daily participation in and appropriation of public space (Buckingham, 2009, 2011; Fenster, 2005). Furthermore, over the last decade, the concept has acquired a variety of connotations as diverse social movements start to incorporate it in their struggles. The idea of the RTC has thus started to be used to address a broader range of issues related to urban life and the enfranchisement of urban residents. The expansion of the meaning of the term, however, has been questioned by some scholars who argue that it is being used incorrectly, in ways that are not faithful to the radical meaning of Lefebvre's concept, causing the simplification of urban issues and the trivialization and corruption of the original term (Lopes de Souza, 2010; Margier & Melgaço, 2016). Therefore, it is convenient to clarify that the use of the concept of the RTC in this study unfolds within contemporary connotations of the term, where gender-based violence in the urban context is understood as one of the restrictions of the fulfillment of the RTC for women as a social group (García, 2016).

As for the scope of this research, this study focusses on the role of expressive practices created by women in order to protest against a hostile urban environment, advance the fulfillment of their right to navigate city spaces and re-shape the urban experience in Mexico City. In other words, I center on the ways in which issues of safety prevent women from accessing what in Mexico City we can understand as the RTC, and the ways in which the unequal access to this right is being contested and reconfigured by female activists. Therefore, this research sets out to highlight, on the one hand, what the RTC means in Mexico City in

relation to its very particular material and cultural conditions, and on the other, the ways in which activist practices are disruptive within the context of this particular city and how they affect women's situated lives. Thus, I do not intend to replace other understandings and uses of the term "right to the city", nor to argue that activism against gender-based violence in public spaces is always related to struggles for the RTC in other cities. Instead, I address the ways in which women's reflections, organization and strategies around safety issues in city spaces are tied to the fulfillment of the RTC in the particular case of Mexico.

Moreover, my approach to the RTC is guided by the notion of situated knowledges, one of the main theoretical contributions of scholarly feminist thought. In an effort to unmask the official and arbitrary ideologies and doctrines of universalism, generalization, objectivity and the truth of scientific knowledge, early feminist scholarly work stood for women's budding sense of collective subjectivity, agency, bodily knowledge production and embodied accounts of the truth. According to this theory, women have an account of the world which rests on a radical historical contingency for knowledge claims and knowing subjects, as well as the need to have a critical practice in order to recognize women's own semiotic technologies for making meanings (D. Haraway, 1988). Among these technologies, the notion of a partial perspective, an embodied vision and the multiplicity of local situated knowledges play an essential role. In this perspective, women's accounts of the truth are about limited locations and situated knowledges, where the standpoint of a subjugated identity (who is located in the peripheries) is a vantage point in the sense that it gives the social group a special capacity to see what those that stand in other places cannot see (D. Haraway, 1988). Through this lens, my research looks at women's participation in the re-making and the owning of a space based on their lived and situated experience, where they can potentially empower themselves as urban dwellers.

The fact that this study focusses on gender and not other identity traits of Mexican women is also worth clarifying. When a study that has a gender orientation is undertaken, the field of gender studies usually expects a focus that is not limited to the gender dimension of the issue. Instead, most of the feedback and critiques point to the need to bear in mind an intersectional perspective wherein class, race, gender, etcetera, cannot be studied alone without incorporating the analysis of all the other attributes, since they construct themselves in the intersection with each other instead of developing independently (Crenshaw, 1991). Nevertheless, in this study, I do not thoroughly address the class and race based differences of the women in Mexico City because my purpose is to flesh out the similarities of the experiences of women who navigate public spaces in Mexico City in terms of one gender identification. In other words, I aim to highlight the ways in which, despite women's diverse personal backgrounds and realities, gender construction is the minimal trait they have in common and that creates an asymmetrical condition for the fulfillment of their right to navigate the city. In my experience as a working-class inhabitant of this city, in the particular case of Mexico City, it is gender, more than class, race, nationality and other traits, which places women in an immediate situation of vulnerability in public urban spaces. Finally, in terms of the disciplinary orientation, this research has an urban cultural studies and feminist geography approach.

Situatedness of the Research & Theoretical Framework

In the early 1990s, feminist geographers started to question the limits of knowledge production in their field by pointing out the ways in which men's interests structured what counted as

legitimate knowledge (Rose, 1993). This critique might have been directed as well to the critical tradition of other fields like communication studies and urban studies, where most of the foundational concepts, such as public sphere (Habermas, 1989), citizenship (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992; Mill, 2006) and right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) have been outlined from male standpoints. Among the foundational theorists whose works have been widely spread and cited in the study of the city, we can find Walter Benjamin and his approaches to the city life and the culture of *flânerie* as the enactment of modern urban experience (Benjamin & Jennings, 2006), during the 1920s and 1930s; Michel Foucault and his theorization of how Western space perceptions are mediated by a set of relations between locations (Foucault, 1984) in the late 1960s; Henri Lefebvre, who addressed the social production of space and popularized the concept of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Lefebvre et al., 2009), in 1968; Richard Sennett and his work on public life, capitalism and the culture of cities (Sennett, 1992, 1996, 2011; Thernstrom & Sennett, 1974), from 1969 to 1997 and in 2011; and Manuel Castells, who addressed the informational city and the relation between economy, society and globalization (Castells, 1980, 1983, 1999), from 1972 to 1989.

More contemporary studies lead us to David Harvey's work on geography, spatial science and social justice in the city (Harvey, 1969, 1981, 1985, 2009, 2012, 1989), from 1969 to the date; Neil Smith's work on social theory, the political economy of cities and production of space (Low & Smith, 2006; Smith, 1996, 2008), from 1979 to 2009; Arjun Appadurai's articulations of modernity, globalization, citizenship, violence against minorities and the production of locality (Appadurai, 2000, 1995, 2006), from the late 1980s to the mid 2000s; Anthony Vidler, who posed questions having to do with time, space, architecture and power (Vidler, 2011), from 1987 to 2014; and Mike Davis and his work on urbanism, the global city,

and social and economic injustice in urban settings (Davis, 2006), from the early 1990s to the mid 2000s. During much of the first half of the 20th century, there were very few published works written by female scholars on topics regarding the study of cities. Later, Jane Jacobs, Doreen Massey and Saskia Sassen stand out as some of the few seminal female authors who started to be acknowledged within urban studies and who are now regularly cited and regarded as foundational in the field.

Jane Jacobs' scholarship on urban life, planning and urban renewal, from 1941 to 2004, remains one of the main references in the study of cities, and particularly cities in the United States and Canada (Jacobs, 1992). Her study on the preservation and sustainability of urban neighbourhoods is one of the very first studies which understands the city by focusing on the uses of the city by men, women and children (van den Berg, 2016). Her contemporary analysis of the urban environment has had a long-lasting influence on metropolitan development, urban sociology, urban planning and geography. Doreen Massey is one of the most prominent scholars who, from 1970 to 2010, theorized economic geography, the social sense of place, and the relation between space and gender. Her work illustrates the ways in which the construction of social and gender relations co-depends on the spatial location and the different physical and cultural spaces in which those relations unfold, as well as the ways in which gendered subordination is related to identity and space (Massey, 1994, 2005, 2008). Saskia Sassen's works, published between 1991 and 2014, address diverse issues having to do with cities and the world economy, sovereignty and globalization, capital and human mobility, urban sociology, and global flows and networks. Her theorization of the global city succeeds in thoroughly analyzing the ways in which cities' dynamics and processes get territorialized globally (Sassen, 2000, 2008, 2013).

Having noted the need to retrieve female scholars' works in historically male-dominated fields, and given that this study looks at women's lived experience, in this research I decided to significantly draw on the scholarship of female Western and non-Western authors. Among those scholars, I highlight Doreen Massey, Leslie Kern, Linda Peake, Dolores Hayden, Catherine Deschamps and Catherine Nesci from the Western tradition; and Patricia Ramírez Kuri, María de Lourdes García Vázquez and Tovi Fenster from the non-Western tradition. This range of works, which address political geographies, women and the city, and feminist interventions into the urban and urban citizenship, were especially illuminating in the development of this study.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five sections. The Introduction provides an overview of the research, in which I identify the specific problem to be taken up, the research question driving the study, and why this issue is worth studying. Then I present the historic location of this study and its theoretical framework, as well as the research traditions and fields on which I draw. Finally, I describe the focus, approach and methodology of the research, the data sources for the study and the definition of the scope. I address what I mean by the right to the city and the right to be safe, in which ways they are mediated by gender, their relation to expressive practices of dissent and the local and national context in which these expressions, which I further discuss in Chapter 2, unfold in Mexico City's public spaces.

Chapter 1 – Emergence and Development of a Right elucidates the conceptual origins and progress of the idea of the right to the city. It maps the early history and the development of the idea, the modifications that it has received within academic work, the contributions that various scholars have made to the term and the extent to which it has been adopted by worldwide social justice struggles. Finally, I frame the case of women's urban safety in terms of the RTC and the seminal scholarship that addresses the issue with a gender orientation.

Chapter 2 – Space Is Public, My Body Is Not centers on representative examples of the grassroots activism of women advocating for the right to navigate city spaces safely in Mexico City. This chapter presents the local and regional conditions in which female organized action started to form, the ways in which the autonomous generation and circulation of creative content emerged, and the rhetorical and practical strategies through which female activists have advanced awareness about differentiated access to the RTC by deploying embodied protest, which in turn is enacted in a series of public interventions such as scheduled street performances and physical self-defence behaviours in emerging, threatening situations in everyday life.

In Chapter 3 – Re-Signifying Urban Localities I propose an analysis of the larger implications of women's street disruptions as a political act in the re-configuration of the meaning of the city. I address the ways in which public expressive acts that condemn sexist practices like street harassment are related to street occupation, the appropriation of public spaces and political participation.

The Conclusions lay out the key findings of the study and their interpretation, the theoretical and archival elements that took me to these interpretations, the usefulness of the findings and the final remarks. I also expound upon the broader implications of the findings in relation to the problem of the study and how those findings might nourish further research and writing in the field.

Chapter 1. Emergence and Development of a Right.

Early History and Definition of the Right to the City

Often, when I mention the concept of the right to the city during casual conversations in both scholarly and non-scholarly settings, colleagues and activists have asked me: "Which *right to the city* are you talking about, though?" In different contexts such as academic writing, social movements and public policies, the term is frequently invoked today in order to describe or interrogate various social and economic issues that have emerged in city spaces, such as homelessness, gentrification, immigration, citizenship, uses of public space and social exclusion. Similarly, many urban social struggles have integrated the right to the city as a fundamental argument for their causes, contributing to the extension of the meaning of the term. From housing policy to the socio-political implications of walking down the streets, the right to the city (hereafter RTC) has apparently become an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of issues that define contemporary urban politics. In turn, the RTC is commonly deployed as a category under which a set of other rights fall —such as rights to housing, rights to be free from police abuse, rights to participation of citizens in urban renewal, rights against established property laws, rights to access the benefits of urban centrality, rights to autonomy as opposed to subjection to state-based urban policy, and rights to communal goods (Merrifield, 2011). The seeming openness of the concept then raises the questions: What does the RTC demand exactly? What social claims should this right respond to? Is there a difference between *the right to the city* and *rights in the city*? Are the rights involved in the right to the city necessarily connected?

In 1967, Henri Lefebvre coined the RTC to designate the right of city inhabitants' in relation to two inter-related phenomena: the right to appropriate space by occupying, using, working and living in city spaces, and the right to participate in decision-making in the production of urban space (Lefebvre, Kofman, & Lebas, 1996; M. Purcell, 2003). Most importantly, Lefebvre's seminal work outlined the RTC as a renewed collective right to transform the urban life that unfolded under capitalist regimes (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre et al., 1996). His conceptualization included a reflection on the effects of unrestrained capitalist development in the city, and pointed to the need for city dwellers to recreate a more meaningful everyday life in order to avoid alienation (Harvey, 2012). Grounded in classic sociological studies of urban life and traditional Marxist approaches (Smith, 2003), Lefebvre understood the city as a work produced through the labor and the daily actions of those who live in the city. For him, the RTC signified the right to inhabit the city and produce urban life on new terms in the sense that it embraced the liberty of inhabitants, especially from the working class, to control the recreation of their living conditions. The RTC, therefore, meant a collective "cry and demand" (Lefebvre et al., 1996:158) to design, produce and control the city (Celik & Gough, 2014; Lefebvre et al., 1996), one which also involved the advancement of more traditional rights, like the rights to freedom and individualization through socialization (Lefebvre et al., 1996). The term was also co-constitutive of Mark Purcell's concept of *citadenship*[1], which demanded that "concrete and practical rights to difference, information, access to services, sharing of ideas, and using public space for all inhabitants" (Christensen,

[1] The term *citadenship* does not involve a grammatical mistake. Mark Purcell coined this concept to refer to a form of citizenship that should be based not only on inhabitance but also participation in and appropriation of the city. As opposed to *citizenship*, which is granted by institutional powers exclusively to individuals that hold certain legal status, *citadenship* demands rights for all the inhabitants of the city regardless of their legal status (Dionne, 2006). Some scholars deploy the terms "right to the city" and "citadenship" interchangeably (Fenster, 2005).

2016:33) were not exclusive to people with citizenship status but should belong to every inhabitant regardless of their legal status.

Even though Lefebvre's RTC appears to be an ambiguous doctrine, it has —as literature and activism have demonstrated— an outstanding political potential. Various scholars have taken up Lefebvre's seminal work on the RTC to either complement or interrogate his assertions and, in doing so, have opened up further questions about his original thesis. Since 2000, a considerable amount of academic literature on the political left has spurred discussion about the RTC (Celik & Gough, 2014) and some scholars have deployed the theoretical framework of this concept in order to give an account of urban space-related struggles such as those that reclaim their right to housing and fight against spatial marginalization, forced eviction and slum clearance in the cities of Santo Domingo[2], Temuco[3], Osaka[4], Cairo[5], Accra[6] (Sugranyes, Mathivet, & Habitat International Coalition, 2011), Istanbul[7], Porto Alegre[8], Buenos Aires[9] [Figure 5], Mar del Plata[10], Hangzhou[11] and Karachi[12] (Cabannes, Guimarães Yafai, & Johnson, 2010). Similarly, various urban struggles worldwide have adopted the term themselves as a foundational slogan of their causes (Celik & Gough,

[2] Santo Domingo is the capital and largest city in the Dominican Republic. It is also the largest metropolitan area in the Caribbean by population (Bourne, 2011).
[3] Temuco is a city in southern Chile.
[4] Osaka is the second largest city in Japan (Statistics Japan, 2017).
[5] Cairo is the capital and largest city of Egypt.
[6] Accra is the capital and largest city of Ghana.
[7] Istanbul is the most populous city in Turkey and the largest city in Europe by population.
[8] Porto Alegre is the capital and largest city of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Su.
[9] Buenos Aires is the capital and most populous city of Argentina.
[10] Mar del Plata is the second largest city in the Argentinian province of Buenos Aires.
[11] Hangzhou is the capital and most populous city of Zhejiang Province in east China.
[12] Karachi is the capital of the Pakistani province of Sindh and the most populous city in the country.

2014), such as the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement[13] in South Africa which fights against the forced evictions that have taken place in the cities of Cape Town and Durban [Figure 6].

Figure 5. "We demand inhabitance and urbanization" protest sign in the slum Villa 31 in Buenos Aires, n.d. Image source: Yves Cabannes.

Figure 6. "We are the citizens. This is our city." protest sign of the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, outside the Durban High Court during the Slums Act, 2008. Image source: Abahlali baseMjondolo.

In what follows, I show how the idea of the RTC has continued to develop by tracing the most relevant scholarship that has retrieved, followed up or questioned seminal work on this concept.

Engagements with and Adaptation of the Idea

In his 2008's article "The Right to the City" (Harvey, 2008), David Harvey, pioneer of Marxist spatial political economy, expands upon Lefebvre's notion of the RTC, paying particular attention to the urbanization process and the working class as a major force of revolution. Harvey proposes that social struggles, especially during urban crises, should adopt the RTC as a working slogan and a political ideal in order to contribute to a broader social movement that

[13] Also known as AbM or The Red Shirts, Abahlali baseMjondolo is a shack-dwellers' movement. It is the largest movement of the organised lower class in post-apartheid South Africa (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2017a, 2017b).

is necessary in order for inhabitants to take back control of urban life (Harvey, 2008; Middleton, 2016). His work on the RTC analyzes the city as a force for the generation of capital accumulation and the absorption of surpluses (capital and labor) and argues that urban struggles should focus on the production and use of surplus value in the city. Since 1981, Harvey believed that the valorization of urban space had been a key accumulation strategy for capital (Harvey, 1981). One of his main assertions is that capitalism utilizes the urbanization process as a way to delay the capitalist crisis of over-accumulation by switching investment into the urban built environment (Harvey, 2012). In response to this, his work proposes the RTC as a strategy for urban inhabitants to make their life more cooperative and creative by participating in decisions that produce urban space without fully relying on the state (Harvey, 2003; Purcell, 2008). This participation includes the convergence of diverse groups towards politicized mobilization, struggle, and conflict in order to bring about radical change (Harvey, 2012).

Neil Smith, a Ph.D. student of David Harvey who made a major contribution to the development of Marxist and revolutionary geography (Celik & Gough, 2014), acknowledges both the usefulness and the weakness of the concept of the RTC. Inspired by his opposition to ruling-class violence against oppressed groups, his work considers that the RTC re-ignites and links pre-existing urban struggles to a broader focus and re-connects academics and activists. This view was also shared by Don Mitchell and Nik Heynen, who argued that the capaciousness and openness of the RTC were two attributes to be welcomed, as they could be useful for unifying the struggles of various marginalized groups around a common rallying cry (Mitchell & Heynen, 2009). Nevertheless, Smith argued that the fact that the term was rights-oriented resulted in a reduction of its reach. The problem with the RTC being a right,

according to him, is that rights are embedded in the fundaments of liberal and neoliberal capitalism, which might be tactically useful but strategically limited (Smith, 2014). Smith believed that the RTC's proposal incorporated no imperative to look beyond rights to the social relations that make any particular set of rights appear as common moral sense. Similarly, he thought that "rights talk" (Smith, 2014:425) was precarious and highly vulnerable to political co-option and the re-absorption of political protest into the goal of a capitalism reworked under the framework of existing liberal rights (Smith, 2014). Finally, he considered that, as a political principle, if the RTC was based too narrowly on rights, it risked the confusion of ethics with politics, especially in the present era when the post-structural paradigm facilitated that confusion (Smith, 2014).

Similarly, Jamie Gough offers a critical standpoint on the RTC in relation to the rights framework. He argues that the RTC is very limited as an approach for left politics since rights are categorical political entitlements. The main task for the left at the local level, in contrast, is to contest economic, social and cultural processes, from a perspective which envisions the eventual popular democratic control of these. This contestation involves debate around investment in and distribution of the material conditions of life, which in most cases cannot and should not be reduced to categorical rights (Celik & Gough, 2014). For Don Mitchell, the RTC has to do, first and foremost, with the right to occupy public space (Mitchell, 2003), as well as the particular rights derived from that, such as the right to be free of police brutality, surveillance, and state overreach (Mitchell & Heynen, 2009). Based on his study of the proliferation of anti-panhandling laws in American cities, he states that homeless people have no RTC, as these laws seek to annihilate them in the name of re-composing the city for global capital (Mitchell, 2003). According to Mitchell, such laws represent efforts both to redefine

what is acceptable behavior in public space and to re-create the public sphere as intentionally exclusive (Mitchell, 2003). In short, he examines the ways in which homeless people are excluded from using public spaces by regulations which elevate aesthetic concerns above the needs of people to survive. As a result, Mitchell's main contribution is that the key question with regards to the RTC is that of who possesses the RTC and its public spaces; he further asserts that any rights are dependent on the status of public space (Mitchell, 2003). In a similar vein, Katherine Beckett and Steve Herbert argue that the laws that deny homeless people their RTC also raise alarm about the return of banishment as a form of punishment and a tool of social control (Beckett & Herbert, 2010). Sarah Swider further identifies the RTC in terms of the liberty of unregistered migrant street venders to use the streets and struggle against public security officers who regulate that use (Swider, 2015).

In these reflections, Mitchell, Beckett, Herbert and Swider articulate concrete examples of how identity-related issues (homelessness, illegal migration, and working status) affect the fulfillment of the RTC, a consideration that was absent in Lefebvre's work (Fenster, 2005). Mitchell, Beckett, Herbert and Swider also raise a dissent conception of the RTC focused on the occupation of urban space as a means of advancing democracy. Homeless people and street protesters are two cases that Kafui Attoh addresses to flesh out this contradiction. Anti-panhandling laws police poor people who solicit money or food, or who camp in public space, and protest-related legislation allows for the criminalization of street protesters who block vehicular or pedestrian traffic. If these two regulations prevent the homeless and protesters, respectively, from accessing their RTC, then the RTC of the homeless and protesters is a right that stands against a possible majority who might believe that such laws and regulations are just and appropriate. In other words, when it is asserted that homeless people have a right to

occupy a public park, this is a right that should be supported despite the desire of a majority comprised by homeowners, renters, store keepers, developers and some dwellers. When it is asserted that protesters have a right to picket or occupy a street, this is a right that could be embraced despite a democratic majority that may view such protests as nuisances or disturbances (Attoh, 2011). In these two situations, the RTC is not necessarily reclaimed in the name of democratic politics or in the name of collective power. Instead, the RTC is reclaimed in spite of popular opinion (Attoh, 2011). This tension broadens and complicates not only the definition of the RTC but also the definition of democracy (Huntington, 1993), as an RTC appears as the collective right to democratically manage urban resources, yet also appears as the right to oppose such management (Attoh, 2011; Mitchell, 2003).

What is clear is that the notion of the RTC does suggest a new form of citizenship. Here, I would like to point to a set of four relevant contributions of this conceptualization. The first is the fact that citizenship and political belonging are proposed in terms of inhabitance and individuals' agency as opposed to formal citizenship status (Lefebvre, Elden, Lebas, & Kofman, 2003; Middleton, 2016; M. Purcell, 2014). This approach allows us to interrogate forms of formal citizenship and their commitment to the ideals of democracy and social justice. The second is the fact that, at the core of much of the work on the RTC, there is also a critique of urban policy. Urban policy and urban design are increasingly implemented in ways that tend to be undemocratic, that exclude poor people and that create cities that prioritize the needs of business and wealthy groups over the vast majority (Wastl-Walter and Staeheli, 2005: 2). The RTC theorization is useful both in reframing and counteracting such urban politics and policies. Third, the critical nature of Lefebvre's work, his use of a language of rights and his broad conception of citizenship, pave the way for urban struggles which

frame their movements in terms of the RTC, as this illuminates their strategies to make specific claims that resonate with already existing civil rights frameworks. Finally, the dissemination of the concept of the RTC has contributed to a tradition of scholarship that focuses on the micro-politics of everyday life and practical concerns regarding the dynamics that unfold in urban space (as well the social, economic and political problems that arise therein), such as street hawking, street harassment, and littering behaviour. The term thus succeeds in supporting the study of experiences of safety, comfort and control in terms of the opportunities, limitations, and restrictions of navigating everyday life (Christensen, 2016).

Interrogations and Advances

While some scholars address the benefits of the RTC's flexibility and capacity to link disparate rights-claims under a unitary framework (Attoh, 2011), others explore the inconvenience of its multiple practical uses and its conceptual ambiguity and partiality. These studies have questioned the fact that the concept is being used only as a motto for social movements and casually deployed by left scholarship (Celik & Gough, 2014). Mark Purcell was one of the first scholars to note that the meanings of the RTC were being increasingly indistinct. He suggested that, through a close reading of Lefebvre's original text, one could find a radical understanding of the RTC that is "an essential element of a wider political struggle for revolution" (M. Purcell, 2014). He thus identifies a gap between Lefebvre's radical conception of the RTC and contemporary urban initiatives concerned with the struggle to augment the rights of urban inhabitants (M. Purcell, 2003). The RTC, he continues, has indeed almost become a catchphrase which is rarely interrogated in depth; and its loose usage by a variety of

movements tends to trivialize Lefebvre's concept since very few of these movements are claiming a fully developed RTC as Lefebvre imagined it (M. Purcell, 2005). In addition, Kafui Attoh argues that, while progressive scholars embrace the idea of the RTC, what these scholars mean by rights is often left unexplored. For Attoh, these scholars ignore the distinctions that political philosophers and legal scholars draw between various kinds and forms of rights, as well as the tensions and contradictions with respect to rights that originate from the ways in which rights are mobilized within scholarship on the RTC (Attoh, 2011). Nonetheless, theoretical critiques have also given rise to studies that point to the need to recoup the radical potential of the RTC by moving beyond the theory to the encounters and actions themselves, by shifting from discussing rights or asking for rights to acting. Andy Merrifield asserts that this move can be more empowering because it is politically and geographically more inclusive (Merrifield, 2011).

Aside from the multiple uses of the concept, other scholars focus their critique on the idea of RTC itself. Among the critiques of Lefebvre's conceptualization, we can find the "tenuous nature" (Mitchell, 2003:5) of the term, the fact that he did not really develop the ways in which the RTC crystallized in practical terms (Attoh, 2011), and the fact that the concept leads to the misrepresentation of today's social actors and forms of resistance, as it tends to study emerging issues (such as radical and autonomous struggles) through the old lenses of "statism, centralism, and hierarchy" (Lopes Souza, 2010:315). Among these critiques, that concerned with the ways in which the RTC assumes universal subjects is central to this research study. Identity-related issues and the ways in which they affect the fulfillment of the RTC seem to be dismissed in the foundational literature on the RTC. As a matter of fact, Lefebvre's emphasis on the notion of class tends to treat all urban citizens as members of the

working class (Purcell, 2002), which may reduce the diversity of the urban population and the importance of issues related to gender, race and age that are fundamental to everyone's accessibility to the city. This sort of class bias has been identified as a limitation, one that a body of emerging scholarship, that addresses the diversity of urban identities in relation to the RTC, aims to overcome (Margier & Melgaço, 2016).

At the heart of the RTC, there is an underlying ideal of equality for everybody in the city. However, human needs and conceptions of equality are expressed differently from one identity to another (Buckingham, 2009). Taking into account that the RTC involves the right to use the city and to participate in its creation or re-creation, it becomes essential to elaborate debates surrounding the RTC through the plurality of identities that live in those particular urban environments. Since different groups of people have different needs and uses of the environments they inhabit, all should be involved in a comprehensive understanding and practice of the RTC (Buckingham, 2009).

Therefore, the differentiation of citizens and their access to rights is one of the main elements that some scholars have disclosed in more recent critical scholarship on the RTC. By returning to the fundamental ways in which questions of difference are dismissed within the concept, these scholars have found that, in the first place, the traditional definition of citizenship itself has encouraged the discourses that ascertain universal and homogenous individuals. Historically, one of the most used interpretations of citizenship has been the idea of full membership in a given community (Marshall, 1979, 1981; Marshall & Bottomore, 1992), one which encompasses civil, political and social rights for all the members. Furthermore, modern political theory asserts the equal moral worth of all people (Young, 1989) and

democratic societies usually argue that every individual is equal in the eyes of the law and the state (McDowell, 1999).

However, not everybody in the city has de facto equal rights. In fact, the expressions of this differentiation are found throughout the history of urban governance and the politics of collective life. Women, workers, Jews and black people are some of the social groups who have historically pressed for admission to the status of citizen and claimed equal political rights. The regulation of public space and the social practices that unfold in there are one of the factors that have caused the marginalization of certain groups. Despite the gradual extension of rights, such as the franchise won by the working class and women, a noticeable feature of urban practice and policy has been the separation, segregation and isolation of heterogeneous groups of *others* (comprised principally of women, the lower class and racialized groups) from civic spaces of the city. Therefore, the articulation of urban order and the participation of citizens in urban public institutions have tended to be restricted to citizens who are bourgeois men, for the most part (McDowell, 1999).

Similarly, the spatial distinction between private and public also started to mark dynamics of exclusion over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The division between those who hold a legitimate right to the public arena and those who should be excluded was constituted in theory and in practice, in legislation, and in the definition of citizenship and civic values, where, for instance, children, female inhabitants, young people and roaming crowds in public spaces could be easily regarded as dangerous and in need of control (McDowell, 1999). Additionally, the formation of the notion of the public sphere denoted gender and class-related differentiations as well. In the early 1960s, Jürgen Habermas' influential work, inspired by

liberal principles, outlined a public sphere model that was supposed to be open and accessible to all, where the function of urban public spaces was to provide citizens with a venue for political action, communication, competition of opinions and deliberation (Huning, 2007). However, this model has been interrogated for presuming the sameness of all individuals, without taking into account the base necessities and identity-related demands that could emerge among them (Fraser, 1990), and it has been revealed as a rather closed and exclusionary sphere governed by male upper classes.

As a result, the urban civic realm, including public spaces and state institutions, was constructed as an exclusive, rather than inclusive space, and the notion of citizenship itself took a spatially constituted form and legitimized forms of exclusion derived from traditional definitions of citizenship. The critical tradition has revealed that the access to the RTC is in fact mediated by asymmetrical power relations that unfold in public spaces in the form of appropriation, exclusion, and discrimination. These power relations also dictate "the boundaries of belonging" (Fenster, 2005:229) for marginalized groups such as women and people embodying diversity, who are not considered by the hegemon as belonging to it (Fenster, 2005). This exclusion is one of the reasons why the idea of citizenship that enforces a supposed homogeneity of citizens has been contested. Despite its attempt to assure the inclusion and participation of everyone, the universality of citizenship does not fulfill the ideal of generality and equal treatment. Modern political thought generally assumes a universal model of citizenship where "citizenship status transcends particularity and difference" (Young, 1989:250). This assumption fails inasmuch as citizenship gives everyone the same status as peers in the political public, regardless of social or group differences among citizens, or of their inequalities of wealth and exercise of power in the everyday life of civil society. What is more,

this ideal of universal citizenship has not necessarily led excluded and disadvantaged groups to social justice and equality. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these groups struggled to win full citizenship status as a guarantee of acquiring equal political and civil rights and freedom. However, in the late twentieth century, when citizenship rights started to be formally extended to all groups in liberal capitalist societies, those social movements of the oppressed and excluded groups noticed that the extension of the equal citizenship rights has not provided them with the living conditions they expected (Young, 1989).

From a set of reflections about the traditional definitions of homogenous citizenship and as a result of political and social crises, new notions of citizenship have emerged. In this process, the assumed equal access to the use of public spaces and to the exercise of power in city spaces, has been interrogated. As a result, new interpretations of inclusion and exclusions in the city have challenged the traditional definitions of citizenship and access to rights (Fenster, 2005; Kofman, 1995). Approaches from both left and right perspectives recognize that citizenship by definition is about exclusion rather than inclusion for many people despite the traditional and popular definitions of the term (McDowell, 1999). These common definitions tend to be identity-related only in the sense that they dictate which groups are included within the hegemonic community and which are excluded. These definitions have historically marginalized women, children, immigrants, people of ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTIQ+ communities and elderly people.

When undertaking research on the RTC that is orientated towards issues of difference, the question arises of who has the right to have rights. This is why pre-existing scholarship on citizenship is pivotal for contextualizing the notion of the RTC within the discourse on new

forms of citizenship. This scholarship that addresses the re-construction of new forms of citizenship conveniently responds to an era of political and economic restructuring. While the traditional definitions of citizenship prioritize equality, communality and homogeneity, new forms of this concept highlight issues of difference and cultural, ethnic, racial and gender diversity (Fenster, 2005), such as the notions of differentiated citizenship (Young, 1989) and multi-layered citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2000), which are specially illuminating for replacing the ideal of universal citizenship of the liberal democracy approach.

One Right to the City. The Case of Women's Urban Safety.

In the past four decades, major attention has been devoted to framing the RTC in terms of social movements and protest (Harvey, 2012; Lopes Souza, 2010), class and social segregation and gentrification (Mitchell, 2003; Smith, 2005), racialized identities (McCann, 1999), and surveillance and social control (Coleman, 2004; Hall & Hubbard, 1996). Gender perspectives on the RTC, however, have been elaborated by, predominantly, two female scholars from the Western tradition: Tovi Fenster and Shelley Buckingham, who draw on influential critical scholarship on political theory and social justice by Iris Marion Young, Nira Yuval-Davis, Linda McDowell and Eleonore Kofman. The writings of Fenster and Buckingham show the ways in which women's access to the RTC is bound up with a history in which women have been subjects of citizen discrimination in numerous cultures and at all scales and sectors — from the private to the public, in economic, social, welfare and political contexts (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McDowell, 1999; Lister, 1997; Young, 1990).

As part of the critical tradition that has revitalized the work on the RTC, this group of female scholars has opened up the dialogue on the ways in which exclusion and disparities in city spaces are underpinned by asymmetrical gendered relations. For the purpose of this research, which centers on the ways in which women's right to use public spaces is at issue, Tovi Fenster's work is especially illuminating. Tovi Fenster addresses the Lefebvrian idea of the RTC as one of the emerging discourses around traditional and new forms of citizenship. While she acknowledges that the RTC sparks a radical rethinking of the purpose, definition, and content of belonging to the city, she first interrogates the extent to which the original notion of the concept is "sensitive to individual and collective difference" (Fenster, 2005:219). Her main critique of Lefebvre's RTC is that his definition does not take into account the notion of power and control in which identity-related issues are grounded. According to Fenster, his definition does not sufficiently challenge power relations, as it neglects the particular embodied encounters with the city in which the right to use and the right to belong to the city are violated by patriarchal, cultural and religious powers, resulting in the construct of public spaces as forbidden spaces for some groups (Fenster, 2005). Specifically, she considers that the traditional idea of the RTC completely leaves out the effects of gendered power relations on the fulfillment of women's RTC (Fenster, 2005). Fenster points to the fact that, aside from the determinants of nationality, marital status, age, class and sexual preference, the oppressive dynamics in many localities are mostly gender-based. As a matter of fact, she addresses the gendered fear of using public spaces such as streets, urban parks and public transportation, as a problem that prevents women from attaining their RTC.

By using different formations and expressions of belonging in women's and men's narratives of their everyday life in London and Jerusalem, and based on their reflections

regarding their sense of comfort, belonging and commitment to these cities, she reveals that issues of safety in public spaces critically cut across women's urban experiences. Thus, she elaborates the binary of fear and safety as a patriarchal socio-spatial issue that dictates women's possibilities to realize their right to use public spaces and the right to participate in urban life. Furthermore, she argues that by isolating the discussion on the RTC from the specificities of daily life, Lefebvre creates a rather neutral public domain which is blind to power relations, resulting in an analysis which is irrelevant to the realities of many women in cities (Fenster, 2005). This disconnection to women's realities is also coupled with the construction of their sense of belonging. According to Fenster, the right to use the city and the right to belong to the city are merged. The construction of belonging, which is based on everyday "ritualized use of space" (Fenster, 2005:223), has a fundamental gendered dimension, as daily encounters with city are usually shaped by a set of divisions of economic activities and uses of spaces among men and women, such as the ways in which household duties and waged work have been historically distributed.

This reflection brings up the importance of the two scales of reference that are fundamental in the study of the production of space: the private (namely represented by the home) and the public (namely represented by the city and the state). In a way, we can say that the discussion of the access to the RTC is connected to the discussion of the right to use the public versus the right to use the private. Lefebvre's RTC frequently invokes *the public* and the creation of the "oeuvre" (Lefebvre et al., 2003), which is an essential context for the everyday life of urban inhabitants. However, it is necessary to trace the associations of *the public* with the political sphere and the diverse social groups that inhabit this sphere (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The *oeuvre* (this is, *the public*) has been perceived by some feminist literature as a white, middle-upper

class, heterosexual male domain (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993). This assertion can be sustained by the fact that women, people of colour, poor people and queer people can be found as the groups which often undergo the violation of basic civil and human rights in public space. In some urban neighborhoods, for instance, women's uses of public spaces such as streets and parks are greatly restricted at a certain time (Massey, 1994) and, in some cultures, wandering around at all might be practically avoided by women (Fenster, 1999) due to the high probability of being sexually assaulted or physically attacked in other ways. In this sense, it can be said that *the public* does not include women, black people or other disadvantaged groups (Young, 1989) although laws and discourses promise these groups that their needs and aspirations will be equally met.

The different engagements of comfort and belonging to the city thus shed light on how women's rights to use and rights to participate in the city can actually be denied. In order to avoid this denial of the RTC for many women, the identification of the RTC needs to offer a practical frame of reference by paying attention to power relations which are ethnic, cultural and gender-related. In this way, the RTC as a new form of citizenship could connect to women's everyday life (Fenster, 2005). In short, the RTC could be fulfilled when the right to difference is fulfilled too and people of different ethnicities, nationalities and gender identities can share and use non-threatening urban spaces.

In many studies, the way in which the RTC links the everyday life of individuals to local governance activities tends to outline citizenship with an orientation to the state instead of the city. With Tovi Fenster's research as an example, I intend to take the city rather than the state as the relevant scale for discussion of the different formations of citizenship and belonging for women in everyday life in Mexico City. The importance of exploring this specific

cases within the framework of the RTC enables the concept to extend beyond a political slogan (Middleton, 2016) and allow us to examine the capacity of social movements to produce transformative and more emancipatory social realities. Violations of the RTC are expressed differently by inhabitants, as the politics of formal and informal belonging vary from one city to another (Fenster, 2004). However, violations of the gendered RTC, which intersect with class and race issues, are tightly associated with impunity, vulnerability, and inaction of local governance especially through abuses of the right to be safe (Fenster, 2005). It is the aim of the next chapter to explore the ways in which female citizen action has responded to this situation in Mexico City.

Chapter 2. Space is Public, My Body Is Not.

The distances between the actual, intended, and ideal rights to the city are often mediated by protest, and even by violence […]

—Diane Davis

Daughters of Violence. The Need for Women's Organized Action.

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that homeless people, street protesters and female citizens have something in common: the potential denial of their access to the RTC. Women in Mexico City are at least partly denied their RTC to the extent that they cannot navigate city spaces freely and safely. For them, street harassment is a daily threat that constrains the schedules and ways in which they commute throughout and use public spaces. Furthermore, the unsettling rates of other sexual assaults against women in the city highlight street harassment as a sort of reminder of women's bodies' assumed vulnerability and the probability of being attacked. While it is true that generalized violence against people who move through public spaces (namely, pedestrians, drivers and passengers of public transportation) is recurring in Mexico City, female inhabitants are a target for sexual violence at alarming rates. 92.9% of passers-by who are sexually assaulted are women (INEGI, 2011), 93% of the female population has received lascivious looks, 69% has experienced unwanted physical approaches and 50% has been groped in public spaces (COLMEX & INMUJERES, 2016). Similarly, according to the 2014's survey about harassment on public transportation conducted by the polling company YouGov in 15 of the world's largest capitals, Mexico City's public transportation system was ranked the second most dangerous for women, after Bogota and before Lima and Delhi. The five components that were evaluated were: safety when traveling

alone at night, the risk of being verbally and physically harassed, help that passengers provide to victims, trust in authorities to investigate reports of sexual harassment or violence, and availability of safe public transport (Thomson Reuters Foundation News, 2014). As for the verbal and physical harassment component alone, Mexico City ranked the worst (Baker, 2017; Boros, 2014), followed by Lima, Delhi, Bogota, Tokyo and Jakarta (Stop Street Harassment, 2014).

Listening to sexual insinuations, being followed or being groped by male strangers in the streets and in public transport without consent are everyday forms of harassment and assault that women deal with in Mexico City. As girls grow up, they develop a permanent fear of being victims of potential harm, which in turn becomes an interiorized warning about keeping themselves safe. As for experiencing this threat on a regular basis, Mexican activist Selene Romero asserts: "It is like you already know that you will be attacked, you just don't know when" (Romero, 2015). The permanent sensation that female bodies are exposed to potential attacks or unsolicited interactions in public spaces makes it necessary to clarify that these bodies are not a thing which anyone can access or make use of.

Figure 7. Intervened photograph "Space is public, my body is not" by artivist Cerrucha in Mexico City, 2015. Image source: Cerrucha.

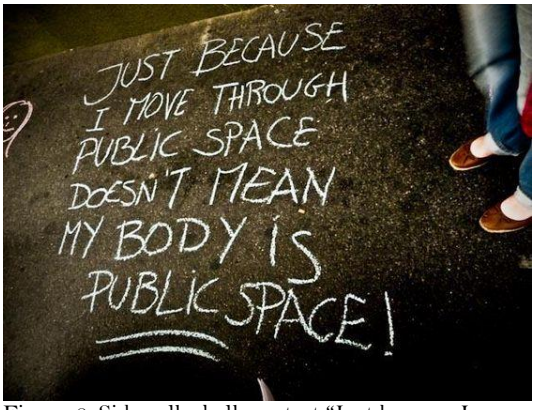

Figure 8. Sidewalk chalk protest "Just because I move through public space doesn't mean my body is public space" in Brussels, 2012. Image source: Hollaback! Brussels.

In response to this situation, "Space is public, my body is not" [Figure 7] has become a widespread imperative that summarizes women's position about the abuses against their bodies and human integrity on the streets. This assertion encapsulates women's determination to reclaim respect for their bodies and to state that they are not at anybody's disposal nor available for being harassed or assaulted. While this statement is also common in women's struggles in developed countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Belgium, where the slogan "Just because I move through public space doesn't mean my body is public space" [Figure 8] has been displayed in street protests, the much higher rates of abuse and disrespect of women's bodies in Mexico and Latin American countries have produced more urgent and active modes of resistance. The similarity of harsh conditions for women among the countries of the region has made Mexico articulate its discourse of women's resistance against violence in permanent dialogue with the countries of Central America, South America and the Caribbean. In spite of the particularities of the urban environments of all of these countries, they have created certain ethics and rhetoric in common that sustain their women's struggles. As a matter of fact, a variety of materials and content created by Latin American activists are constantly retrieved by Mexican activists and vice versa, to the point that they become foundational in each other's struggles. This includes the coining and circulation of slogans that summarize a whole set of politics, mandates and concerns.

In Mexico, over the past two decades [since the 1st National Feminist Meeting in 2010 and the 1st SlutWalk March No Means No in 2011 (I. Jiménez, 2011) ignited reflection on women's determination about their self-worth and street safety], women have coined long-standing slogans that encapsulate the foundational principles of anti-street harassment activism, to which I will refer throughout this chapter. For instance, "The streets are mine in

the morning and at night" and "The streets and the nights are ours" [Figures 9 and 10] are well-known phrases in women's movements that reclaim the right to be safe when moving through city spaces no matter what time of day or night. These sentences set out to address women's drive to feel afraid, defenceless or not entitled to appropriate a space that seems to strip them of control, freedom and safety.

Figure 9. Intervened photograph of the activist Ana Karen Condes (member of the collective The Daughters of Violence) titled "The streets are mine in the morning and at night" by Mexican artivist Cerrucha, 2015. Image source: Cerrucha.

Figure 10. "The streets and the nights are ours" poster by Mexican activist Rotmi Enciso of the collective Producciones y Milagros A.C., 2015. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

Coupled with some other global female activists' concerns like rape culture, a central concern of women's movement in Mexico, as I have mentioned earlier, is the underlying cultural assumption that women's bodies are available for other individuals to see, judge and abuse. Romero describes this assumption as the result of a process of collective appropriation of women's bodies (Romero, 2015). In response to this, materials that promote statements like "My body is mine" [Figure 11], "I own myself" and "I belong to myself" have emerged in activist circles and are constantly cited in order to assert bodily autonomy. Thus, the assertion that women are the only owners of their bodies and therefore the only ones who should

exercise decisions about their bodies is a fundamental component of anti-street harassment discourses in the city.

Figure 11. "My Body Is Mine" song by Cuban activist and hip-hop group Krudas Cubensi, 2014. Image source: Odaymara Cuesta & Olivia Prendes.

This concern was also addressed by second-wave feminist literature, which would argue that women are a colonized people in the sense that their own territory (their bodies) is seen not as a fundamental ownership, over which they have exclusive command, but as exploitable resources for male sexual pleasure and human reproduction (Morgan, 1984). On a similar note, Latin American feminisms[14] have theorized about the connection between the colonization of land and the colonization of women's bodies. Indigenous women in Bolivia, Chile and Peru, among whom Aymaran[15] Julieta Paredes and Adriana Guzman are leading activists, have created what they call communitarian feminism[16]. Communitarian feminism (whose decolonializing approach has notably nourished anti-street harassment activism in Mexico),

[14] The references to 'feminisms' do not involve a grammatical mistake. The pluralization of feminism was introduced in the late 1980s to indicate that feminism was not the domain of one single group and "to signify the multiplicity of ways in which those who share a feminist critique may come together to address issues"(Miller, 1999:225). The concept feminisms intends to "create discursive space in a fraught arena" (Miller, 1999:225) by resisting homogenization and generalization. (Miller, 1999).
It was also introduced as a strategic term by activists to facilitate the negotiation of a complex range of ideological, national and regional differences (Hawkesworth, 2010; Miller, 1999).
[15] The Aymarans are an indigenous nation from the Andes and Altiplano regions of South America. Nowadays, Aymaran communities are located in Bolivia, Peru and Chile.
[16] Also known as "community-based feminism".

points out the ways in which women's bodies, land and aboriginal culture, have all been regarded historically as objects of colonization (Paredes, 2013). "Neither land nor women are territories of conquest" and "You cannot decolonize without depatriarchalizing" [Figures 12 and 13] are two of the most characteristic statements that have been most widely circulated in order to raise awareness about the urgency of women's determination to defend the autonomy of their bodies as *mestiza*[17] women in a country that has been colonized in the first place.

Figure 12. "Neither land nor women are territories of conquest" graffiti created by Bolivian collective Women Creating, 2015. Image source: Mujeres Creando.

Figure 13. "You cannot decolonize without depatriarchalizing" graffiti created by Bolivian collective Women Creating, 2014. Image source: Mujeres Creando.

The dissemination of these premises has developed as certain alliances among women have also been created. Women's groups have been formed as women started to share their experiences of street harassment. In these groups, the participants started to listen, advice and share legal aid resources with each other. The formation of these groups led to the emergence of organized action, prompted by the need for specific strategies to respond in the event of assaults. Through collective practices and activist participation, the girls and women in these groups have ever since sustained an affective network of alliances through which they keep in

[17] Mestiza is a female-gendered term to name a woman whose ancestors are both native peoples from Abya Yala (which is the Kuna language name that the region that we know now as Latin America had before being colonized) and white European settlers. Nowadays, in Mexico and many Latin American countries, mestiza is a racialized and political identification that refers to a person who has a mixed cultural and racial heritage resulting from those two ancestries.

touch and support each other. Women who participate in these circles admit they feel very thankful and blessed for being part of a peer-based community that makes them feel accompanied (Vega, 2017). The creation of these networks of organized action arises as necessary also because of the dismissal of inquiries into, and action on, gendered issues that unfold in the city. Along with their testimony, women also share their experience when legally denouncing street harassment as well as exerting pressure towards government campaigns, policy making and political discourses which claim to take care of this issue. For instance, in August 2016, the municipal government of Mexico City launched the app *Live Safe CDMX* (*Vive Segura CDMX*) as a strategy derived from Mexico City's participation in the UN Women Global Initiative "Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls", along with the cities of New Delhi, Cairo, Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá (Women's National Institute, 2016).

Allegedly, the purpose of this app was to provide female users a tool for reporting threatening situations in the streets and in public transportation and to assist the users when in need. When women started to use the app to ask for help, they noticed the app did not work as promised, since no authority ever came to help them. As they started to share their experience and opinions about the app, they realized that the municipal government was utilizing women's reports to only map zones where a reoccurrence of attacks was taking place, without ever responding to their urgent requests (Híjar, 2016). While gathering information to spot potentially dangerous zones is certainly necessary, the fact that governmental institutions were lying made women upset, because they were expecting to get some help in case of danger, instead of merely serving as sources of information while their safety and their lives were threatened. The resulting exchange of information is an example of conversations where

reflections about the need to rely on women's personal resources instead of relying on the criminal justice system are articulated in the city.

Situations like this have made women's networks go beyond individual moral support. In a context where both machismo culture and institutional inefficiency enable a hostile urban environment of permanent catcalling and assaults against women, anti-street harassment activism has become one of the most predominant causes of women's grassroots struggles in Mexico City. One point of departure of this type of activism is to invite women to actively demand their right to use and appropriate public space as a space that has been historically denied to them (The Daughters of Violence, 2016b). Specifically, self-defence ethics and practices that set out to immediately respond to street harassment and prevent further assaults have developed as one form of public intervention that resists the violation of women's right to navigate the city in a safe way. In the next section, I go on to explicate where and in what way self-defence is situated as a form of anti-street harassment activism in Mexico City.

Feral Resistance. Grassroots Anti-Street Harassment Activism.

Street harassment is part of a continuum of gender-based violence where a number of other issues regarding the objectification of women's bodies unfold, such as the criminalization of abortion, the trivialization of the effects of rape culture and the dismissal of cases of missing and murdered women. In order to contest street harassment as one particular expression of a wider sexist paradigm, women-organized expressions of dissent are constantly taking place in

the city and create a narrative of local resistance. These expressions of dissent can be grouped in the following two forms:

1. Media making and circulation, which includes the creation of DIY materials, graphics, ads, stencils, graffiti, slogans, literary composition, musical composition and any combination of these. These expressions involve the fact that the participants denounce gender issues by using hand-made devices, resources or content that they craft or elaborate themselves in order to spread specific messages, which often take the form of catchy or relatable images, short sentences, claims, mottos or requests [Figures 14 and 15].

Figure 14. "Do not touch me" patch by Mexican illustrator Iurhi Peña, member of the collective We Make FemZines, 2016. Image source: Iurhi Peña.

Figure 15. "Against patriarchal violence, feminist self-defence" stencil on a wall in Madrid, 2014. Image source: Sandra Campó.

2. Embodied protest, which for the most part takes the form of street disruptions where women's bodies enact outrage by doing symbolic acts, *escraches*[18], street performances

[18] An escrache (from the Genoese word *scracca* and the Piedmontese word *screacé*, which means *to expectorate*) (Gobello, 2005) is a popular symbolic protest where an organized group of people denounce an aggressor or a person who is responsible of an aggression or a crime. (Dictionary of Americanisms, 2010). The protest action takes place in the address or workplace of the person that is denounced, or a public place where this person attends regularly. The term popularized in the 90s (after the dictatorship that ruled

and body-painting. Most of them come about during street protests against specific aggressors or to demand justice for specific cases of women who have been assaulted, as well as other women's practices of memorialization and scheduled demonstrations, such as the Annual March for the International Women's Day, street protests against the increasing rates of *femicides*[19] and other forms of gender-based violence, and symbolic acts to protest against arbitrary detentions of female activists [Figures 16 and 17].

Figure 16. *Escrache* against sexual assaults *#NosotrasPorNosotras* at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City, 2016. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

Figure 17. "Stop Sexual Street Harassment" ad at a public performance against street harassment and sexual assaults in Mexico City, 2016. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

While many expressive practices belong mostly to the first group as they do not necessarily involve the real-time participation of women's bodies, many other public interventions are often a combination of both groups. For instance, women's *batucadas*[20] are a type of musical street ensemble that performs while marching in public demonstrations, where the members rhythmically pound on drums that are made out of repurposed plastic containers. The members can also play either other hand-made or professional musical instruments like

Argentina from 1976 to 1983), when citizens groups would go to protest to the addresses of people who, despite being accused and prosecuted due to crimes they committed during the dictatorship, were released. The term escrache and the denounce practice it involves were adopted by Hispanic countries ever since.

[19] The term *femicide* is a conjunction of the terms female and homicide, deployed to describe the alarming rates of murdered women as a phenomenon (Dorantes, 2017).

[20] Batucada is a percussion-based musical ensemble usually played in the streets, which comes from an African-Brazilian festive tradition.

drums and maracas, and use sound devices like megaphones. While the members of the batucada play the musical instruments, they sing protest songs, chant and shout political slogans, statements, literary compositions, or manifestos out loud. Alternately, the participants carry protest signs, dance, run, jump, spray-paint walls or bus stop billboards, and physically defend themselves from people who might oppose to the protest [Figure 18].

Figure 18. Women's batucadas in Mexico City's downtown, 2015. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

One more example is the 2015's Street Performance against Sexual Harassment, where a group of women walked through some streets of Mexico City's downtown to finally arrive at the Zócalo Capitalino, the city's main square. While the participants were walking, they were showing phrases painted on their faces, bellies, chests, backs and arms. Some of the phrases were: "Your catcalling does not flatter me, it bothers me", "Against street harassment", "I do not want you to catcall me, I want you to respect me", "Hands of other bodies, out!", "I go on

my own anywhere I want", "I go out dressing as I please" and "I want to walk down the streets without you teasing me". As they were marching through the streets, they were pronouncing a set of anti-street harassment statements aided by a megaphone. Each participant was also holding an unfurled umbrella which had a letter painted on it. When all the open umbrellas were lined up, they formed the sentence "Space is public, my body is not" (Cerrucha, 2015) [Figure 19].

Figure 19. Public Street Performance against Sexual Harassment in Mexico City's Zócalo Capitalino, 2015. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

The messages that they were saying out loud were collectively written during the Sixth Annual International Anti-Street Harassment Week in the workshop "Re-appropriation of Public Space against Sexual Street Harassment", organized by the non-profit organization Habitajes and the National Institute for Social Development. The participants of the workshops gathered together for ten weekly sessions in order to share their personal

experiences when facing issues of safety in public space. On the basis of those conversations, they wrote a set of messages that encapsulated their feelings and thoughts about the street harassment they experienced when navigating the city. They called this project 2R Re-Appropriations Network (Sierra, 2016). When female activists communicate their dissent through these public disruptions, both in their speech and in their acts, they refer to and deploy their own bodies. "This body is my body, it should not be touched, it should not be assaulted, it should not be murdered" is a slogan frequently printed in posters and painted on different parts of protestors' bodies [Figures 20 and 21].

Figure 20. "[This body is my body is my body,] it should not be touched, it should not be assaulted, it should not be murdered" and "If one of us is touched, all of us is touched" body-painting on protester's backs in Mexico City, 2016. Image source: María Sahuquillo.

Figure 21. "This body is my body, it should not be touched, it should not be assaulted, it should not be murdered" illustration, 2015, and protest sign, n.d. Images source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

Adrienne Rich's work is a significant inspiration for the spirit of these communicative practices of dissent: «When I write "the body," I see nothing in particular. […] To say "the body" lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective. To say "my body" reduces the temptation of grandiose assertions. This body.» (Rich, 1984:210). This proposition points to the importance of sticking to one's own lived experience when it comes to protesting against abuses in collective spaces, without engaging in hypothetical assumptions or generalizations. The concreteness of women's bodies telling and enacting in the streets both

their experience and their standpoint about it, places them not as performing-only bodies but most importantly as political actors, in the sense that they speak for their lives and their bodies as a result of the material conditions that those lives and bodies have been put through by systematic social and cultural regulations and structures of power.

I propose to understand women's self-defence as one of these expressive practices, in which women also connect their thought and their speech with their bodies and exteriorize it publicly. Women's self-defence in Mexico City consists of physical training and technical bodily awareness but also is a discourse inspired by particular ethics and politics, about which I will say more in the next section. Self-defence discourse and practice are deployed as a resource to both symbolically convey dissent and physically respond to expected or unexpected physical violence. Therefore, as part of the public expressions of dissent that I previously addressed, the anti-street harassment activism in Mexico City includes the creation of a) materials and content and b) cultural, expressive and defence practices in public space. This combined activist response creates a particular urban narrative of female resistance in Mexico City. On the one hand, the continuity, circulation, archival and retrieval of materials and content open up a spectrum of symbolic action that extends from knowledge mobilization to informational activism (McKinney, 2015). On the other hand, self-defence (as a specific strategy of anti-street harassment activism) promotes political awareness about gendered issues among citizens and calls women to action by spreading practical strategies and *know-hows*. Therefore, it can be argued that —oriented by anti-street harassment mandates and utilizing women's capability to physically respond— self-defence discourse and everyday praxis comprise a disruptive expression of dissent that might advocate for women's right to navigate city spaces safely in a more profound way than what is typically known as women's direct

action in Mexico City, which most of the times is visible for a few minutes or hours (E.g. the other women's protests that I illustrate earlier). What I would like to take up in relation to self-defence is its political significance and the ways in which it might re-signify the meaning of the city's public space for women. In order to do so, in the next section I address the discourse and ethics of women's self-defence in Mexico City.

If You Defend Yourself, You Defend Us All. The Politics of Urban Self-Defence.

Against the backdrop of an inefficient criminal justice in Mexico, self-defence has become one of the most trustworthy strategies girls and women rely on when it comes to their safety on the streets. Self-defence activism is a form of politicized action that sets out to invite women to shift away from victimhood to an active response. This response is inspired by an individual and collective ethics of care directed to oneself but also to each other, as it is grounded in the idea that, to the extent that one woman individually responds to harassment, she contributes to the consolidation of a collective will that vanishes the interiorized sense of passivity and helplessness, through a potential decrease of situations of potential danger against other women. These politics are encapsulated in catchphrases like: "If you defend yourself, you

defend us all" and "If one of us is touched, all of us respond" [Figures 22 and 23].

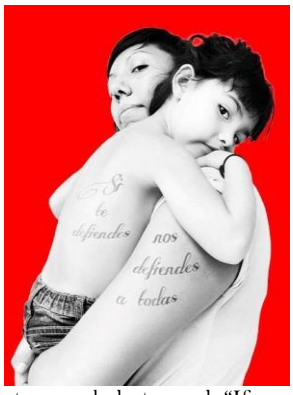

Figure 22. Intervened photograph "If you defend yourself, you defend us all" by Mexican artivist Cerrucha, 2016. Image source: Cerrucha.

Figure 23. "If one of us is touched, all of us respond" protest sign in Mexico City, n.d. Image source: Feminismos en Red.

Furthermore, self-defence is an outstanding component of women's activism in Mexico, as it consists not only of practical strategies for fighting back but also of a specific knowledge of the roots and logics of violence against women, the relation between women's bodies and the spaces they move through and the relation between women and their bodies themselves. Additionally, the reflections and practices encouraged by self-defence open up relevant peer-based processes of support, accompaniment and community-building:

> *Self-defense is more than physical techniques, but it is nonetheless grounded in altering women's relationships to their own physical bodies. It incorporates women's awareness of their surroundings, women's abilities to strategize options for dealing with violence; women's abilities to use their voice to demand what they want and don't want, to yell and to draw attention to violence and harassment […]; women sharing information with other women and getting help to heal from violence; women physically fighting back and carrying themselves in a confident, active manner. Self-defense isn't just warding off attackers. It is also about improving women's overall quality of life on a daily basis* (Rentschler, 1999:154).

Aside from those groups which operate intermittently or are currently emerging, the most established projects on self-defence that have been formed in Mexico City are The Daughters of Violence (*Las Hijas de Violencia*) and Commando Hummingbird (*Comando Colibrí*) [Figures 24 and 25]. Out of these two, The Daughters of Violence is the only one that has self-identified as a feminist collective.

Figure 24. Mexican artivist collective The Daughters of Violence, 2016. Image source: The Daughters of Violence.

Figure 25. Mexican self-defence group Commando Hummingbird, 2015. Image source: Enredadas Valencia.

The Daughters of Violence was a feminist art collective that created a series of street performances to contest catcalling, from 2013 to 2016. This group, comprised of three young female activists from Mexico City, derived from an independent study of gender-based violence conducted by Ana Beatriz Martínez and Ana Karen Orozco. The project of The Daughters of Violence, based on performance art, punk culture and video-making, set out to render socially legitimized chauvinist violence visible and invite other women to reflect on it. The group's manifesto reads:

> *We are the daughters of Violence. We carry years of moving through a hostile public space which does not leave room for a female body as a passing-through body, but as a body for other*

> *people's enjoyment. We are the prietas*[21]*, the short, the poor, the whores; the ones who have to smile but not that much; the ones who menstruate without nobody noticing. The ones who sully, yell, rage. The hysterical, the crazy. The hairy who want to take back the command of their bodies. The exaggerated who want to walk down the streets with nobody harassing them. The dyke. The ones who abort. The pro-choice. The alone. The feminazis. The single. The aggressive who will shoot you the next time you grope us* (La Julia, 2016; Las Hijas de Violencia, 2016).

Their performances are grouped into two projects: *Anti-Sexist Scenic Puke* (*Vómito escénico antisexista*) and *Punk Sexist* (*Sexista Punk*). *Punk Sexist*, consisted of the three members of the collective walking down some streets in the city and confronting men who would assault them verbally. Sometimes verbal confrontation was enough to respond back and stop the harassment, and sometimes they completed their confrontation by shooting confetti guns at the assaulters, turning on a couple of speakers that they would carry on their backs to sing along their song *Punk Sexist* [Figure 26], whose lyrics included the following lines:

> *What you have done to me is called harassment*
>
> *If you do this to me this way, I will respond*
>
> *You must know: you are not the number one or ten*
>
> *I am fed up with this and your stupidity*
>
> *In a low voice, you tell me so many things*
>
> *I pass by and I see your nasty look*
>
> *You don't flatter me, you make me feel uncomfortable*

[21] *Prieta* is a female-gendered Mexican slang word for "brown girl".

What I am wearing doesn't matter

You don't have the right [to harass me] […]

I find this every day

The same aggressive looks and words […]

If you say nothing, I say nothing, we say nothing

We are nothing but a piece of meat […]

I know it is not normal that you try to touch me

That you talk to me as if you were going to rape me

I imagine the day in which I can go out for a walk

Without having to watch out and hide my body

I am not, you idiot, who asks for it

It is you who don't respect me

And you piss me off (The Daughters of Violence, 2016a).

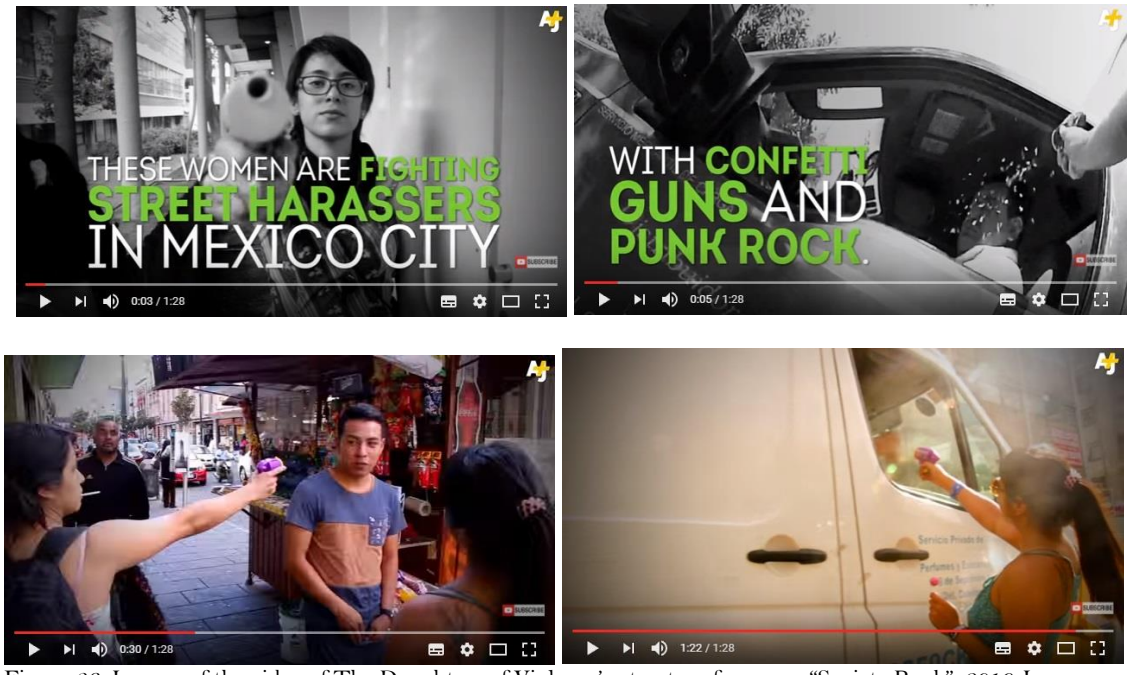

Figure 26. Images of the video of The Daughters of Violence's street performance "Sexista Punk", *2016*. Images source: AJ+.

Confronted with determination and assertiveness, as well as a musicalized performance, was an unexpected response for the assaulters, who would feel exposed and ridiculous. A valuable effect of this intervention was that, by the very act of shifting from freezing, trying to ignore or feeling ashamed (some common women's responses to street harassment) to an explicit and confident request to back off, The Daughters of Violence would return the sexual assaulters' intimidation tactics. Through their playful but meaningful street performances, this collective largely spread the ethics of self-defence and the urgency of reclaiming respect for their bodies as a form of appropriating public space. The Daughters of Violence's expressive acts in the streets set out to transcend their useful effects on female pedestrians' everyday life. In other words, what is noteworthy about their self-defence activism is that it was not limited to their short public performances. Rather, the major contribution of this collective is that they gathered the mandates of grassroots self-defence activism that other activists use to disseminate without crystallizing them in a specific project.

Thereafter, among women's groups in the city, The Daughters of Violence consolidated its position as a pioneer activist group in stressing the importance of addressing the foundations of the discourse and imperatives of self-defence, and the ways in which this might potentially re-order the meaning of the streets for women. While self-defence activism aims at an instrumental response to street harassment, it is first inspired by Hispanic feminist politics[22] of verbalizing self-representation and self-identification through the formation of

[22] In the first section of this chapter, *Daughters of Violence. The Need for Women's Organized Action*, I mention that plenty of cultural texts and discursive strategies produced by South American, Central American and Caribbean activists are constantly retrieved by Mexican activists and vice versa, to the point that they become foundational in each other's struggles. Despite the economic and political differences between Latin American countries and European countries, activist groups from Spain relate to these discourses and sometimes participate in this exchange. Their integration completes a sort of transnational circuit of creation and circulation of Spanish-speaking content that sustains a frame in common and a multi-directional conversation of shared ethics and mandates articulated by one mutual language.

one's own narratives, in order then to enact them publicly. As a matter of fact, the street protests' claims derived from women's own experiences of abuse, as evidence of the ways in which self-defence culture in the city involves the protection of oneself both physically and discursively. An outstanding trait of self-defence in Mexico City is women's determination to take the law into their own hands instead of fully relying on the justice system. Women in the region are frustrated at seeing aggressors who are accused very often released on bail or discharged, and have constructed an ethics that sets out to encourage bravery, agency and even revenge. Their hands-on politics, which are oriented towards preventing street harassment from escalate to other forms of violence, extend from invitations like "Woman, arm yourself" (whose original Spanish version, "Mujer, á(r)mate", is a play on words between the word *ámate*, which means "love yourself"; and *ármate,* which means "arm yourself") to more daring propositions like "If he doesn't respect you, make him feel scared" [Figures 27 and 28].

Figure 27. "Woman, arm yourself" protest sign, 2016. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

Figure 28. "Woman: If he doesn't respect you, make him feel scared #Self-defence" protest sign, n.d. Image source: Señorita Vagabunda.

Other common premises of self-defence discourse in the city include "Machete to the *machote*[23]" (*Machete al machote*) [Figures 29 and 30] and "Rape-y dick to the blender" (*Verga violadora, a la licuadora*). These two puns, which have two words that rhyme in their original

[23] *Machote* is a Hispanic slang word for "chauvinist man".

Spanish versions, are very frequently mobilized within radical feminist circles. These messages are an invitation to not remain passive and resigned when women perceive imminent danger, in order to defend themselves from harm, and an invitation to fight back in the event of a threatening situation, even when the situation involves hurting the attacker or abuser in order not to be hurt instead. In this research, I frequently cite various protest slogans because of their centrality in women's struggles in Mexico City and the rest of the country. The creation and circulation of these catchphrases, which have become a fundamental part of the female protest culture vernacular, are an extensively used resource that affords the movement broad and accurate propagation, as a result of these slogan's longevity, fecundity and faithful copying (Shifman, 2016). Their longevity is demonstrated by the slogans' capacity to survive over the years and to be passed on from one street demonstration to another, from one activist group to another, from one city to another, from one language to another[24]. Their fecundity can be found in the number of replications produced in the form of protest signs, stencils, graffiti, and similar DIY materials in protest gatherings and in the production of cultural texts. The faithfulness of their copying resides in the accuracy with which the political imperatives are communicated and reproduced through explicit statements. Thus, self-defence utilizes a slogan's shortness and local ubiquity and visibility in order to ease and boost the diffusion of particular forms of women's thought and action. They acknowledge women bodies' autonomy and agency, promoting the right to be respected and safe from harm and the right to navigate

[24] Many protest slogans of women's movements are adopted by various other women's movements around the world and across languages. Some of them are literal translations and some other adjust slightly depending on the city's or country's context. The slogans "Just because I move through public space doesn't mean my body is public space" and "The streets belong to us all" are two examples of slogans that exist in different languages and countries.

city spaces confidently, as well as extending an invitation to respond to physical and verbal violence.

Figure 29. "Machete al machote" sticker, 2013. Image source: Mi&Ko.

Figure 30. "Machete al machista" grafitti, n.d. Image source: The Daugthers of Violence.

These self-defence messages are a creative response of dissent to the sexist paradigms that enable street harassment. This type of slogan converts collective rage and grief into puns and wordplays in order to raise awareness and call to action. At the linguistic level, they revitalize the use of rhetorical devices and forms of speech that pass on local culture, cultural experience and acquired knowledge over time, like the adage, the maxim, the saying, the apothegm and the aphorism. What is outstanding about these catchphrases is that, aside from the fact that they deploy literary resources like the metaphor and the rhyme, they are inspired by contemporary gendered lived experience and embodied perceptions of everyday risk and hostility in city spaces. The radical discourse on self-defence in Mexico City, which is similar to the rhetoric of some women's struggles in the global south, (where the slogan "You rape, we chop" has been deployed in protest movements in South Africa in 2013 and India in 2012 [Figure 31]), is found to be aggressive, unreasonable, unjustifiable and incorrect by some people that are not part of feminist communities.

Figure 31. "You rape, we chop" protest sign in India, 2012. Image source: India Times.

These politics, nevertheless, have been formed in a place of rage and in response to the harsh conditions that women face in Mexico and Latin America. When these politics are criticized by the general opinion that argues that violence should not be fought with violence, female activists, who are fed up with feeling defenceless, respond: "Violence is not defending yourself from harm. Violence is going out and wondering how bad you are going to be harassed or assaulted on your way home. Violence is feeling afraid for being a woman." [Figures 32 and 33] (Vega, 2017).

Figure 32. "Are we the violent ones?" graffiti on a wall in Buenos Aires, 2016. Image source: Reddit.

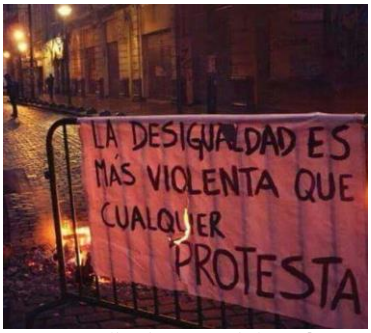

Figure 33. "Inequality is more violent than any protest" protest sign, 2014. Image source: The Daughters of Violence.

Self-defence's invitation to women to fight back and even retaliate is part of a discursive violence that is actually outlined as a rhetorical strategy to defend oneself by returning the fear. Judith Halberstam describes this strategy as a form of imagined violence

that responds to unpunished real violence (Halberstam, 1993). This imagined violence in self-defence discourse happens to be unsanctioned by general opinion, partly, because in the popular imaginings of violence, women tend to be entitled to occupy the role of a victim, not that of a perpetrator of violence. Self-defence discourse in Mexico City, however, creates an imaginable counter-reality as a strategy of revolt (Halberstam, 1993), that is to say, a tactic that can potentially produce change to re-signify women's urban experience through their violent representations of resistance against street harassment and the construction of the threat of retaliation.

Self-defence in Mexico City enacts particular women's ethics and circulating forms of thinking that attempt to have an impact on everyday women's praxis, local activist labour and connective action. In doing so, practices of self-defence influence the ways in which women live out their urban identities and embody certain politics and beliefs derived from their situated experience. Thus, self-defence local culture in the city is useful not only for understanding women's behaviours of dissent, their cultural production and the ethical principles governing them, but also the context and conditions in which those behaviours and productions ae produced. Examining urban self-defence logics is significant because they summarize important aspects of the navigation of public spaces as differentiated identities and the ways in which particular subjectivities decide to respond to the risks they face. In this chapter, I have sought to elaborate some of the ways in which women's activism in Mexico City articulates a response to street harassment as the result of collective reflections which contribute to the re-signification of women's urban experience.

Chapter 3. Re-Signifying Urban Localities.

Self-Defence as Street Intervention, Street Intervention as Political Act

The RTC was offered, theoretically, as a revolution in the sphere of everyday life, characterized not only by the right to use and enjoy the material and immaterial resources that the city hosts but also the right to decide and participate in the creation of those other things that are required to fulfill inhabitants' needs (Buckingham, 2011; Harvey, 2008; M. H. Purcell, 2008). As a result, the RTC involves the possibility of producing urban space and re-creating urban life based on the specific necessities and wishes of the people who inhabit a given city. In light of this conceptualization, this research has addressed women's public disruptions to reclaim safer streets in Mexico City as a way of demanding their RTC. Specifically, I argue that the ways in which Mexican women contest street harassment through self-defence culture represent an embodied, powerful strategy with which to exercise their right to navigate public spaces in a safe and confident way. On the basis of this assertion, I will outline out some ways in which women's street interventions in Mexico City are a form of political action that reorders the meaning of the city.

A Challenge to the Public-Private/Formal-Informal Divide

A relevant point of departure in the study of gender-related uses of city spaces is women's relation to the divide public-private. When we look at the socially constructed functions and roles that maintain gender inequalities during women's encounters with the city (Buckingham, 2011), we find the dichotomy of the public and the private as an element that has historically

shaped gender-based spatial relations, such as those related to the sexual division of productive labour and reproductive labour. According to this split, male actors were in charge of the first type of labour (which consisted of the discussion of ideas, the formation of politics, the decision-making processes, and membership in the waged labor force); and female actors were confined to the second type (which took care of household responsibilities, care giving, sexual and affective labour and unpaid housework[25]). This division suggested that women's activities were politically inactive, encouraged female seclusion and prompted male dominance in the formal political institutions. Most importantly, this divide underpinned the differentiation and partiality of women's citizenship (Lister, 2003; Martin, 2004; Pateman, 1989). The socio-spatial divisions of public-private and formal-informal have been examined by feminist political geographers as a source of structural oppression. These approaches analyze the ways in which street harassment develops as a mechanism of intimidation that seeks to bring women back exclusively to the private sphere, by making them feel uncomfortable and insecure when navigating a domain in which they are not supposed to belong. Women's expressive practices against street harassment, therefore, constitute a refuse to experience city spaces as spaces that are denied to them.

Furthermore, many women's practices of resistance have gained visibility in the international imagining of social movements, due to their various forms of intervention in city spaces. From the Guerrilla Girls' creative stickers and posters of denunciation pasted up on

[25] As a matter of fact, according to Rousseau's social scheme, women were excluded from the public realm of citizenship as they were deemed to be "the caretakers of affectivity, desire and the body" (Young, 1989:254). Plenty of studies from feminist geography, sociology and media studies have traced the diverse instances that have ever since constructed socio-cultural perceptions of women as belonging in private spaces.

the street walls of New York[26], to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's white headscarves graffiti on the pavement of Buenos Aires main square[27], to the female vigilantes of the Red Brigade patrolling the streets of Lucknow[28], to Pussy Riot street performances in Moscow[29], to Femen topless protests in Eastern and Western European cities[30], women-only activist groups have developed their own vocality and coding in order to unify the representation of their struggles and display them publicly [Figure 34].

[26] The Guerrilla Girls is a New York-based feminist activist group that create visuals in order to expose gender and ethnic bias, as well as discrimination in the realms of art, film, politics and pop culture (Guerrilla Girls, 2017).

[27] The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo is a movement of Argentinian mothers whose children were kidnapped and disappeared during the military dictatorship that ruled the country between 1976 and 1983. Since 1977, these women gather to protest at the Plaza de Mayo square that is located in front of the presidential palace *Casa Rosada*, wearing a white scarf on their heads, which became the symbol of their protest. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were the initial responders to the human rights violation committed during the state terrorism of the dictatorship.

[28] Red Brigade is an Indian self-defence group that spreads awareness on sexual violence, provides self-defence education to young girls and directly talk to sexual molesters and rapists and their families. The group started with a volunteer base whose members patrolled the streets of slums in Lucknow, wearing red and black *salwar kameez* or sport clothes (red, representing danger, and black, representing protest), in order to confront harassers and minimise teasing and stalking in public spaces (Chamberlain, 2013; Sengar, 2017).

[29] Pussy Riot is a feminist Russian collective based in Moscow that, through street performance and video-making, protested discriminatory government policies against women and LGBT groups, Vladimir Putin's authoritarian regime and Orthodox Church leaders' support for Putin. The members used to perform wearing brightly colored tights, dresses and balaclavas.

[30] Femen is a Ukrainian-French feminist collective that performs topless street protests against sexual exploitation of women, religious institutions and homophobia, body-painted with political slogans and crowned with flowers. Nowadays, there are members holding street protests in Warsaw, Zürich, Rome, Tel Aviv, Rio de Janeiro, Montreal, and other cities in Germany, the U.S., Switzerland, Italy, Bulgaria, and Tunisia.




Figure 34. From left to right:
"Do women have to be naked to get in the Met. Museum?" Guerrilla Girls' sticker on New York's wall, 1989. Image source: Guerrila Girls.
Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's headscarve graffiti at the *Casa Rosada* square in Buenos Aires, 2016. Image source: COB La Brecha.
Members of the Red Brigade walking through the Midiyav slum in Lucknow, 2013. Image source: The Guardian.
Members of Pussy Riot performing at Red Square in Moscow, 2012. Image source: Reuters.
Femen protest in Milan against Vladimir Putin's politics, 2014. Image source: Agence France-Presse.

Overcoming the tendency to marginalize women's political participation by labeling it "informal" or by locating it exclusively in the private sphere, women's political acts nowadays range from voting and holding office (Cope, 2004) to individual and collective symbolic acts of resistance, criticism and autonomy. In urban settings, this spectrum of participatory practices shares a common orientation, which is to improve the living conditions for women and address specific issues that undermine their rights as human beings and citizens.

In the case of Mexico City, self-defence culture forms the core of women's grassroots political action directed at everyday access to their RTC. As I claim in chapter 2, the expressions of this self-defence culture are a street intervention in two senses: first, in terms of women's embodiment of determination and readiness to fight back or ward off aggressors in public spaces; and two, in terms of the visual and discursive representations of self-defence that are created and circulated in the city as a politicized response. The fact that this double strategy involves a deliberate use of public spaces represents a major transgression on the part of women, as they entitle themselves both to command the interaction of their own bodies with other bodies, and to decide how to use the public spaces through which they move. This represents a profound political turn in terms of how women exist in cities, in which male dominance has tried to confine them to invisibility, passivity, conformity and abnegation. Both in Mexico and Latin America, women's interventions in space that materialize in specific strategies (in the case of this research, everyday behaviours of self-defence and regular content-mobilization), need to be credited for sparking the discussion and awareness of women's lived experience in public arenas not only in terms of the generalities of critical social theories, but in a set of thorough, systematic reflections on socialized bodies (Young, 2005a) that navigate and interact in spaces of which the traditional divides public-private/formal-informal no longer give a sufficient account.

Networked Uses of Urban Space for the Purposes of Dissent

The prevalence and emergence of multiple forms of gendered socio-cultural, economic and political discrimination against female population worldwide (whose rates have increased over

the last years (Murdie & Peksen, 2015))[31] have resulted in an ever stronger presence of women's organized action. However, no study to date has articulated a systematic analysis of the transnational mass mobilization of women (Murdie & Peksen, 2015). Public disruptions in Mexico City engage with female political action at three spatial scales (local, national and regional) and, to a certain extent, exemplify women's protest culture and its modes of resistance in Mexico and Latin America. The existing studies that address regional women's political participation have shed light on the similarities between different sites of formation of women's collective activism. These include, for example, the ways in which democratizing states have tried to control and co-opt women's initiatives while pretending to incorporate public policies aimed at women's interests (Alvarez, 1990), and the development and uses of a politically effective image of womanhood and motherhood in collective protests (Radcliffe, 1993), such as the ones founded by The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo[32] in Buenos Aires, the mothers of Las Muertas de Juárez[33] in Ciudad Juarez, Las Patronas[34] in Veracruz, and, more recently, the mothers of Ayotzinapa[35].

[31] Until 2015, 81 countries had a majority of women, 36 countries had a majority of men and 75 were within 0.5% of gender parity. Nowadays, men outnumber women on the planet by 66 million, the highest number ever recorded (Bauer, 2016).

[32] A short description of The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo movement can be found in a footnote of the previous section in this chapter, *A Challenge to the Historic Divide Public-Private/Formal-Informal*.

[33] Since 1993, more than 400 girls and women have been murdered and more than 400 are missing in the city of Ciudad Juarez, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. In 2001, a group of mothers of the missing and murdered women founded the organization May Our Daughters Return Home, which fights femicide, reclaims justice and denounce the state complicity to the impunity of the cases.

[34] Las Patronas is a group of activist women of La Patrona community, from the town of Guadalupe in the municipality of Amatlán de los Reyes in the Mexican state of Veracruz. Since 1995, the group provides food and assistance to migrants on their way north to the United States through Veracruz. In 2013, their work towards the defense of the migrant rights earned the National Human Rights Award.

[35] Ayotzinapa is a community located in the metropolitan area of the city of Tixtla de Guerrero in the Mexican state of Guerrero. In 2014, a bus with 43 male students from the Teachers College of Ayotzinapa who were heading to a protest in Iguala, was intercepted by police forces, and the students were kidnapped and disappeared by the Mexican State. Ever since, the mothers of have fought for the search for our children and protested for the meager progress in the investigation of the case (Driver, 2011).

The region also shares an extended repressive political context, where a series of military dictatorships and oppressive and violent regimes have dominated formal political, economic, and social structures for decades throughout Latin American history. Derived from this oppressive context, struggles regarding issues of human rights and state violence have importantly shaped not only women's lives (Cope, 2004) but also their forms of insurrection, which in turn respond to the specific abuses they experience in their position as women. As a matter of fact, the sexual abuse of girls and women has been extensively used as a weapon of war during guerrilla warfare, civil unrest and armed conflicts in Colombia, Argentina and Mexico. Various activist discourses and projects have addressed the issue of the female body as a spoil of war, such as the Mexican photographer Liliana Zaragoza's trans-media project *Held Gaze: To Resist Is to Hold the Gaze* (*Mirada sostenida: Resistir es sostener la mirada*)[36], which retrieves the oral history of female survivors of sexual abuse during the 2006's repression and occupation of the Mexican San Salvador Atenco community[37] by federal forces [Figures 35 and 36].

Figure 35. Women protesting at a demonstration in San Salvador Atenco, 2006. Image source: Gabriela de la Rosa, Somos el medio.


Figure 36. Participants of the project "Mirada sostenida: Resistir es sostener la mirada", 2010. Image source: Liliana Zaragoza.

[36] Of the 27 survivors of sexual assault and torture that participate in the project, 11 denounced the Mexican State before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (Zaragoza, 2017).

[37] San Salvador Atenco is a community located in the Metropolitan Area of Valle de México, on the outskirts of Mexico City. In 2004 and 2006, a series of violent confrontations between police forces and residents and members of the Peoples Front for the Defense of the Land took place, causing the deaths of protesters. During the unrest, dozens of women were sexually assaulted and tortured by the police forces.

The regional attention to rape as a weapon against women (and the communities and territories they inhabit) and the politics of self-defence against street sexual assault are connected. Both reflections point to two sexual manifestations of aggression carried out by male actors as a way to control, terrorize and dehumanize women (Mayer, 2004; Seifert, 1994). The connectedness linking the reflections and imperatives that underscore women's activist agendas in the region is what enables the formation of networked organized action both in Mexico and Latin America. This dialogue makes possible the simultaneous mass mobilization of women in various cities in Mexico and in most Hispanic countries, where the transnational movements *Ni Una Menos* (which translates to English as "Not One [Woman] Less") and *Vivas Nos Queremos* (which translates to English as "We Want Us Alive") [Figures 37 and 38] articulate a national and international assemblage of protesting women that is inspired by politics in which self-defence culture is fundamental.

Figure 37. "¡Vivas nos queremos!" illustration by Argentinian illustrator María Tatumba., 2016. Image source: Pinterest.

Figure 38. *Vivas nos queremos/ Ni Una Menos* march in Mexico City, 2016. Image source: Producciones y Milagros Archivo Feminista.

These movements take to the streets in scheduled demonstrations more than 4 times a year and spur women to embody the struggle all along the year through their bodily readiness to fight back in the event of an assault. Other examples of networked women's intervention in public spaces are the movements #IWillGoOut that in 2017 took place in more than 30 towns

and cities across India to reclaim women's rights to safe public spaces and streets at night and stands in solidarity against sexual harassment and misogyny (#IWillGoOut, 2017; Taneja, 2017) [Figures 39], the Take Back the Night rallies that originated in 1973 and have involved demonstrations in the United States and Canada since 1978 (Hyndman, 2004), and the SlutWalk, a transnational movement that sets out to abolish rape culture and misogynistic body-shaming practices. Since their introduction in Toronto in 2011, SlutWalk demonstrations have taken place in various cities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Australia, India, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras and Uruguay [Figures 40 and 41].

Figure 39. "#IWillGoOut" banner, 2017. Image source: #IWillGoOut official Facebook page.

Figure 40. "Marcha das vadias" protest sign at a SlutWalk demonstration in São Paulo, 2011. Image source: Marcel Maia.

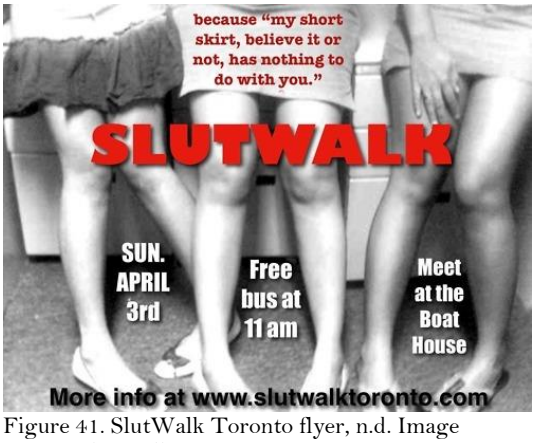

Figure 41. SlutWalk Toronto flyer, n.d. Image source: SlutWalkTo.

These struggles contest street harassment as the language of an overwhelming environment of sexual terrorism (Kissling, 1991) produced by a series of invasive behaviours that extend from girl-watching to groping, which in Mexico and Latin America potentially escalate to rape and murder (UN Women, 2017). The fact that these expressions involve a political use of the streets has larger implications in city life: they raise awareness of the patterns of inequality that perpetuate gendered abuse in assumed egalitarian city spaces, they stimulate a re-distribution of power and privilege and resources in city spaces, they revitalize a peer-based notion of *the political*, they draw public attention to compelling understandings of inhabitants difference, and finally, they contribute to the deconstruction of the traditional notion of citizenship by delinking it from the norms of the nation-state and directing it toward a more inclusive and participatory notion of "social and cultural citizenship based on affinities with immediate communities and public spaces" (Staeheli & Kofman, 2014:7).

Traces and paths. Early Female Spatial Disruptions.

It is important to note that the interventions of women in public space are not an exclusively contemporary expression of dissent. One reason why studying the significance of women's struggles to use public spaces is relevant is because the production of urban space throughout the centuries has greatly depended on gender constructions and differentiations. One of the most discussed aspects of the relationship of the citizen to the urban landscape concerns the figure of *the flâneur* of nineteenth-century France (Benjamin & Jennings, 2006) —a figure long described in exclusively male-gendered terms. The importance of looking at *flânerie* stems from the ways in which this icon, whose meditations and explorations of city life defined urban

modernity, was a totalizing figure. As such, attention to the *flâneur* has tended to neglect and even deny the experience of the other subjects (which do not fit in the *flâneur*'s characterization) and their interactions with the city, resulting in a limited understanding of the urban experience of the nineteenth century (Lauster, 2007). The scholarly prominence of the *flâneur* has been questioned in terms of the ways in which it has laid the ground for ideas that are taken for granted in contemporary cultural theory (Lauster, 2007).

However, during the nineteenth century itself, when urban modernity was understood and documented through the figure of the *flâneur*, some women took part in the depiction and exploration of modern life in their own way. Their strategy for strolling through and entering spaces involved, at times, certain forms of camouflage that made possible their explorations of the city, such as the cross-dressing and male dress (Mesch, 2009) adopted by the feminist activist Madeleine Pelletier and the novelist and memoirist George Sand [Figure 42] to gain access to venues which were otherwise denied to them as women (Nesci, 2007). Two iconic examples of this public behaviour of resistance to gender norms in Latin American urban settings are Costa Rican-Mexican singer Chavela Vargas [Figure 43], who was the first public woman in Mexico to wear trousers in the 1970s[38]; and *Las Canallas, a* Mexican group of 8 young lesbians who, during the same decade, adopted a physical appearance not common among women (they would wear denim trousers, boots and hats) and engaged in behaviours that appeared fearless. They used to bring knives and guns with them, would assist women in danger by physically confronting molesters and assaulters and would demand access to

[38] Chavela Vargas was even chased out of places (Aquino, 2010) for showing up in a dress code inadmissible for women at that time.

cantinas[39] (which back then used to have a sign over the entrance that read: "No women, men in uniform or dogs allowed.") (Fuentes, 2015).

The stories of these women who refused to adjust to an imposed feminine[40] place within collective life exemplify some of the first behaviours that signalled a refusal of a restrictively gendered urban life and offer early traces of forms of resistance and the appropriation of spaces. To this thesis, what their experiences bring to the table is the ways in which modalities of body comportment and practices of movement in public spaces are bound up with the structure and meaning of women's lived experience (Young, 2005b).

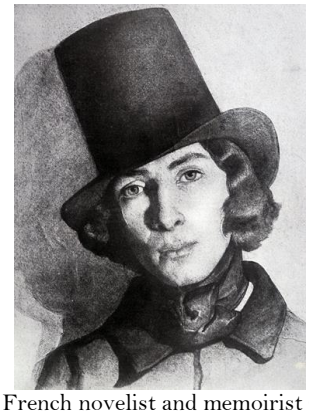

Figure 42. French novelist and memoirist George Sand, n.d.. Image source: Pinterest.

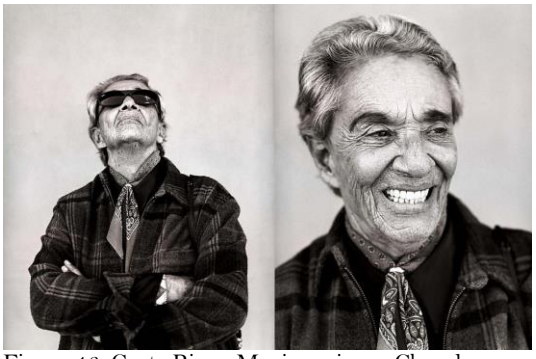

Figure 43. Costa Rican-Mexican singer Chavela Vargas, n.d. Image source: Catherine Gund and Daresha Ky.

Re-Shaping Spaces, Building Community.

Throughout this thesis, significant attention has been paid to expressions of dissent against

[39] A cantina is a type of pupular bar in Mexico.

[40] I deploy "feminine" as an adjective not to describe a mysterious quality that all women are granted by their biological femaleness, but to denote the socially and culturally constructed set of structures and conditions that have historically attempted to construct the typical situation of being a woman (Young, 2005b) in Western thought and societies.

oppressive urban environments that deploy the mobilization of women's bodies as a tool of protest. In terms of the uses of city spaces and the social dynamics that unfold in those spaces, the public interventions addressed in this research (street protests, consciousness-raising performances and self-defence embodied practices and behaviours) have at least two functions. On the one hand, they challenge the gender-based, long-standing structures of power and privilege that are involved in navigating public space, all the while creating new spatial relations that redefine the meaning of the city, especially for subordinated groups. On the other hand, they open up a set of dynamics that encourage the formation of women's social networks of support, comradeship and accompaniment.

As part of both the re-creation of local socio-spatialities and the building of community, public female expressions of dissent articulate urban subjectivities inspired by an ongoing consciousness-raising process that enables politicized judgments and actions. The importance of the formation of these subjectivities can be found in the fact that women's protest practices are not only a system for expressing points of view and contesting a toxic status quo, but also an occasion for the creation of a community in ways that encourage critical thinking and expand ways of knowing and understanding social reality. In other words, women's collective effort to appropriate public spaces through self-defence is politically significant because it offers a set of strategies that encourage emancipatory dynamics for both the promotion of critical thinking about gender-based power asymmetries (Haraway, 1991; McDowell, 1993) and the building of a sense of social engagement and collectivity among women. Thus, women's struggles against street harassment that render gender-based violence visible and subvert forms of oppression have both a pedagogical function and a capacity for

social change, in the sense that they raise awareness through the dissemination of information, discourses and ethics, and through their calls to action.

On the flip side, and in the specific case of Mexico and Latin America, women's organized action significantly consolidates the identifications of Latin American women activist imaginary. Self-defence culture as part of the project of reclaiming women's RTC, galvanizes particular mestiza women[41] and women of colour, within grassroots modes of activism that do not depend on the state provision of justice, and as part of anti-colonial and autonomous politics that draw on indigenous feminisms from Central America, South America and the Caribbean. (All of these, it might be noted, are often dismissed within dominant feminist discourses from the United States and Europe.) The mandates that are enacted by women through self-defence practices are a means of living out their situated identities and decentralizing Western feminist discourses, as well as documenting and spreading Latina women's own narratives and tactics, in the process challenging misconceptions about a singular, universal women's activism.

[41] A brief description of mestiza women can be found in a footnote of *Chapter 2. Space is Public, My Body Is Not*.

Conclusions

One of the inspirations for this research on women's self-defence, as a resource for reclaim public spaces, was the extent to which women's agency regarding gender-based violence is acknowledged and documented. Despite the fact that there is a vast amount of scholarship on violence against women, the focus on women's own defences against that violence is not common (European Parliament, 2016; Snortland, 2015). Furthermore, cases studies of women's movements in general mostly address movements in the United States and Western Europe, while women's movements in other regions are less covered in English-language media and academic literature. Exploring the case of Mexico City (and the ways in which it is in dialogue with national and regional women's struggles) allowed me to escape these limitations.

Exploring the fact that the concept of the RTC actually houses various forms of differentiation, helped to flesh out the ways in which the RTC is a proposal often contested and is becoming a framework wherein multiple forms of social dissent develop. Similarly, engaging with the socio-geographical discussion that public spaces are shaped by long-standing structures of power, control and exclusion, led me to argue that public gender-based violence (exercised, for example, in everyday street harassment) is a form of spatial displacement which female residents in Mexico City are actively contesting through street disruptions as a form of appropriation of city spaces. Finally, articulating a brief analysis of the ways in which the participatory practices of women in public spaces stimulate dynamics that re-signify their spatial locality, guided me to conclude that their expressions of dissent have larger implications in the articulation of political subjectivities, certain politics of women's protest culture in

Mexico and Latin America and the consolidation of networks of kinship and solidarity. On the basis of these explorations, I draw the following three concluding points (which are interrelated to one another), as well as a few ideas of how these points can contribute to future research and engage with interdisciplinary discussions.

Group identifications as a mobilizing force for political action and advocating change.

Women's struggles against a restrictive urban experience in Mexico City exemplify the capacity to crystallize collective identifications that are grounded in the living conditions of a given social group (Cope, 2004; Kuumba, 2001). In this thesis, acknowledging the tensions between gender power relations and the contestation they prompt in public space serves as an entry point for discussions of how a group's agency can reorganize the spatial logics of a city and the symbolic and material implications of this reorganization in public life. On the basis of this assertion, studying groups' agency might serve to further understand the usefulness, potentialities and limitations of collective action in relation to both formal and informal decision-making processes. In other words, the urban disruptions inspired by group identity are a compelling force allowing us to grasp the ways in which the political organization of situated communities can potentially create new urban regimes (Massey, 1994) through dynamics and practices that push for action.

As a matter of fact, over the last six decades, street occupation in Mexico has increasingly positioned as an important resource that draws public opinion towards specific social issues and pushes for justice, policy evaluation and reforms. The mass occupations and

protests carried out by LGBT+ movements since the early 1970s (Jiménez, 2017), struggles for the decriminalization of abortion since 1990 (13 EFLAC, 2014), struggles of the teachers' unions of the public education systems in the early 2010's and struggles that fight state violence against activist students in the last year, exemplify the fact that street intervention remarkably helps to advance a movement's claims and position them in public attention. Therefore, the ideas developed in this thesis about spatial intervention look forward to opening up the dialogue about the ways in which politicized dynamics of local organization can have a substantial influence on larger political and participatory processes, and the gradual fulfillment of activist agendas.

The role of physicality in city spaces, street protest and urban life.

Collective action through street protest is symbolically meaningful, at the least, because it enacts a potential power to confront repressive cultural structures and government systems. At the practical level, this "insurgent urbanism" (Davis & Raman, 2013:60) portrayed in bustling protesting bodies and material resources that intervene public spaces, are part of the physicality of democratic citizenship. In times where many public discussions are actively, increasingly developing and gaining visibility in online spaces such as social media and other digital means of communication, this thesis shows the ways in which women in Mexico and Latin America continue to devote attention to and hold expectations of the physical concentration and uses of their bodies and hand-made/DIY materials to challenge the social and political order, which in turn shapes the political history of a city's places based on its citizen's uses. I thus propose to extend the conversation about the ways in which taking public spaces remains a focal object

of and agreement for political opposition; as well as the ways in which social dissent is performed bodily and physically in other struggles and other cities around the world, where, for instance, rebellious and disruptive acts involve the implementation of material infrastructure such as the erection of fixed encampments and the establishment of toilets and shelters (Davis & Raman, 2013).

In Mexico, the intervention and occupation of city spaces for the purposes of dissent is studied and understood in two senses. The first, as an enactment of urban residents' dissatisfaction, rage and grief, as well as a collective catharsis; and two, as a resource for citizens to demand either society or the state to accommodate or respond to the claims that are being made. Therefore, I additionally propose to further explore the connection between the rights to gather publically, the signification of citizens' congregation at physical venues and the collective capacity to bring about change.

Revitalization of the understandings of citizenship and agency.

City spaces have been long described as spaces of citizenship. Local modes of dissent, however, have forged politics of collective criticism and resistance that help us rethink the sense of belonging to a city and its forms of citizenship. In the specific case study that was taken in this thesis, self-defence might appear to be commonly known as a means for defending women's physical integrity, by enabling their bodies to respond to violence and avoid victimization. At first glance, this may appear to be an act of individual choice (Massey, 1994). However, it is important that we not forget that women's safety is a social issue in

which we see the structures of subordination and misogynistic dynamics that are encouraged by state legislation. Thus, local and national self-defence struggles explored in this thesis invite to take up further explorations of the ways in which dissent, opposition and insurgency in many other struggles contribute not only to assert urban residents' status as rights-bearing individuals, but also to the fulfillment of residents' right to alternative forms of social and cultural citizenship[42].

As I have suggested throughout the chapters, individuals' agency plays a central role in the revitalization of these forms of citizenship. In the case of women's urban safety, most of studies and recommendations carried out by international[43], national and municipal commitments on gender equality and the female empowerment assert that women's lives would be made safer by good urban governance that implement a set of regulations made by governments and institutions, such as reliable public transport, safe public toilets and adequately lit streets (Delhi Declaration on Women's Safety, 2010; Kelly, 2014). However, while safe and gender-responsive institutional regulations are fundamental, they do not necessarily involve the transformation of mindsets and social relations and subordinations (Kelly, 2014) or the encouragement of women's agency. Therefore, this thesis invites to further explore the ways in which the articulation of self-understanding, agency and power (Lorde, 2007) might have large effects on the expansion of urban residents' freedom, choice and diversity (McRobbie, 2004).

[42] See citation to Staeheli and Kofman about citizenship in *Networked Uses of Urban Space for the Purposes* of *Dissent* in this chapter.

[43] Such as the Safe Cities for Women multi-country movement, which involves 35 cities in 20 countries, emerged in the 1970s and highlights women's equal rights to cities and public spaces.

Finally, this thesis looks forward to provide a few insights about the character and function of public spaces as accessible points for reclaiming a right to the city of certain groups as part of democratic struggles worldwide. This can potentially enhance the understandings of the importance for some identities of being spatially visible, the ways in which spatial associations define communal ties and group identity, and the ways in which urban space plays a relevant role in the constructions of coalition groups and politicized networks.

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