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## Feminist Urbanism: Participatory Mapping of Diverse Perspectives of Safety and Fear in the Latin American Urban Space

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Eva Youkhana<sup>1</sup> & Cilia Saed Hedayatiy<sup>2</sup>

## **Feminist Urbanism: Participatory Mapping of Diverse Perspectives of Safety and Fear in the Latin American Urban Space**

**Abstract.** This study focuses on safety through a feminist urbanism lens in the city of Buenos Aires. We question the effectiveness of safety measures and who benefits from them. Key considerations include how various demographic groups, from the elderly to security forces, perceive safety and city renovations. We adopt a feminist perspective, referencing seminal works like Leslie Kern's 'Feminist City' (2021) and Argentine activist Ana Falú (2022). Utilizing participatory mapping tools designed in Latin America, our study aims to co-construct knowledge with research participants thereby decolonizing traditional academic knowledge production methods.

**Keywords:** feminist urbanism, urban renovation, gentrification, participatory mapping

**Resumen.** Este estudio se centra en la seguridad a través de una lente de urbanismo feminista en la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Cuestionamos la eficacia de las medidas de seguridad y quién se beneficia de ellas. Las consideraciones clave incluyen cómo diversos grupos demográficos, desde los ancianos hasta las fuerzas de seguridad, perciben la seguridad y las renovaciones de la ciudad. Adoptamos una perspectiva feminista, haciendo referencia a obras fundamentales como 'Feminist City' de Leslie Kern (2021) y la activista argentina Ana Falú (2022). Utilizando herramientas de mapeo participativo diseñadas en América Latina,

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nuestro estudio tiene como objetivo co-construir conocimiento con los participantes de la investigación, descolonizando así los métodos tradicionales de producción de conocimiento académico.

**Palabras clave:** urbanismo feminista, renovación urbana, gentrificación, mapeo participativo

## Introduction

The city of Buenos Aires is a global attraction due to its history, socio-cultural diversity, wide range of cultural events, and good climate throughout the year. The city's cultural, material and immaterial heritage also supports branding, through which its wealth is commercialized (Dinardi, 2015). The city attracts international tourists, including foreigners working from home, as living costs are low due to the high national currency inflation (Tödtmann, 2023). People from the provincial and rural areas, and neighboring countries, migrate towards Buenos Aires for better employment, education, health, and citizenship opportunities. Buenos Aires is a city of immigration, and its growth can be traced back to the various waves of immigration that led to a considerable number of informal settlements, or *barrios populares* (cf. Snitcofsky, 2022). The tense urbanization process is managed by the city administration, which maintains and improves the city's attractiveness through a well-advertised concept of integrative urbanism. Nevertheless, although small compared to other cities in the country, crime rates are growing and are considered quite dangerous, at least in the province.

In the context of feminist urbanism, questions of safety are central. This study focuses on how (often technologically fixed) measures promise more safety and serve the psychological moment of deterrence by creating a sense of safety and reducing the fear of passers-by. The central questions are, therefore: How do people perceive safety in different locations of the barrio, how do they experience different forms of city renovation, and who benefits from these measures and why?

We wanted to link our critical urban research with creative approaches and feminist perspectives on urban planning and design and to identify what strategies already exist on the part of residents to make life safer in a city perceived as dangerous. In doing so, we wanted to use innovative and participatory approaches and methods that allow for an immediate and organic approach to our research field. Nevertheless, we were also concerned with historical and contemporary urban developments, which, even if unknown to many residents, are essential references for today's urban life. Therefore, a multi-method approach was adopted in order to incorporate not only historical contexts but also

contemporary political frameworks in the analysis needed to explore the potential of a feminist kind of urbanism in Buenos Aires.

The article begins with a presentation of the research background, where we discuss perceptions of violence and feelings of insecurity in Argentina in general and Buenos Aires in particular. We then zoom into the research site and introduce the Barrio Bajo de Belgrano. This is followed by conceptual overlays looking at the emergence of feminist urbanism in Latin America, and, within that, reflections on women's safety and fear in urban space. We then describe our situated and context-adapted methodology, collective and participatory mapping, which proved to be a pertinent research tool. Our research findings are then discussed in very general terms and two mapping examples that we found fruitful are presented. The article concludes with a reflection of the study and an attempt to evaluate the observed urban planning measures.

### **Violence and Perceptions of Insecurity in Argentina / Buenos Aires**

At the time of the research, electoral campaigns for the legislative and presidential elections to be held on 22 October 2023 were in full swing (and the ultra-right and neoliberal Javier Milei won the election). The economic crisis was at the center of the presidential campaign, as the country has been facing galloping inflation for years, reaching 113% by mid-2023 (Statista, 2023). The accompanying poverty and discontent among the shrinking middle class has reached unprecedented levels in Argentina, especially in the capital city. As a result, many other issues, such as education, health care, the environment, the housing crisis, or even public security issues, became dwarfed and set aside.

Although in the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA) the crime rate is relatively low concerning the province Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (AMBA), and in contrast to the crime rate in the country as a whole, a map of the crime rate presented in April 2023 by the Attorney General's Office in the province of Buenos Aires shows worrying statistics. According to the map, from 1 January 2022 to 8 January 2023, the number of robberies in the province of Buenos Aires (AMBA) increased from 96,957 cases in 2021 to 101,150, while the number of homicides decreased by 54 from 699 to 645 (Klipphan, 2023). The homicide rate in the province of AMBA, which has a population of nearly 18,000,000, was at 3.67%, higher than in the capital, where it was only 2.86% in 2022, he said.

Ideas of safety in cities are linked to everyday experiences and a supposedly objectivist understanding of safety generated through various

channels, media, policies and city administration. This results in very different social imaginaries that lead to the production and reproduction of safe urban spaces, as Krüger, Voss and Seidelsohn (2017) illustrate using the example of German cities. In Latin America, spaces perceived as safe in the inner cities are as fragmented as the cities themselves. This is characterized by spatial compartmentalization of exclusive residential complexes from nearby poorer neighborhoods, by the management of parks and squares whose access is increasingly controlled and managed. The traditional polarization between rich and poor has continued to dissolve due to ongoing immigration and urban restructuring (Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2009). Who hasn't heard the stories of tourists, completely unsuspecting, strolling through the historic streets of a colonial-era downtown, and suddenly, just a street corner away, being robbed?

Such experiences are made by tourists and frame the everyday lives of urban dwellers in many Latin American cities. Insecurity is thus a deep and complex feeling, a mixture of subjective perception and objectively verifiable uncertainties, that manifests itself differently in different cultures and societies. In Latin America, the perception of insecurity among women is a pressing problem, more acute than in industrialised countries (Kessler and Focás, 2014, p. 137), which can certainly be related to the fragmented nature of urban spaces. The constant alternation of manageable, open, walkable and safe places with somewhat confusing, less frequented and dark corners reinforces this feeling in Latin American cities.

Gender-based violence, especially homicides against women, also known as femicides have experienced a frightening boom in Buenos Aires since the pandemic. According to the statistics service of the city of Buenos Aires (Dirección General De Estadística Y Censos, 2021), homicides against women have tripled in 2020 in contrast to 2019 with a total of 15 murders. Also, more domestic violence was reported in the last two years than in previous years. Regarding the increase in domestic violence, some studies (Corte Suprema De Justicia De La Nación, 2023) reveal that women are mainly victims of violent acts by people, mostly men, in their intimate environment.

Although statistics clearly mark private space as dangerous for women and children, feminist urbanism addresses insecurity in public space. The *Collectiu Punt 6* is a group of urban planners and activists, most of whom come from Latin America. They engage in discussions about the importance of feminist critique and practice in urban planning and outline a vision of urban spaces that are pluralistic, inclusive, equitable, and sustainable. Their feminist critique is based on the daily experiences of all residents, which should be decisive for the transformation of cities. Similarly, Ana Falú (2010, p.23) argues that public spaces are historically designed for men, contributing to women's insecurity and restricting their full participation in urban life. A survey of 1300 women in the 11

provinces of Argentina, addressing the situation of insecurity of women in the cities of these provinces, was conducted by Mujeres de la Matria Latinoamericana (MuMaLa) and the Instituto de Investigación Social, Económica y Política Ciudadana (ISEPCI) (Ni una Menos 2017). The survey focused on the perception of safety in daily mobility and in the use of public transportation. According to the study, 80% of women feel unsafe when moving around in public spaces. This insecurity is particularly heightened in places that are barely lit or where few people attend. Also, the feeling of insecurity is intensified in the dark or at night. Of the women surveyed, 20% said they had been harassed when using public transportation, especially when using a cab. They report they often contact others through social media who are also alone in public spaces.

Before women start moving, they implement strategies to move more safely in public spaces. These include wearing inconspicuous clothing or, if possible, finding someone to accompany them. Women switch sides of the street, avoid eye contact, or adapt to threatening situations through martial arts to feel safer. The authors of the study conclude that women's sense of insecurity, especially at night, is closely linked to the fear of putting their sexual integrity at risk. It becomes clear that cities and public spaces are not designed and conceived according to the needs of women, who for centuries were confined to the private sphere. Today, however, the tide has turned. Women are not only responsible for the household and children, but study and practice professions and earn a share, sometimes all, of the household income. Furthermore, women are generally more likely to walk or use public transportation than men; in 2019, 60% of pedestrians in Buenos Aires were women, according to a survey by the Secretaría de Transporte y Obras Públicas (Gobierno De La Ciudad De Buenos Aires, 2022a, p. 26).

The fact that women feel insecure in their everyday movements reflects the power relations that maintain gender inequalities (Ni Una Menos, 2017). The issue of women's safety has become an integral part of public debate, mainly since more than 250,000 Argentines gathered in the *Plaza del Congreso* in Buenos Aires on June 3, 2015, in response to a series of femicides. With the call, *Ni Una Menos*, a feminist movement, gradually formed, operating beyond the country's borders, with the goal of treating violence against women as a social problem rather than a private and personal one (Bedrosian 2023).

### **Bajo de Belgrano / Belgrano C as a research site**

The study was conducted in March 2023 when both authors lived and worked in Buenos Aires. As residents of the northern barrios Belgrano and Nuñez, in general

marked as safe, we were interested in women's perceptions of safety in our immediate environment. The research site, Bajo de Belgrano, a neighborhood in the north of the city centered on a large plaza with an adjacent park, is located in the southern part of Comuna 13, in the Belgrano neighborhood (Comuna 13 is composed of the neighborhoods of Nuñez, Colegiales, and Belgrano). A large Mitre commuter rail station, Belgrano C, and a bus terminal are located here, both generate a high flux of people each day, making the location a suitable site for our study. In addition to the southern residential areas of CABA, it is these train and bus yards that are considered dangerous and unsafe. The Mitre station Belgrano C has existed since 1862 to transport Porteños (the inhabitants of Buenos Aires) north to the Tigre recreation area. Long considered needing an overhaul, the station was rebuilt, renovated, and elevated in 2018. Every day, 50,000 people board or transfer trains here. The *Avenida del Libertador* is the upper limit of the map section and part of our research site. The eight-lane road Avenida is 26 kilometers long and forms an emblematic renovation project of the city government. Since 2022, it has been the first major street in Buenos Aires accessible for cars, buses, bicycles and pedestrians (Turismo Buenos Aires, no date).

Barrio Belgrano C is home to about 126,000 inhabitants and the Barrio Chino. Developed in the early 1980s, this neighborhood dates back to the immigration of East Asians and stretches across three street corners just behind the Mitre Station (Wikipedia 2023). Barrio Chino is a tourist hotspot and greets visitors with a Chinese-style archway. A Buddhist temple was built there in 1988, but it hardly stands out in the commercial district, with numerous restaurants, cafes and shopping for cheap imported Chinese goods. Barrio Chino has also been considered dangerous because this is where the lower part of Belgrano (Bajo de Belgrano) begins, where the first informal settlements of poor migrants searching for job opportunities were built over a hundred years ago.

Even though *villa*, the Argentine term for precarious neighborhoods, was not used to name informal settlements in Buenos Aires until the 1930s, such settlements existed even before. These were built by immigrants, mostly from other parts of the country, and were given the name *Barrio de Latas* (neighborhoods of containers) because of the tin containers used for building houses. The first of these *barrios* was inhabited mainly by garbage collectors who had settled near garbage dumps in Bajo de Belgrano and Parque Patricios (Snitcofsky, 2022, pp. 28-29). While the barrio around Parque Patricios in the south of the city, also pejoratively referred to as *Barrio de las Ranas* (Frog Quarter), was evicted in 1917, the settlement in Bajo de Belgrano managed to hold its own, and until its brutal eviction during the military dictatorship in the 1970s, went down in the city's history as the oldest known *villa* (Snitcofsky, 2022, p. 34)

The historical division of Belgrano into the rich residential part in the higher areas (Belgrano R) and the commercial part in the lower areas (Belgrano C, or Bajo de Belgrano), is still visible today through the different buildings (also marked by the two suburban train stations Belgrano R, and Belgrano C). Bajo de Belgrano is where, at the beginning of the 20th century goods could be loaded, the garbage disposed of, and precarious work could be found. While a large part of Belgrano R was laid out as an exclusive residential district, Belgrano C presents itself today with many very tall buildings and dense construction. After the renovation and elevation of the train station, this traffic junction and *macrocentro porteño* district is trying to improve its image with further improvements to the square and the park. These upgrades include the renovation of ramps and sidewalks, the installation of bike lanes, and the 2018 restoration of the park, Barrancas de Belgrano, established in 1862. In the park, paths and playgrounds have been created, sculptures have been erected, benches and tables with chess playing facilities have been installed, and plant species have been cultivated to provide a recreational space for the citizens of the barrio. Every Sunday evening, citizens spontaneously gather to dance the tango on the Glorieta de Barrancas de Belgrano platform.

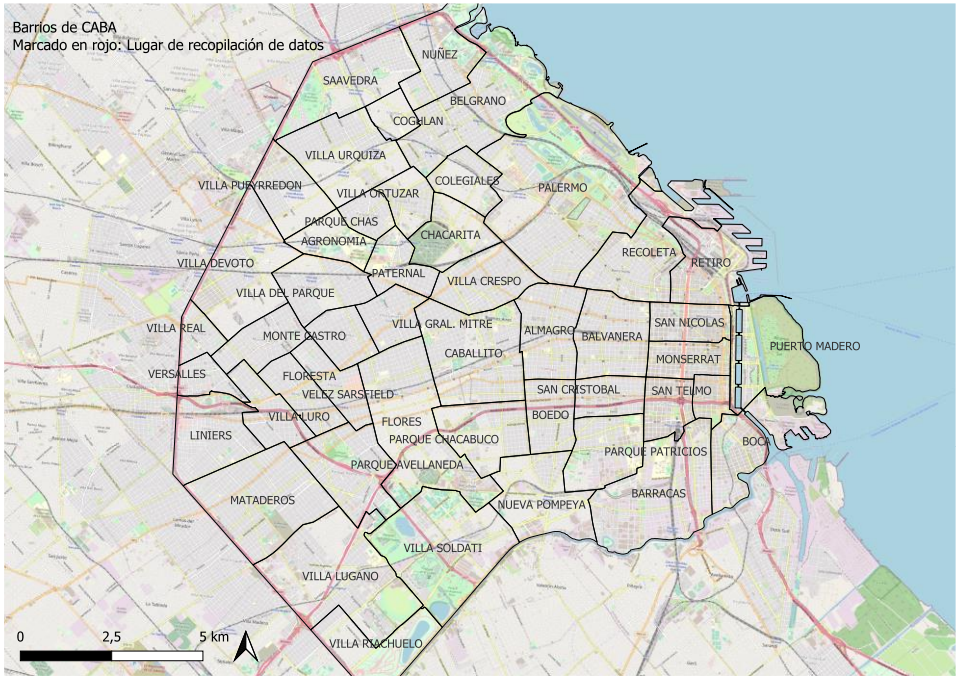




Figure 1- CABA – Autonomous City of Buenos Aires



Figure 2 – Area of data collection in Buenos Aires

Despite the reconstruction, this area is called a critical one (*area crítica*) in terms of safety, although it is equipped with countless video cameras and police officers are also very frequently present there. The city government is very proud of the installation of video surveillance cameras, which were deployed as a response to the population's lack of sense of security. With the installation of 5,000 new video cameras in the last two years, the city's current conservative-liberal mayor, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta (in office since 2015), touts the fulfillment of his promise to have 75% of the city monitored by video cameras. Now, a total of 15,000 video cameras are to provide more security throughout the city, in addition to the deployment of an additional 4,000 and better-trained police officers on the streets (Gobierno De La Ciudad De Buenos Aires, 2022).

In order to convey a sense of security in the city, the administration goes to great lengths and massively advertises its measures, especially in the election year 2023 which coincided with our research visit.



Figure 3- Eva Youkhana (Subte Station Plaza Italia, 22.07.2023)



Figure 4 - Eva Youkhana (Butón Antipánico, Anti-panic button at bus-station in Moreno, Provincia de Buenos Aires, 16.07.2023)

Accompanying this, an emergency number has been set up, 911, which promises rapid help for people, or women, in distress in less than 4 seconds. The emergency pillars, equipped with cameras and integrated anti-panic buttons, so-called *Botones Antipánicos*, are intended to give people commuting through the city the impression that they can count on help at any time if they feel threatened. Finally, the advertisements and posters state that CABA will be secured with 26,000 policemen and policewomen, and that 610,000 students will be protected on their way to school through the 'safe routes to school' program that has been set up, the so-called *Senderos Escolares*.

The public were shocked, therefore, by an attack on an 11-year-old schoolgirl, who was assaulted and beaten to death by two men on her way to school in the province of Buenos Aires on 09<sup>th</sup> of August 2023. The assault, filmed by video cameras, went viral and has brought about a public debate within the election campaign on violence and security in urban areas, as well as calls for a ‘strong hand’ to supposedly protect women and children. Doubts have been raised about the purpose of video cameras, which are said to be able to record violence on the streets and deter perpetrators if necessary, but were apparently unable to prevent the girl's death.

### **Feminist Urbanism and perceptions of security and fear**

In the course of debates about more citizen participation and plurality in urban planning and design towards safer urban spaces, issues of citizen-led-urbanism have been discussed for the Latin American context (Alarcón et al., 2022). In this context, the reference to feminist and intersectional approaches should be highlighted, as these allow the analysis of the structural causes of inequality in the context of the right and access to the city. Traditional urban planning focused mainly on physical aspects such as buildings and infrastructure while neglecting social and ecological aspects. Academics and activists of feminist urbanism consider this approach insufficient and superficial. Traditional urban planning perpetuates an androcentric and Eurocentric view that ignores the needs of women, trans and queer people and other marginalized groups (Ciocoletto et al. 2019, p. 154-155). Falú emphasizes that the public space is still male-dominated. In a public space designed in this way, which does not take into account women's needs, women often become the victims of violence and discrimination. This restricts their right to actively exercise their freedoms as residents of the city (Falú 2010, p. 23).

Feminist urbanism respects the diversity of everyday experiences and aims, it is said, to pluralize urban life through community participation. Feminist urban space must be adapted to the needs of diverse populations, gender, and people with physical and mental disabilities, as well as all other minorities, with an eye toward housing, public facilities, and an adaptation of mobility. In an ecofeminist reading, the intersectional view must also take into account the protection and care of the natural foundations, which are the basis of social life (Alarcón et al., 2022, p.24).

Leslie Kern's book (2021) "Feminist City" has used the example of North American cities to emphasize the importance of feminist and intersectional approaches for a more equitable and safe urban design for all. According to

feminist urbanism, the history and definition of a city's cultural heritage must be rewritten. Feminist urbanism calls for urban planning that promotes people's autonomy and considers the communal dimension of urban life. It should also be anti-racist and see the diversity of bodies and identities. To inclusively plan and design a city, it must be viewed from the perspective of its urban dwellers.

### **Feminist urbanism: The history and emergence in Latin America**

According to the World Bank, Latin America is the most urbanized region in the world (Argentina 91.8% urban population, Brazil 86.5%, Chile 87.5%, and Colombia 80.7%) with the rapid growth of so-called megacities that have become an economic engine for many countries. The demands of people with disabilities, the elderly, children, and women have hardly been taken into account in these rapidly growing urban spaces (Falú, 2010, pp. 17-18). This is precisely where feminist urbanism comes in, rooted in the critique of traditional and gender-blind urban planning and architecture (Ortiz Escalante, 2018, p. 2). The first thoughts on feminist urbanism emerged with the feminist movements in the 1970s (3rd wave of feminism). Hannah Arendt, in her work based on lectures, "The Human Condition" (1958), dealt with the representation and memory in urban public spaces. Her oft-quoted statements stand for itself: "The City is an organized Memory". "Women are the forgotten ones in History". Her groundbreaking work remains an inspiration for feminist urbanism to this day even though Hannah Arendt herself never really showed interest in feminist movements and / or theory. Still, her distinction between public (political) space and private (social) space, and her political theory by which she advocates a plurality of perspectives in the shaping of society, inspired feminist urban thinkers to devise numerous programs and strategies for a right to the city all over the world. In 1994, for example, the *European Charter for Women in the City* was launched, a communication platform for more gender-conscious urban design.

In Latin America, feminist urbanism took a particular form, strongly influenced by the social and political contexts of the region. For example, Ana Falú worked for more than three decades to document the problems of women and girls in urban spaces and to bring them to international agendas. She founded the *Red Mujer y Hábitat de América Latina*, a network composed of institutions and women working to promote women's rights and greater gender equity in the design of living space. The aforementioned network developed a manual, *Herramientas para la Promoción de Ciudades seguras desde la Perspectiva del Género* (Rainero et al. , 2006), for diagnosing safety in everyday urban spaces. Other initiatives in Latin America advancing feminist urbanism can be traced back to architect and university professor Lourdes García Vázquez from Mexico, who integrated a *Feminismo Popular* into architecture and urban planning. The focus

was on housing projects and district plans in Mexico. It questioned the elitist view of architecture and applied a feminist and de-colonial perspective. One of the most important elements of feminist urbanism was and still is community work, because women are stronger together and organized, and thus can achieve a much greater political impact (Arana López, 2015).

### *Women safety in urban areas*

Insecurity is a profound and complex feeling that manifests differently in different cultures and societies. In Latin America, the perception of insecurity among women is a pressing, and due to the increase in violence, acute problem (Kessler and Focás 2014, p. 137). The insecurity of women in public spaces is not only a result of increasing violence against women but has its historical roots in the social norms and values-oriented towards patriarchal interests, which are also reflected in the development of cities. This is because in their original planning, urban spaces were designed according to the daily routines of men, but the habits of women were systematically neglected. Moreover, gender-specific and sexist forms of violence have not always been punished in the same way as other forms of crime, for example, crimes against private property (Ni Una Menos, 2017, p. 11). men's daily routines, but women's habits

At this point, reference should be made to the crime of marital rape, which until the 1980s was still restricted to the sphere outside the marriage, even in European and established democratic countries such as Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria. However, the way crime is reported in the media contributes to feelings of insecurity, according to the authors of the study *Ni Una Menos*. After all, even if the likelihood of being raped or assaulted by strangers in public spaces is much lower than the risk of domestic violence, women feel much more insecure in public spaces. This paradox was pointed out by Rachel Pain (Pain 2001, pp. 903-908), who showed that there was a clear discrepancy between the perception of insecurity and the actual level of threat in public space. The origin of fear and insecurity is complex and deep-seated and describes a social phenomenon and construction. Fear and insecurity are shaped by gender power structures and reproduced in everyday life, through social institutions, media, and personal experiences (Ortiz Escalante, 2018, pp. 2-3).

### **Methods**

We carried out this research over a couple of months while living in Buenos Aires from October 2022 to August 2023. Over this period, we sensitized ourselves

about the security issues in the city. We talked to colleagues at the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (UNSAM) and searched for literature and studies on urban security in Buenos Aires and more generally, for Argentina. We observed and lived the daily routines of the Porteños and tried to get a sense of the most dangerous zones in the city. We collected primary data published by the city administration and which was openly available. In addition, we created maps to visualize the data and show significant changes in urban infrastructure and measures that have been taken to make life in the capital more appealing to its 3 Mio inhabitants. There was, for example, data available about the lowering of sidewalks to make them suitable for wheelchair users or other data on socio-cultural institutions, gastronomy, daycare, etc.

We understand maps not only as conveying geographic information but are aware that they reflect power relations. Thus, maps can also be used as instruments of power to exert territorial control. Most often, traditional maps have been and continue to be produced by governmental or economic institutions, thus representing the perspective of the dominant population. Marginalized voices and experiences of the people living in the mapped space are often left out. However, spaces are not one-dimensional, natural and rigid entities, but are constructed in everyday coexistence, are dynamic and multidimensional (Michel, 2022, cf. Oranotango). In order to show this multidimensionality in maps and to deconstruct the hegemony inherent to maps, the methodology of *mapeo colectivo*, critical collective mapping, was used. In terms of a critical understanding of space, collective mapping is understood as an instrument for a communal approach to urban space for the purpose of civic and emancipatory interventions in the city. For "the city...", as the slogan of the recently launched citizens' movement, *El Movimiento*, before the presidential elections in Argentina, puts it, "...are those who inhabit it" (*La ciudad somos, quienes la habitamos*). Collective mapping serves the participatory identification of spatio-temporal dimensions and relations, social and physical actors, institutions, symbols, representations and meanings that constitute an (urban) space. In the Lefebvrian sense of the right to the city, the demands of urban dwellers are to be translated from street protests into new urban agendas. However, what this should look like in each case must first be determined for each city. The principle of collective mapping can certainly help planners to leave their offices and develop new, inclusive and pluralistic planning cultures. Collective mapping can also rewrite entrenched narratives of a city that have been historically reproduced and in which minorities, women, and others do not appear in the hegemonic historiography. Thus, collective mapping is a decolonial feminist research method, as we, as researchers, work with our respondents on safety perceptions in urban space through the co-creation of new maps with generally understandable symbols and legends.

The collective mapping instrument began in Latin America in the 1970s and was systematized by *Iconoclastas* about 10 years ago in a kind of textbook. They are a duo founded by Argentineans Julia Risler and Pablo Ares in May 2006, who began to collectively produce graphics, posters, publications, and cartographies in a kind of social communication laboratory to initiate urban interventions oriented to the needs and narratives of the inhabitants. Their activities involved and continue to involve artistic, political, and academic practices to evoke urban-territorial activism and thus, citizen-based institutional change through critical pedagogy and participatory research. Since 2008, they have offered collective mapping workshops in different parts of the world to encourage critical awareness of urban space and the production of collective meanings. In 2013, the *Iconoclastas* duo published *Manual de Mapeo Colectivo*, critical cartographic resources for territorial processes of collaborative creation", in which they compile and share methods, resources and dynamics for self-organizing workshops, exercises, roundtables and interventions of collective mapping (Ares and Risler, 2013, p.21).

This manual gives researchers and students incentives to apply collective mapping in different socio-cultural and political contexts. The manual also helped us develop our collaborative study and participatory mapping on safety perceptions and fear in the Bajo de Belgrano neighborhood. We assume that residents of a neighborhood can provide important inputs for gender-responsive urban planning, as they know and can share from their own experience which measures need to be taken and make sense in order actually to increase safety field (Ciocchetto et al., 2019, pp. 135-137).

For the mapping itself, which we conducted in March 2023, we chose a sheltered, yet pedestrian-frequented location behind Mitre Station. A massive concrete mound served as a table on which we laid out our pre-made maps of the barrio and the materials for mapping. We marked our work area with a highly visible and pink Venus symbol and positioned ourselves to discreetly approach passersby without them feeling harassed. We addressed the passersby according to their movement behavior. Those moving quickly and showed little interest in our stand were allowed to pass. We approached others who were strolling or interested in our actions. At least one in three of those approached was interested and had the time to answer our questions and actively participate.

Before each participatory mapping and interview, we briefly explained who we were and what we were interested in and obtained the participants' consent for the interview and mapping practice. Using an interview guideline, we slowly got into the conversation and worked our way to more sensitive questions. The step-by-step approach helped us to assess the interviewees and their willingness



to respond a little better, and thus to guide the interview process sensitively. While the passersby labeled the cards, we could take our detailed notes, which we supplemented with a memory log after the mapping. Respondents were then given a flyer with our contact information to inquire about the results at any time and, if necessary, withdraw their consent to further use or publish the information. We also prepared for unforeseen moments, possible emotional situations, or displeasure from passersby by clarifying critical ethical issues in a form provided to us by our host university. Modifying names and other personal information anonymized the maps. Over four consecutive days, we were able to conduct a total of 14 participatory mappings, each lasting up to two hours.

### **Results, assessments, and case studies**

We interviewed 14 people, a total of 9 women and five men. Their ages ranged between 20 and 59 years. We had to estimate the age of three persons, as the information was missing. Information on occupation was provided by six of the interviewees. The interviews varied in their progression, as some interviewees focused on the mapping and answered our questions rather succinctly, whereas others talked to us for longer but showed sparse interest in the mapping.

#### *Location assessments*

The Barrio Chino is explicitly described as unsafe by six people. The reasons vary; darkness at night and fear of theft, which is constantly warned about, are among the main concerns. Nevertheless, a clear distinction is made between thefts and robberies, which in turn are clearly located. The Barrio Chino, with its variety of goods and tourist interests, is associated with an increased incidence of pickpockets. These, according to the in-depth opinion, would make their presence known especially on weekends, when the streets are full of unsuspecting tourists. Otherwise, the interviewees perceive Barrio Chino as a pleasant and varied location where one can move around freely for the most part. One of the male interviewees had himself already been robbed in Barrio Chino, but did not mention this until the end of the interview because he did not perceive the attack as dangerous. The perception of the barrio is dualistic. Interestingly, this place is perceived as safe by two people, mainly because of the presence of many people and stores that provide light.

Parque Barrancas de Belgrano also diverges greatly in perceptions of safety. On the one hand, violent robberies are reported in the park. It is described as unsafe or dangerous by six respondents, mainly because of the presence of homeless people and the lack of lighting in the back and tree-lined part of the park. One interviewee, 20-year-old Bibi, was threatened and robbed in the park. Camila,

a police officer, told us that people were threatened there with a gun. On the other hand, four interviewees considered the park safe because it provides opportunities to linger, and at least during the day there is lively activity, with children playing, sport activities, and picnicking families enjoying the exceptionally pretty green space.

The station is described by four people as unsafe. Many people congregate here, including homeless people or refugees who find no other place to sleep, or rest. Before the reconstruction and the raising of the station in 2018, the situation was even more confusing, according to the feedback of three of the respondents. In some cases, real camps had been set up by homeless people who saw an income opportunity at the station and therefore settled there temporarily. The structural changes were thus perceived positively and influenced the perception of safety. However, none of the interviewees knew about upcoming reconstruction projects, for example the planned merging of the bus and train station.

25-year-old Alejandro, in a wheelchair, feels safe everywhere in Belgrano C. He says that the station, in particular, is barrier-free. Above all, he says, the train station is barrier-free, and he can easily take public transportation here. He also asks why we would do the survey in Belgrano C, not Provincia. "All is calm here!" - he remarked.

Avenida Libertador is described as safe by six people. The traffic and the presence of passersby and cyclists lead to the animation of this big street, making it feel safer. One of the female interviewees mentioned the increased patrols on the avenue, which raises the perception of safety. The increased presence of security forces is perceived positively and noticed accordingly. According to the feedback, three central factors for a stronger sense of safety can be identified. First, the revitalization of streets by stores and the presence of many people is considered a deterrent to criminals. In this context, Estela, a 59-year-old woman, expressed hope for the civil courage of other passersby because "security is provided by courage!" Estela states that she never leaves the house without a whistle around her neck to draw attention to herself in case of emergency.



Figure 5 - Map with whistle, Bajo de Belgrano, Eva Youkhana, March 3rd 2023

Second, the presence of police and cameras is cited by several people as reason for an increased perception of safety. The cameras would deter potential criminals because crimes could be traced. She was once able to convict a criminal by using the private camera in front of her house. The police officers could intervene if a person were in danger, she stated. On the other hand, Bibi was not convinced by the measures and did not believe that the cameras really help. Rather, the knowledge about the presence of cameras and increased security measures would provide a sense of security without really being able to guarantee security. Lucía, short on conversation due to lack of time, said that security perceptions are very subjective. " Me, for example, I always go prepared. I keep my bag well protected and always know the precautions I have to take." In conclusion, she emphasizes that video cameras would not help and that women must protect themselves. Camila, a policewoman, had a different view and considered the cameras to be a clear support for her work. For example, she said, there are cameras at the entrance to the station that scan the faces of passersby, and in the event of a possible assault, the perpetrators can be quickly identified and captured.

Third, the perception of safety is increased by having an escort, especially a male escort. Gender stereotypes are served here, according to which men are seen as protectors and, at the same time, act as deterrents to offenders.

According to the collective maps, the following three reasons create insecurity. Firstly, darkness and lack of illumination. In many maps, places are marked as safe only during the day. At night, women, in particular, feel more unsafe in Belgrano C and Buenos Aires in general. Two of the women interviewed who work in Belgrano C have adjusted their work shifts so that they only have to work during the day. Although it was noted in some interviews that mainly the upper social classes, the so-called *clase media alta*, live in

Belgrano, many homeless people on the streets convey a feeling of insecurity. Their lack of money and lack of prospects in a crisis-ridden country lead the homeless to be labeled as a security problem. The second insecurity factor is associated with the presence of beggars. This is all the more astonishing because robberies are rarely committed by the homeless and/or the extremely impoverished segments of the population. On the contrary, they are discriminated against, criminalized and often become victims of violent attacks themselves. According to the 2022 Census of the City of Buenos Aires, 2,356,435 people in Argentina are homeless or living with less than what constitutes a home, a secure roof over their heads. In CABA alone, 124,000 people are considered homeless, with more than 2,500 people living on the streets in 2022 (Instituto Nacional De Estadística Y Censos, 2022). It is currently estimated that more than 10,000 people live on the streets, and the numbers are rising. It was not until July 2023 that homeless people drew attention to themselves, as they settled in the area around the Jorge Newbery inner-city airport, which is only a few kilometers from our research site. Nonetheless, we were able to understand why women walking alone feel threatened by people begging on the street, especially when it is dark, and the women have to actively avoid being scrounged.

The third insecurity factor cited was the lack of measures to create security. For example, some respondents said they want more cameras, better lighting, and emergency pillars. The call for higher control mechanisms and better lighting in public spaces go hand in hand with the demands of feminist urbanism. In Argentina, 81% of women surveyed feel unsafe at night, especially when the place has little traffic or is poorly lit (Ni Una Menos, pp. 9-10). A better-lit public space improves orientation, leads to a better assessment of potential dangers, and can thus increase the feeling of safety. These all-important measures for women to move more freely.

## Bibi, the young immigrant in Buenos Aires

To exploit the diversity of the data, it is worth taking a closer look at individual cases. For this, two women with very different experiences were chosen: Bibi, a waitress, and Camila, a police officer. Both speak very reflectively about the topic, yet from different perspectives. Bibi is a 20-year-old waitress from Venezuela who came to Buenos Aires five years ago and has worked in the Bajo de Belgrano barrio ever since. Her experiences and perceptions of safety are the product of several individual and social factors that influence her personal history and her current situation in Argentina.

Bibi generally feels unsafe in the neighborhood, especially at night due to the lack of lighting. Her sense of insecurity intensifies when she is alone, or her cell phone is without battery. Bibi looks pretty reflective about her appearance and has noticeably thought about safety in Belgrano C beforehand. She was open-minded from the beginning, answered questions thoroughly, and was engaged and self-reliant in working through the map. She was concerned about highlighting the scary areas on the map and what needed to be improved to make these places safer.

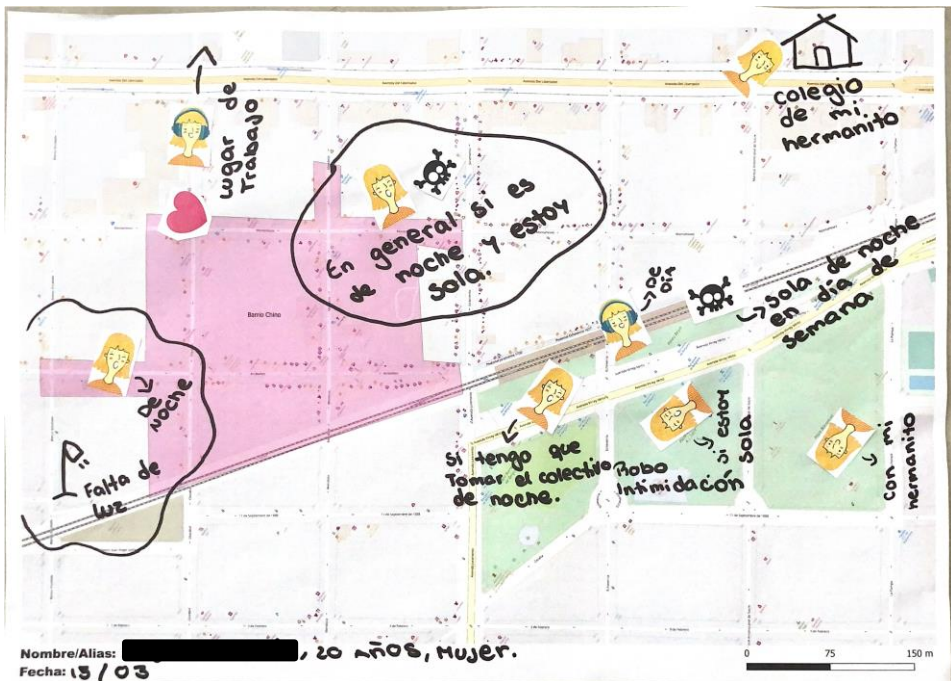


Figure 6 – Highlights made by Bibi on the map of Buenos Aires (reproduction)

When asked if the cameras made her feel safer, she expressed scepticism. While cameras are often used as a deterrent or for later prosecution, they would not be helpful in immediate emergency situations. Bibi doubted that assaults could be prevented or successfully punished by them. She recounted an experience in Parque Barrancas de Belgrano in which she and her boyfriend were assaulted by a homeless man. She spoke of a particular scam identified in which the attackers would ask for a donation and become aggressive if refused. As a migrant from Venezuela, Bibi feels that her accent marks her as different, making her more vulnerable to exploitation or violent assault. She pointed out the additional challenges migrants face and raises awareness about intersectional forms of discrimination that compound marginalization and vulnerability. Bibi noted that she does not feel safe on public transportation because there is no means of escape, and she does not trust passersby to help her.

Bibi would like to see more emergency pillars and lighting, which she feels could improve safety. She feels that the measures currently implemented are insufficient. Nevertheless there are places where Bibi feels safe. These include Barrio Chino because of the large crowds, the right part of Parque Barrancas de Belgrano where she plays with her brother and therefore associates a positive feeling with the place. She also moves freely and safely during the day in front of the train station, on her way towards her brother's school, and on her way to work, a nearby Restaurant. Overall, Bibi's experiences and views point to a city that does not adequately address the specific needs and safety concerns of women, particularly immigrants.

### **Camila, the police officer**

Camila, 40, a police officer with many years of work and operational experience in the Belgrano C neighborhood, provides a very different, but also multi-layered perspective on urban security. As the mother of three children and a law enforcement officer, she has lived through the many challenges of urban crime for over a decade, while reflecting on the dynamics between social factors and crime. Her insights, both on a professional and personal level, offer profound information into the real-world impact of crime and insecurity in Buenos Aires. Camila approached us during work hours and in her uniform, by first asking us what we were doing in this place. She remarked that she had been watching us for some time and had become curious. She was satisfied with our brief explanation and

immediately got into a chatting mood. However, she made it clear at the beginning of the conversation that she could only comment on our questions as a police officer, and with professional glasses. Anything she might have to say on the subject of security would not reflect her personal view. Nevertheless, the conversation with her became an emotional roller coaster, as she burst into tears several times. Camila's emotional reaction during the conversation shows how connected she feels to her surroundings and the events taking place in them. She cries because of her deep concern about the future of her three children, who would have no perspective. "The youth has no future!" Her daughter, who has already left school, lacks any future work opportunities in this country. Although her daughter studied criminology, she fears that she will be unable to find a job for her and that the child will, therefore, have to go abroad. That, in turn, would tear the family apart, which scares Camila.

She made a big sweeping statement criticizing the current social and economic situation in Buenos Aires and Argentina. Young people, like Camila's daughter, lack confidence, she said. She added that the urban structure is slowly but surely collapsing, unemployment is rising, and the crime rate is skyrocketing. She related her personal and professional experiences on the streets as a police officer to rising poverty and made a causal connection.

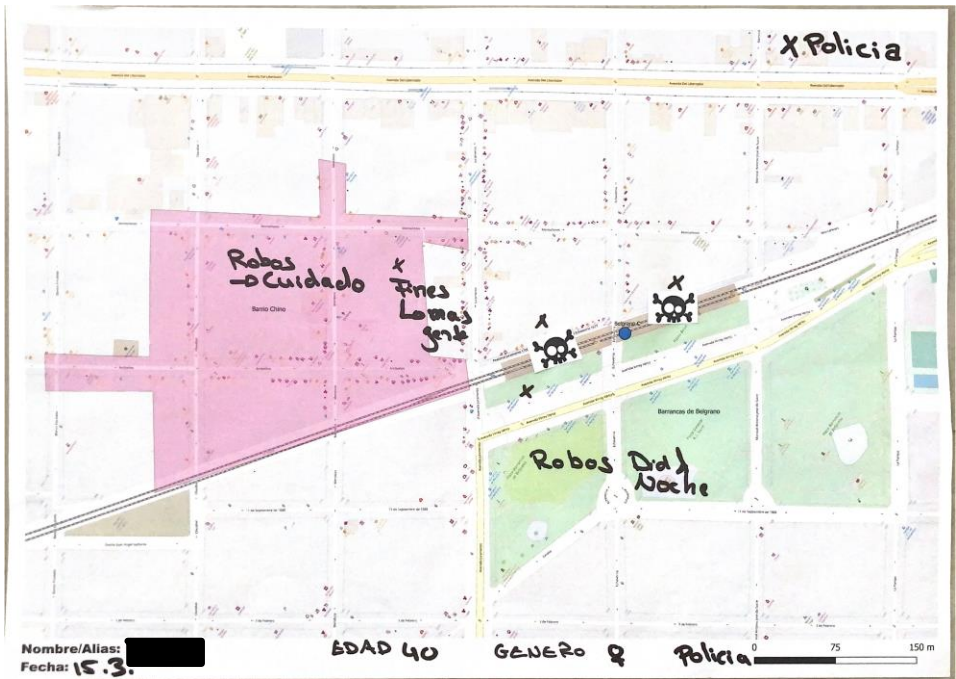


Figure 7 – Highlights made by Camila on the map of Buenos Aires (reproduction)

According to Camila, unemployed and homeless people in Belgrano C are more likely to commit crime and take risks because they have nothing to lose. This association is in its subjectivity comprehensible and shows how strongly economic factors, inflation, and homelessness and an ever-increasing poverty rate influence the feeling of safety in the city. Her sweeping judgment about a welfare state that turns people into lazy welfare recipients, even though there is enough work, reflects a spirit of the time.

Here, Camila quite candidly represents a thoroughly thought-provoking but common opinion on the part of the middle class, which is afraid of social decline in the face of decreasing economic performance, a shrinking gross national product and far too much public spending. "Yesterday there was sausage and soda, today there are social plans. Social plans are good for the people who really need and benefit from them, but the country needs something different." Regarding infrastructural changes, Camila noted that the station had become safer



since it was renovated and elevated. She pointed out that the cameras make her job easier, especially the cameras at the station's entrance, which could be used to scan and recognize faces. She has confidence in the new technologies, stressing that security could be improved with these tools.

Nevertheless, technologies are controversial when they are reflected on from the point of view of data protection or the implications of facial screening in the context of racist identity controls. Camila also takes her job very seriously, noting, "Wherever there is danger, there is safety - because we are there." She has confidence in the state apparatus, the police, and the effectiveness of her profession. The passersby interviewed sometimes agree with her, as women, in particular, seem satisfied with the increased police presence and feel safer. A feeling that we, as women traveling alone in a large Latin American city, can certainly understand. Nevertheless, police presence also raises issues of surveillance and control that optimistic security concepts need to address. Increasing video surveillance of cities is more than controversial but is due to the perception of higher threat potentials.

Dispositions of insecurity among the population, especially after major violent attacks (such as 9-11 in New York in 2001 or the attacks at the train station Atocha in Madrid on March 11, 2004), have always been used to set up the urban control system, as a political calculation or to improve the location in the course of city branding processes. In-depth studies on the actual usefulness of the surveillance apparatus, and its contribution to preventing crime, or solving criminal offenses, have yet to be presented. "It should also be considered that the most disturbing acts, sexualised violence and homicides, are crimes that predominantly take place in the private sphere - victims and aggressors mostly know each other. Therefore, these threats are not connected to the anonymity of the big city. The stranger in public space as a social type is unsettling, but relatively rarely a source of danger to people's lives" (Wehrheim, 2018, translated by the author.). In summary, Camila's statement offers insight into the complex relationship between gender, profession, and urban life. As a police officer, she offers a unique perspective on safety issues. Her testimony also highlights that despite technological advances and urban transformation, there are deep-rooted social and economic problems that cannot be addressed with improved infrastructure alone, but do affect urban security.

## **Conclusion**

As fragmented as Latin American cities are today, so is the perception and situation of safety. The safety perceptions go hand in hand with urban fragmentation but also reflect the subjective perceptions of the various citizens due to their practices, experiences and intersectional backgrounds. This

interconnection is clearly reflected in the collectively created maps shown above. An urban space, in this case Bajo de Belgrano, can be perceived as safe or unsafe by different people depending on diverse criteria, besides individual experiences also on the time and place, discourses constructed around the neighborhood, or according to the historically established reputation of a neighborhood (e.g. barrio Chino).

Latin American cities are characterized by their fragmentation their dissection, which has gradually prevailed during the different and rapid phases of urban growth. Urban spatial dissection is accompanied by sociocultural dissection, which is exacerbated by politics of renovation and gentrification, and by the emergence of a consumption-oriented society in which urban resources are unequally distributed.

In this reading, Buenos Aires is a classic Latin American city that has now reached its sociocultural limits within the framework of neoliberal urbanism, as the upper middle class of gentrified barrios no longer feel safe. For even if feminist urbanism addresses precisely these adjusting screws of inequality in rights and access to urban resources, the intentions of many urban planners to provide safer and more equitable housing for women hold only limited promise. The study has shown that conventional control and surveillance measures, while providing a sense of safety, have failed to make urban space convincingly inclusive. While feminist urbanism is adaptive and flexible, solutions based on technology and infrastructure are standardized and poorly adapted to diverse needs, ethnic communities, and social strata. Disciplinary effects were observed in the study, those that reinforce existing social orders rather than dismantle them. A city whose constitution has been adapted for centuries to the needs of men may not be easily transformed. But the departure from standardized and thus androcentric solutions is not yet in sight even in Buenos Aires.

Although the metropolis of 3 million inhabitants appears very modern, accessible, inclusive and safe, the background to perceptions of safety and the nuances of fragmented feelings of insecurity within a neighborhood could be identified through collective mapping.

Therefore, we agree with the Canadian NGO Women in Cities, WICI for short, which already 20 years ago put the needs of children and women in urban space on the national and international agenda. Their handbook on feminist urbanism, published in 2002, provides the basic principles of feminist urbanism (Falú, 2010, pp. 32-33). Based on this, six principles have been developed to design women-friendly urban spaces (Ortiz Escalante, 2018, p.5, p.9). These can be summarized as follows: a) better orientation by clear signaling and guidance in

the city, b) Visibility by ensuring continuous lighting and avoiding dark corners, c) more dynamic spaces to encourage the presence of people and allow for combining residential, commercial, and administrative spaces, d) informal supervision based on solidarity and equality, as opposed to authoritarian surveillance mechanisms, e) the proper equipment of spaces with infrastructure that supports everyday life, such as benches, shade trees and playgrounds, f) fostering communality for more social cohesion and community participation to reinforce a sense of belonging and ownership.

Whether such small-scale and elaborate approaches will have any effect in a city that increasingly relies on international immigration from European countries, concentrating on the affluent global middle class and its needs in order to make urban space accessible to the few, remains questionable. Against the background of multiple crises, it is also to be feared that people without a voice will be left out of the urban transformation of Buenos Aires. This makes it all the more important to include the opinions and sensitivities of many in such planning processes. With the participatory mapping we hope to have presented a tool for this future project which could be used as a meaningful instrument to start with.

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