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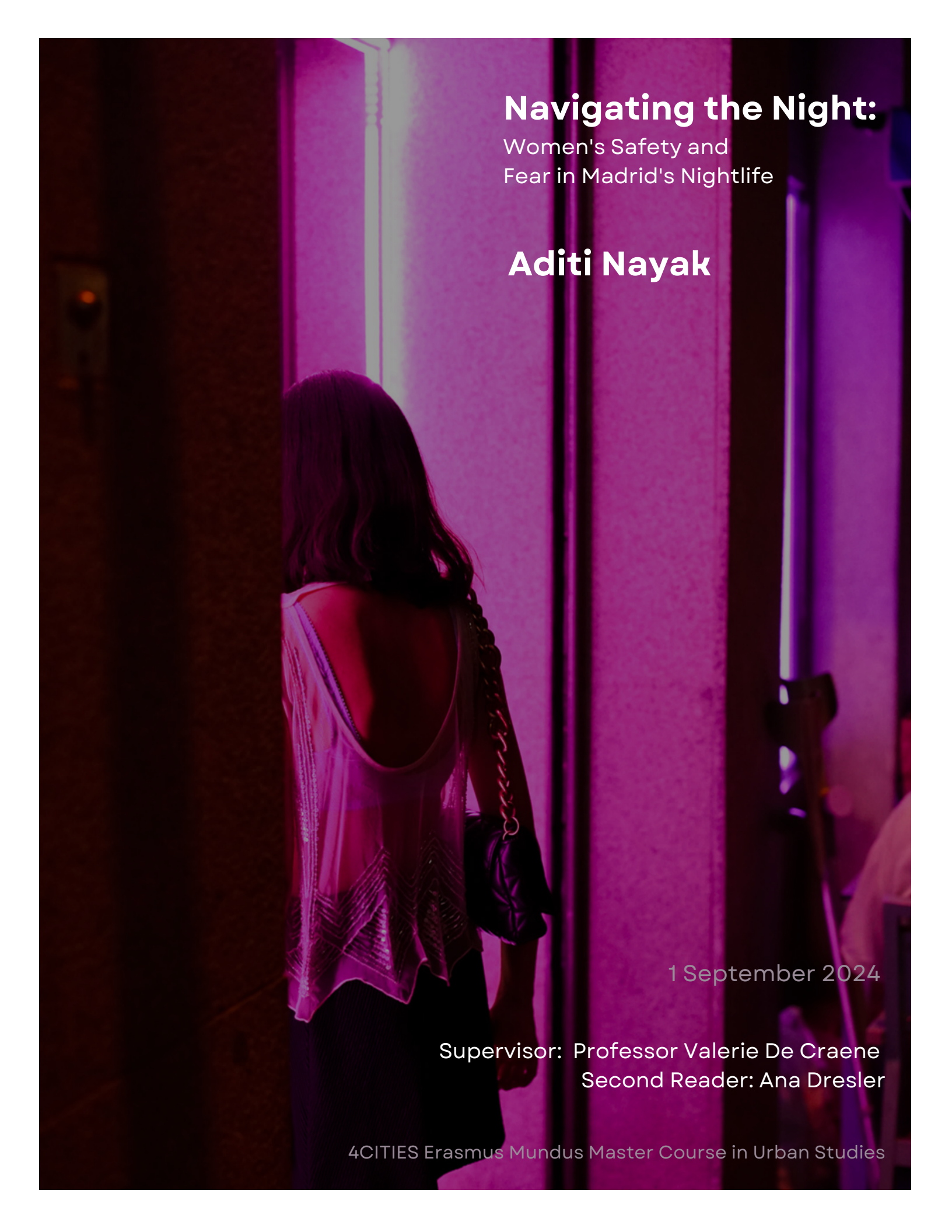
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A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, seen from behind, walking away from the camera. She is wearing a light-colored, sequined, open-back top and a dark skirt. She is carrying a black bag with a chain strap. The background is a dimly lit room with vertical light streaks, suggesting a nightclub or bar setting.

Navigating the Night:

Women's Safety and
Fear in Madrid's Nightlife

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1 September 2024

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4CITIES Erasmus Mundus Master Course in Urban Studies

“In a safe, feminist city, women won't have to be courageous just to step outside the door. Our energies won't be wasted on a million and one safety precautions. In this city, the full extent of what women have to offer the world can be realized” (Kern, 2020, p. 101).



All images are taken by the author, unless specified otherwise

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Abstract

The intersection of gender, space, and temporality underscores the complex dynamics that render public spaces at night profoundly exclusionary for women, impeding their 'right to the city'. This research makes use of feminist theories to address the gap in existing literature on experiences of women in nightlife spaces, which is exclusive to those women who are local to the place. With Madrid attracting a significant number of international students who want to partake in its nightlife scene, it becomes crucial to understand how their non-local status, coupled with their gender identity and other socio-economic factors such as race, sexuality, class among others, give rise to unique challenges.

This thesis deploys a feminist epistemology and qualitative research methods to best capture the emotions (specifically concerning fear and safety) emerging from the everyday experiences of women. The findings highlight that these women are cognizant of the heteronormative culture present in most nightlife spaces, and make patriarchal bargains to navigate these spaces with caution and care. Their experiences are not free from resistance, sometimes done through conscious ways and sometimes unknowingly, reflected through the strategies they employ to safeguard themselves while occupying nightlife spaces. The internalization of gender norms and resistance to the same, showcases their active role in shaping their experiences which contributes to producing and re-producing their identities in urban spaces. The emotional knowledge of these participants, largely shaped by their experiences in nightlife spaces in Madrid and other cities, are instrumental in making city spaces safer, accessible and more inclusive not only for women, but other marginalized groups as well.

Keywords: Gender, violence, fear, safety, risks, perceptions, emotional knowledge, everyday resistances, night-time economy, non-local.

Zusammenfassung

Die Überschneidung von Geschlecht, Raum und Zeitlichkeit unterstreicht die komplexe Dynamik, die öffentliche Räume in der Nacht für Frauen zutiefst ausgrenzend macht und ihr „Recht auf Stadt“ behindert. Diese Untersuchung nutzt feministische Theorien, um die Lücke in der vorhandenen Literatur über die Erfahrungen von Frauen im Nachtleben zu schließen, die sich ausschließlich auf die ortsansässigen Frauen bezieht. Da Madrid eine beträchtliche Anzahl internationaler Studenten anzieht, die am Nachtleben teilhaben wollen, ist es von entscheidender Bedeutung zu verstehen, wie ihr nicht-einheimischer Status, gepaart mit ihrer Geschlechtsidentität und anderen sozioökonomischen Faktoren wie Ethnie, Sexualität, Klasse und anderen, zu einzigartigen Herausforderungen führt.

In dieser Arbeit werden eine feministische Erkenntnistheorie und qualitative Forschungsmethoden angewandt, um die Emotionen (insbesondere in Bezug auf Angst und Sicherheit), die sich aus den alltäglichen Erfahrungen der Frauen ergeben, bestmöglich zu erfassen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass diese Frauen sich der heteronormativen Kultur bewusst sind, die in den meisten Räumen des Nachtlebens vorherrscht, und dass sie patriarchale Abmachungen treffen, um sich in diesen Räumen mit Vorsicht und Sorgfalt zu bewegen. Ihre Erfahrungen sind nicht frei von Widerstand, der manchmal bewusst und manchmal unbewusst erfolgt und sich in den Strategien widerspiegelt, die sie anwenden, um sich zu schützen, während sie Räume des Nachtlebens nutzen. Die Verinnerlichung von Geschlechternormen und der Widerstand dagegen zeigen ihre aktive Rolle bei der Gestaltung ihrer Erfahrungen, die zur Produktion und Reproduktion ihrer Identität im städtischen Raum beitragen. Das emotionale Wissen dieser Teilnehmerinnen, das weitgehend durch ihre Erfahrungen im Nachtleben in Madrid und anderen Städten geprägt ist, trägt dazu bei, städtische Räume nicht nur für Frauen, sondern auch für andere Randgruppen sicherer, zugänglicher und integrativer zu machen.

Schlüsselwörter: Geschlecht, gewalt, Angst, Sicherheit, Risiken, Wahrnehmungen, emotionales Wissen, alltägliche Widerstände, Nachtökonomie, nicht-lokal.

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Introduction

I grew up in Goa, a place known for its thriving nightlife and labeled as the 'party capital' of India or the 'Europe of India'. It received a significant number of tourists, both domestic and international, who are drawn by its "swaying palms, miles of golden sands, lush greenery" (Yugandher, 2012, p. n.d.) and the freedom and excitement promised by its nocturnal leisure options. However, beneath this image lies a complex and alarming discourse surrounding violence and safety, especially concerning the tourists or 'non-locals'.

Through media depictions and day to day conversations, I noticed a common trend emerging in the handling of cases involving female tourists, wherein the blame was often shifted onto the victims instead of offering them support and dealing with the crime. These women were portrayed as being reckless and their presence in Goa was justified solely for the purpose of engaging in heavy drinking and drug usage. This victim blaming narrative took attention away from the actual safety concerns and resulted in a stigmatizing environment for survivors of violence, hindering their ability to seek legal assistance and access other social services. Furthermore, the narrative around perpetrators of these crimes was also equally problematic, wherein lower-income, non-local men were vilified and were portrayed as being the culprits, capable of committing such atrocious acts. Both of these discourses not only led to further marginalization of these vulnerable groups but also ignored the broader socio-cultural issues that contributed to violence against women in nightlife spaces.

Now, as an international student having to navigate life in different cities across Europe, I find myself in a position similar to that of the tourists in Goa, wherein I'm perceived as an outsider, and have to deal with different vulnerabilities that come with it. Nightlife spaces have always been intimidating for me, with my past experiences with violence in these spaces making it all the more daunting. As a 'non-local', I find myself being extra careful and cautious while occupying these spaces.

Similar to Goa, Madrid also attracts a significant number of tourists, but also international students who want to be a part of the nightlife scene of the city (Madrid Tourism Board, 2019; Ministerio de Universidades, 2023). However, the existing body of literature on experiences of women in nightlife spaces mainly focuses on women who are residents of the place (García-Carpintero et al., 2022; Fileborn, 2015; Sheard, 2011). There is a lack of research on women who are in the city for a limited

time or those who are not 'local' to the place, such as international students, who also use nightlife spaces and might encounter unique challenges and risks that are different from those of local women. Unlike local residents, international students might lack deep-rooted social networks, comprehensive knowledge on the legal and social support mechanisms in the city, or might stand out as 'non-locals', all of which can contribute to a heightened sense of vulnerability.

Hence, by employing a feminist epistemology and a methodology that allows for the recording of emotions emerging from everyday urban experiences, I have attempted to answer the following research question:

How do perceptions of safety and fear influence the behavior and decision making of non-local women who occupy nightlife spaces in Madrid?

The analysis of their perceptions of fear and safety will be examined as everyday resistances, which are crucial in transforming urban spaces into more accessible environments for groups that are often excluded from them. Hence, the aim of the research will be:

- 1. To understand how gender based vulnerabilities influence the experiences of women users of nightlife spaces in Madrid, who are not local to the place.**
- 2. To learn from the lived experiences of non-local women to make nightlife spaces more accessible and inclusive for all.**

To answer my research question, I have structured my thesis in the following way:

Section 2 includes an academic literature review with a theoretical and conceptual framework on the core topics discussed in the study. It has been divided into two large segments, each having its own sub-topics. The first segment is on 'theorizing fear and safety', to understand women's fear, how, where and when it manifests and strategies they employ to feel safe. This is followed by the second segment on 'the night-time economy', to understand the historic background of its inception, the consumers it targets- such as international students, the gendered vulnerabilities in these spaces, as well as measures employed to deal with these vulnerabilities. Section 2 also includes the introduction to my case, in which I situate my study in Madrid, by giving an overview of the history of nightlife in Madrid and transformations it underwent during the city's neoliberal era, touristification and

studentification in the city and resistance to the same by the locals, as well as prevalence of gender violence in Madrid, and steps taken by the government to combat the issue.

Section 3 introduces the methodology of the research as being an ethnographic study following a feminist epistemology. I also present my positionality and its influence on conducting this research. The section also introduces the qualitative data collection methods used in the research, which are in-depth semi-structured interviews, a focus-group discussion, field observations and auto-ethnographies. I also provide reasons as to why the specific data collection methods were used for the thesis, and what kind of data was retrieved from it, along with how that data was analyzed, using qualitative analysis tools such as thematic analysis.

Section 4 provides the findings of all the data collected during the fieldwork, which have been thematically analyzed. The analysis starts with a brief overview on the presence of international students in Madrid. The rest of the analysis has been divided based on the behavior and decision making of women before they go to the nightclub, when they are at the nightclub and when they return home from the nightclub. Apart from this, other axes of inequalities influencing women's perceived safety and fear in nightlife spaces, such as temporality and language barrier have also been coded. These findings have then been cross-referenced with secondary literature and theoretical frameworks to contextualize the results in existing debates on nightlife, its accessibility to different groups, and right to the city, particularly for women.

Lastly, section 5 includes the discussion and conclusion, wherein the research question has been answered by organizing it around the research aims. It also includes the limitations and implications of the study.

Literature Review- Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

1. Theorizing fear and safety

1.1 Studying the 'everyday' emotions of women

The concept of 'right to the city', as originally proposed by Lefebvre (1968/1996) and further developed by Harvey (2003), views urban inhabitants as agents of change, capable of shaping an alternative vision for the city that prioritizes social equity and justice. Unlike viewing urban spaces as commodities under capitalism, the right to the city advocates for the unrestricted utilization of these spaces, encouraging citizens to actively engage in shaping and managing urban life. (Purcell, 2013). Lefebvre's concept emerged from the urbanization and class conflict of the 20th century industrial development, wherein he believes that 'urban workers' were the main victims of the conflict and hence must lead and be centered in the political struggle. However, he fails to recognise other relations of power, such as gender, which also dictate the inequalities and conflicts in urban life (Sanz & Gil, 2020).

An interpretation of right to the city from a feminist perspective given by Sanz and Gil (2020), urges urban scholars to not only focus on political urban movements as catalysts for change, but also pay attention to everyday forms of resistances of marginalized groups, such as women, that are equally powerful. Scholars such as Scott (1985) and de Certeau (1984), have a similar approach, where they view mundane activities of individuals, which are often scattered, hidden, or invisible, as attempts of making do within the constraints of social systems. These mundane activities, referred to as tactics by de Certeau, are forms of resistance against the existing status quo, in which individuals reinterpret spaces in ways that may subvert the intended meanings imposed by those in power. Sanz and Gil (2020) highlight the role that emotions and memories that are rooted in daily experiences play within a space and act as political practices in showcasing how certain groups occupy the city. For example, upon having the 'right to the city' denied to them, women internalize and normalize the violence and fear they experience in public spaces, making it a part of their narrative and image of a city as being unsafe and intimidating. The emotions they feel along with their experiences, can hence be viewed as acts of resistance, as they contribute to the essence of a city's identity, while at the same time provide strategies on how to navigate them and visions of how a city should be based on first-hand knowledge. Work such as the one done by Soto (2013) hence do not view women in a victimizing lens, but focus on their day-to-day aspects and their emotional knowledge in navigating cities with

caution and care, often feeling a collective responsibility towards other women, thereby creating and sharing knowledge about the city and its inequalities. Analyzing emotions can also be used as a tool to understand the intersectional dynamics of power, within a given place. Paying attention to who experiences emotions of comfort or discomfort, where they are being felt, and how it plays out, could be useful to make visible the “unevenness that is at the base of structural inequalities” (Rodó-Zárate, 2023, p. 680). This is also the approach I wish to take for my thesis, wherein I will focus on the ‘everyday’ emotions of women (specifically concerning fear and safety), in order to gain a deeper understanding of how these emotions shape their interaction with urban environments and inform their visions of urban spaces.

1.2 Defining fear

Fear has traditionally been explored psychologically as one of the basic emotions. It entered the field of criminology in the late 1960s and early 1970s, marking the beginning of significant academic exploration into the concept of fear, particularly fear of crime (Lee, 2007). This growth is evidenced by a rise in membership within criminological associations, a larger number of students enrolling in criminology programs, and an increased application of specialized criminological knowledge in various government domains. (Tudor, 2003) There have also been recent explorations in the field of sociology, wherein ‘sociology of emotions’ has begun to emerge as an autonomous topic. This subfield focuses on cultures of fear—examining the cultural matrix within which fear is recognised and the patterns of social processes characteristically associated with it. Defining this emotion in detail is hence a complex task. Nonetheless, drawing from these three disciplines (psychology, sociology and criminology), theorizing fear, its meanings, and diverse components becomes essential for a comprehensive understanding, and theoretical grounding for this thesis project.

Cattell and Scheier (1961) and later Spielberger (1966, 1972) have made the distinction between situational and dispositional fear. Situational fear is understood as the fear a person experiences in a specific situation that could potentially be dangerous- such as having to walk through a dimly lit park, or having an encounter with a stranger. Fear in this context is transitory in nature, and will usually pass quickly. Dispositional fear on the other hand refers to the individual differences in the predisposition of experiencing fear while being in a potentially threatening situation. This fear is developed over a longer period of time by having multiple experiences with circumstances that are fear inducing, leading to a person experiencing fear more intensely. Evidently, if a person has experienced situational fear on multiple occasions, they might be more sensitive towards recognising

dangerous situations in the future, leading to an increased tendency towards dispositional fear. Similarly, having a higher-level of dispositional fear might also increase the chance of them experiencing situational fears while being confronted with what they perceive to be a similarly threatening situation (Kappes, et al., 2013; Gabriel & Greve, 2003).

Gabriel and Greve (2003) have further developed the conceptualisation of situational and dispositional fear, to come up with three components which are integral for a state to be labeled as fear- 'Cognitive perception of being threatened', involving the individual's recognition that there is a potential danger or threat by evaluating the situation and perceiving it as harmful or threatening, 'affective experience' referring to the emotional response to the perceived threat, which can manifest as anxiety, dread, or panic, and lastly 'appropriate motive or action tendency' involving the behavioral response to the perceived threat either by fleeing, freezing, or fighting. Gabriel and Greve (2003) believe that these components are interconnected through complex trigger and feedback processes, and are present when an individual experiences situational fear.

1.3 Causes of fear

One of the oldest theorisations of causes of fear is the victimization hypothesis which believes that an individual's victimization experience is directly related to why they experience fear more than others (Lee, 2007). In the late 60's and early 70's, a significant number of government surveys were carried out, especially in the UK and USA, as a response to understand the 'dark figure' of crime, focusing on personal experiences of individuals with crime victimization. These surveys, such as the British Crime Survey (BCS) in 1982, or the reports commissioned for 'The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice', essentially followed the model of the victimization theory elucidating that the level of fear experienced by a community/sub-group is a product of collective experiences of crime within the community- either shared through conversations with other people in the community or from mass media, which shape the overall sense of fear and safety. If many people in a community/sub-group have experienced crime, the community/sub-group as a whole will feel more fearful (Farrall, et al., 2007). However, this theory was later criticized for being too simplistic and empirically inaccurate due to the risk fear paradox, which showed that certain social groups experiencing fear of crime were less likely to be victims, such as older women, wherein those having a higher risk of being victimized were less fearful, such as young men. The risk paradox was further applied to understand causes of fear experienced specifically by women. Killias (1990) believed that the vulnerability of women was an important

factor causing them to experience fear more than men. According to him, fear intensifies in situations when the individual feels that they have less control over the situation and are unable to avoid the threat or lessen the seriousness of its consequences. In the context of women, because they are “inferior in physical strength and ability to the average offender”, their physical disadvantage puts them in a vulnerable situation leading to them being more fearful (p. 102). Similarly, Grabosky (1995, as cited in Lee, 2017) held the opinion that women's fear is mainly the result of socialization and internalization of gender norms which make women less confident and independent compared to men, further arguing that women's fears are unrelated to their potential risk to crime.

These theorisations have rightfully been criticized by radical feminism and feminist criminologists, who argue that women's tendency to experience fear is not irrational, but a reflection of their actual risk and vulnerability in society towards crimes (Lee, 2017; Pain 2000). They point towards the inaccuracy and failure of crime statistics, victimization reports and crime research to deeply understand the nature of women's victimization, highlighting that it is a sub-legal process involving women experiencing continuous violence and intimidation in their everyday lives, in their homes as well as work settings and public spaces, such as the streets (Stanko, 1990; Lee, 2007). These intimidations, often not taken seriously or qualifying as a crime, especially when committed by strangers or acquaintances, continuously remind women of their vulnerability to violence (Lee, 2007). Additionally, crimes such sexual harassment and domestic violence mostly go unreported, and hence are not represented in victimisation statistics and surveys, further obscuring the true extent of women's fear and victimisation. Women, being aware of their vulnerabilities, also avoid dangerous situations more than men by reducing their exposure to risk, by adapting their routine and mobility patterns. This avoidance behavior is a rational response to their lived experiences and awareness of their vulnerabilities, rather than an indication of irrational fear, pointing towards another fallacy in criminal statistics (Lee, 2007; Stanko, 1990; Pain, 2000). On the other hand, these reports and surveys also do not take into account the constraint of machismo that men face which can influence their decision to not report feelings of uneasiness towards crime (Valentine, 2000). Thus, by criticizing the former approaches of criminology that blame women for their victimization, and adopt a simplistic approach which fails to address the structural factors contributing to women's fear of crime, these assessments have reinforced the need for a more nuanced understanding of women's experiences that legitimizes and rationalizes their fear of crime.

1.4 Understanding women's fear

Even though statistics show that private spaces are where women mostly face attacks, with the perpetrators being men who are usually known to the victim, it is public spaces where women feel the most unsafe (Valentine, 1989; 1992). This mismatch between the geography of violence and the geography of fear, shows that there is a discrepancy between actual violence experienced by women and the perceived spatial distribution of violence, making it essential to understand how these perceptions of fear and safety are formed and are spatially situated.

Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) conceptualizes space as something that is dynamic, constantly evolving and made up of multiple identities. It is produced through everyday practices, encompassing different social relations, having their own symbolisms and power dynamics. According to Massey, space is experienced differently depending on one's identity. She highlights the dialectical relationship between space and gender; suggesting that space is not just a passive backdrop for social interactions, but is shaped by as well as actively participates in constructing an understanding of gender in the society we live in (Sandberg & Coe, 2020).

The western world has historically been structured around two opposing spaces: a public, decision-making, and producing space for men, and a private, reproducing space for women, centered around unpaid and informal work (Valentine, 1992). This perspective is based on gender binary, where men and women are considered to be essentially different and complementary: women being passive and nurturing, while men are seen as being active and productive. Women throughout history have been associated with the home. In pre-industrial England, the institution of marriage was understood as a partnership between a man and a woman with clearly defined rules dictating the relationship between the two individuals. Men were given authority over the household and its economic functions and were required to protect the family, while women were expected to look after the social roles of the family. This arrangement was further legitimized by the church and the government to maintain social order within the society. During the 18th and 19th century, even as the family economy collapsed, and sites of production and reproduction were separated, traditional gender roles still persisted, with men going out to work, while women were left at home to take care of the family (ibid.).

Although domestic circumstances are now changing, with women increasingly going out to work (Mehra & Gammage, 1999), they still rarely have a claim over public space but rather find

themselves being trapped and confined by it. Gender norms and power structures through everyday life processes function to constrain women's space, and continue to reproduce space that is unequal and gendered (Valentine, 1989; Pain, 1997). The false public-private divide persists today, with women who spend significant time in public spaces or visit them at unconventional times often facing scrutiny (ibid).

In the process of "doing" gender through everyday social interactions, mechanisms of gender normativity dictate what constitutes an "appropriate femininity," leading to specific restrictions on women's experiences (Butler, 2004). Elizabeth Wilson's work in the 90s (Wilson, 1995) illustrates the crucial influence of sexuality on the spatial structures and the regulations of behavior. She draws attention to how the male gaze is instrumental in eroticizing life in the city wherein it sexualizes the spaces it views (Watson, 2002). Using idealized figures such as the temptress, whore, or the virtuous; women's bodies through 'sexual vigilance' as a form of active subjectification, are made to occupy, present themselves, and move around in public spaces in a specific manner (Fanghanel & Lim, 2015). Having a "panoptical male connoisseur" (Pederson, 2020, p. 378) guiding their consciousness, these restrictions are managed through a self-regulating process, and can cause women to feel insecure and need to protect themselves while occupying particular spaces, which reinforces the socially constructed view of women's vulnerability (García-Carpintero et al., 2022; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Pain, 2000). In addition to their actual experiences with violence in public spaces, Fanghanel and Lim (2015) and Pritchard and Morgan (2010) also argue that governmentality intensifies the need for women to care for themselves, by following a strict risk-averse moral framework wherein rape myths are used to objectify women and condoned violence against them (Valentine, 1989). Failing to internalize self-control and responsibilities results in women feeling emotions of shame and guilt, further affecting their right and freedom to occupy public space.

Additionally, the media is notorious for exaggerating specific types of crimes against women such as sexual assault or murder, as the information about the same is readily available and such stories receive a lot more public attention (Valentine, 1989; 1992). The media also creates a spatial and temporal image of the specific crimes that they choose to broadcast- wherein crimes committed in public spaces, especially in deserted locations such as the park, or during the nighttime, are heavily publicized, whereas crimes committed at home where the perpetrator is known to the victim do not receive the same attention. Information about these crimes against women disseminated through the media are later discussed through conversation at home, at the workplace, or with friends and

neighbors (Valentine, 1992). These crimes are interpreted in a specific manner and are further transmitted through gossip and rumor to create perceptions about fear associated with specific spaces. Interactions with unknown men in public spaces are unpredictable and are hence also perceived to be potentially threatening, leading to fear of being associated with the 'public' for most women (Pain, 1997; 2000). Additionally, their actual experiences with violence in these spaces, such as daily encounters of cat-calling, whistling, or physical assault and in general, an invasion of their personal space, and the severity of these violations, raises concern amongst women of having to deal with a similar situation again in the future (Valentine, 1989).

Hence, gender norms enforced through family, media, and peers, and their actual experiences of violence in public spaces, influence women's feelings of lack of belonging in public spaces shaping their perceived safety in these spaces. In this context, safety of women can be largely understood as a socially determined phenomena, the perception and fulfillment of which is governed by socio-cultural norms within a given group. Maslow (1943), in his theory of 'hierarchy of needs' has provided 5 needs that he thinks are essential to all human beings. Apart from basic physiological needs of survival, 'safety needs' occupy a high position in his hierarchy pyramid, which he defines as the lack of threats related to health, security or financial status that one might experience. He believes that this need can be mainly satisfied by the family and the society. Similarly, 'need to belong theory' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister, 2015), also suggests that humans have a high need of belonging in a society, by establishing and maintaining social relationships with others, which in turn provides them with a sense of social safety. Hence, safety can be perceived as a basic need of individuals impacted by socio-cultural norms determining their perceptions of belonging, the absence of which can endanger or cause harm to them (Eller & Frey, 2019). These norms and experiences create an environment where public spaces are perceived as inherently unsafe for women, with women feeling the need to navigate these spaces in a specific and careful manner to avoid potential harm.

1.5 Women's perceived safety and strategies of managing risk

As seen above, societal norms defining danger are closely intertwined with those establishing what is deemed safe. Therefore, in this thesis, I will aim to theorize the perceptions of fear and safety simultaneously to understand how perceptions of fear and safety influence each other and affect women's experiences in public spaces.

Valentine (1989) explores how women's geographies of fear profoundly affect their navigation and utilization of public spaces, shaped by their perceptions of danger and insecurity. These include the construction of mental maps, instilled in women from a very young age, wherein women carefully plan their choices of routes to avoid dangerous situations and ensure one's safety. This makes them hyper vigilant and conscious about micro design features and presence of infrastructure in the spaces they occupy, wherein they plan their path and pace accordingly.

As Jane Darke (1996) would argue, cities are "patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete" (p. 88). Modernist planning is built on the ideas of rationality, having clear cut solutions for the city and its issues, asserting "gendered social relations and patterns of movement" (Watson, 2000, p. 104), wherein public spaces are designed without keeping women's experiences and needs in mind (Kern, 2020). Evidently, ill-thought design elements such as compact places with fewer exits, where men can be hidden and can potentially attack women without being seen by others, for example, subway stations, alleys, train compartments, parking lots, are spaces that are fear inducing for women (Valentine, 1989; 1992; Rijswijk & Haans, 2018). CCTV surveillance, which is commonly used as a tool to increase security of people occupying an area, to a certain extent, does influence perceptions of safety of women (Brands et al., 2016). At the same time, situations that women are mostly fearful of, such as general intimidation, cat calling, uncomfortable stares, and drunken rowdiness, is where CCTV falls to be insufficient as a means to ensure protection and safety. Additionally, CCTV surveillance is also perceived to be a technology that is most effective after incidents have occurred, rather than being a preventive tool to crime, which also means that it doesn't fully help with increasing the perceived safety of women. The presence of street lights is also known to increase the feelings of safety of women occupying public space (Rijswijk & Haans, 2018; Painter, 1994). Street lights allow individuals to detect possible threats in an area. Even the mere presence of street lights is known to increase the perception of safety in public spaces. However, extremely bright lighting can emphasize on the blind spots in a distance, highlighting what one cannot see rather than what one can see (Matthewson et al., 2019). Hence lighting can also reduce perceived safety by drawing attention to the long-range detection of threats it provides (Rijswijk & Haans, 2018).

Large open spaces which are frequently empty such as forest areas, parks, canals, rivers or the countryside are also perceived to be risky by women (Valentine, 1989). This is often complemented with local place mythologies that exist about these spaces, which also influence their perceived fear. When women are in areas that are not familiar to them, they rely on preconceived notions about the

place and its inhabitants to make judgements about one's well-being in the place. Additionally, graffiti or vandalisms in the area can suggest the presence or possibility of threatening behavior, while clean and neat streets invoke opposite feelings. These perceptions are also influenced by the class and ethnicity of the inhabitant, reflecting broader societal biases and stereotypes. Hence, perceptions of fear can also lead to territorial stigmatization wherein certain areas can be branded with a negative public image, reinforcing a symbolic dispossession of their residents. This practice not only labels them as being social or urban outcasts but also takes away their "collective representation and identity" (Larsen & Delica, 2019, pp. 542).

The above listed negotiations that guide women's everyday experiences in public spaces can be linked to Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) theorisation of 'patriarchal bargains', wherein women have to access risk and strategize within a set of concrete constraints, which are layered and shaped by their race, ethnicity, class and other socio-economic factors. Van der Burgt (2015) has come up with a classification to understand how young people deal with risk and ensure one's safety while occupying public space. This classification can be effectively applied to gain insights into the specific ways women navigate safety concerns in public environments. The three categories listed by him are risk-confronting, avoidance and boldness strategies. Risk confronting strategies would involve precautionary tactics that one could employ in situations where they feel like they could potentially be in danger. This would include carrying a mobile phone or a weapon as a safety measure, or just trusting one's gut feeling and being 'street-smart' in evaluating the environment one's in to assess the probability of risk. Avoidance strategies would involve not going to certain places which could potentially put one in a risky situation (Valentine, 1989). In the first two strategies, safety with respect to risk is often perceived as something that is more or less in the control of the women, and highly dependent on their ability to resist temptations such as avoiding the consuming alcohol, which can make them more vulnerable to crime (Fileborn, 2015). By adhering to these self-imposed safety measures, women may be able to position themselves as 'deserving' victims if they still encounter violence. This perspective implies that women who do not follow these safety practices may bear partial responsibility for the violence they experience (Fileborn, 2015; Valentine, 1992).

Lastly, Van der Burgt's third classification known as boldness strategies would entail women convincing oneself that they should not be afraid and acknowledge their right to occupy public space through self-empowerment (Van der Burgt, 2015). Similarly, a growing body of literature, exemplified by works such as the one by Lupton and Tullock (2002), explores how individuals

actively choose to embrace risk as a means of testing themselves and reinforcing their personal identities. In this perspective, women are not viewed as passive victims of structural changes but rather as active agents in a high-risk society. For instance, some women challenge societal expectations by participating in 'risky' behaviors such as taking an active role in sexual encounters often by initiating them or using drugs. This risk-taking behavior for women can be regarded as a positive and productive aspect of constructing their feminine identity, as well as something that gives them pleasure. Such research acknowledges that risk is still a concern for women who are navigating public scenes, however, at the same time, women are viewed as active agents who enter such spaces being aware of the risk, and equipped with ways in which they can manage it (Hutton, 2010).

2. The night-time economy

2.1 Nighttime spaces

As previously discussed, women's perceptions of safety and fear are spatially situated; however, they are also influenced by temporal factors.

Compared to the daytime, nighttime spaces, due to its negative associations with criminal activities, chaos and unsafety (Schwanen, et al., 2012), can become even more destabilizing, giving way to a distinct set of social dynamics and exclusions (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009).

For this reason, it becomes increasingly important to understand the significance of temporality in the conception of space and gender.

Williams (2008) in his work explains the way in which space, at night, changes in meaning, use and purpose (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009)-

“But night is much more than a time of the day. With the coming of night, we also have the ‘arrival’ of night spaces. Although night is a natural phenomenon, night spaces are not. They are socially mediated. They do not exist prior to, or apart from, human practices and the attendant social relationships that seek to appropriate, even control, the darkness in its myriad human uses and meanings. However, night spaces are neither uniform nor homogenous. Rather they are constituted by social struggles about what should and should not happen in certain places during the dark of the night” (Williams, 2008, pp. 514).

Williams (2008) believes that the transgressive meanings attached to darkness can prove to be a threat to the order and control established in society. This order, organized through the deployment

of strategies and techniques of how society should present itself based on the existing power structures, can be obscured during the night. This is not to say that these transgressions don't take place during the day, or that night-deployable technologies of surveillance do not exist. However, the anonymity offered by the night through its darkness gives way to opportunities of transgression which are not always available during the daylight hours, which could entail unlawful activities, allow individuals to act in unconventional behaviors, or even organize insurgencies. There still exist mechanisms through which power and control can be established over people at night. As discussed before, hegemonic values (such as gender norms) internalized by individuals prescribe ways in which one must act appropriately in society. As "even if we are not being watched now, there is always the possibility of being observed" (Williams, 2008, p. 518), these rules of social conduct which are already decided for us, guide behavior of people in the night. This internalization is accompanied by panopticon strategies of surveillance, wherein legal measures are enforced to establish authority within society. For example, prohibiting cruising in specific streets at night, or installing a curfew across areas, are put into effect to maintain authority within society (ibid.).

The intersection of gender, space, and temporality underscores the complex dynamics that render public spaces, especially at night, profoundly exclusionary for women. Historically and culturally, public spaces have been framed as masculine domains, inherently sidelining women (Valentine, 1992). The added dimension of night and the association of darkness with transgressions (Williams, 2008), along with the societal expectations of appropriate feminine behavior (Butler, 2004), exacerbates this marginalization. Chatterton and Hollands (2002) point out that, "if the modern urban nightscapes are more female-friendly, it generally means that they are targeting women as potential consumers, rather than attempting to transform traditional gender relations" (pp. 112). This creates an environment where women are either absent or must navigate these spaces with heightened caution and vigilance- wherein night becomes both fear-inducing and a source of pleasure and freedom for them.

Before the advent of electricity and artificial lighting in Western societies, nighttime activities beyond sleeping were limited due to practical constraints (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). However, with the widespread adoption of electricity and the invention of light bulbs at the start of the 20th century, city centers have undergone significant transformations. These innovations reshaped urban environments into spaces for living, working, and entertainment, extending their functionality and

temporality into the nighttime hours (ibid.). This shift underscores the importance of studying nighttime environments and its impact on aspects of urban life and social dynamics.

2.2 Building a night-time city

Cities in the west went through major transformation after the 1970s (Hobbs, et al., 2000). This involved changes in the economic model from industrial to post-industrial/post-fordist forms of economic organization, as well as a shift in the governance structure from focusing on managerial service provision to entrepreneurship aimed at economic growth. One way of stimulating the local economy was through revamping the city centers to make them more attractive and liveable by positioning them as sites of consumption and pleasure (Brands, et al., 2013).

A report on the city centers of Britain in 1991 was pioneering to planning the nightlife city (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009). It highlighted the lack of social life in the city centers post 5 pm, urging policy makers to create interventions that would attract people to the centers (not just locals, but also tourists) by providing them with facilities ranging from convenience stores to entertainment venues. Cultural planners at the time also pushed for the incorporation of the '24-hour city' concept, which further reflected in policy changes such as de-regulation of 'restrictive' urban planning and licensing regimes, and the encouragement of investment from external and mobile sources. Thus, global cities were compelled to compete with each other and competitiveness was enhanced through economic agglomeration and specialization (Hobbs, et al., 2000; Hadfield, 2015; Harvey, 1989).

The terminology of 'night-time economy' was first used in the 1990s by Franco Bianchini who was part of the creative cities organization named Comedia Consultancy, wherein 'Night-time economy' was used to refer to a consolidation of industries involved in night-time cultural production, in which alcohol and leisure were seen as integral parts of nocturnal activity (Escalante, 2016). An important strategy was to capitalize on the cultural and social potential through city branding by promoting theaters, evening classes, cafes, bars, nightclubs, music venues, street animation and other activities within the night-time economy; thereby attracting the creative class to boost the local finances (Florida, 2002; Heath, 1997; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). David Harvey in his work emphasizes this move towards service-based, cultural and symbolic economy, wherein historic districts and abandoned industrial centers were revamped for the upper class (Harvey, 1989; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). Additionally, Jane Jacobs (1961) in 'The death and life of great American cities', explained the importance of having vibrant city streets in providing a sense of

safety, comfort, and a feeling of community among city dwellers. She further emphasized that such activities in city centers could lead to the presence of more people in these places and on the sidewalks, creating a lively city which is safe for those inhabiting it. This vision of city centers already existed in southern Europe, in cities of Greece, Italy and Spain, but was reinforced during the post-Fordist era through the development of exclusive upmarket leisure spaces, sanitisation of historic spaces, often at the expense of local and alternative nightlife (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009; Chatterton, 2002).

Following the global economic crisis of 2008, the commodification of city centers in Europe and its nightlife spaces has intensified on an unprecedented scale, driven by the concept of 'vacation city' (Fletcher, 2018). Tourism expansion has been looked at as a strategy by cities to fight the over accumulation which is inherent to capitalism, leading to the complete transformation of urban spaces into theme parks. Such processes have been carried out through strategic amendments in regulations, dismantling laws designed to maintain rural lifestyles and protect cities from international competition. These changes have resulted in new forms of privatization and rural displacement, forcing migration to cities while simultaneously promoting unrestricted tourist expansion in urban landscapes, a process largely known as touristification (ibid.). This has been facilitated by deregulation in the aviation industry and the easing of laws against foreign ownership of land. Touristification should be understood broadly, extending beyond attracting weekend visitors (Calvo, 2018). The objective is to draw new middle-class users who will live and consume spaces in the city for the short and medium term, such as European retirees, freelancers, and digital nomads seeking lower costs and higher living standards. This has created a global demand for housing, supported by platforms such as Airbnb on digital platforms that make local real estate available on a global scale. As renting out to Airbnb, or converting single family houses to multiple use apartments, becomes a more lucrative option for landlords, it has led to significant transformations in the city's rental market. This market is now determined by the purchasing power of these migratory urban elites and investors, which typically surpasses that of local residents, causing the displacements of long-term tenants of the neighborhood from the city center (Sequera & Gil 2018). Additionally, the expansion of new tourist-oriented facilities, has been accompanied by the closure of historic nightlife venues in the city, causing the loss of intangible and tangible cultural heritage. This move towards establishing a more refined 'café society', has been further criticized by research, such as the one by Talbot and Böse (2007), as being closely tied to discriminatory practices against marginalized groups.

Through their research in Southview and Manchester in the UK, they point towards how cultural change, economic development, licensing practices, and policing have been used to further marginalize black spaces of cultural expression, thereby erasing black lifestyle in these cities.

Another important group of lifestyle migrants attracted through tourism promotion (specifically academic tourism) are international students. Infact, the UN definition which considers a tourist to be a “traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure, or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited” (United Nations 2010, p. 10), encompasses many international students who are abroad for just a semester, such as those participating in Erasmus exchange programs. With these international students increasingly becoming new transnational residents in the city, drawn by its leisure and nightlife options, and having similar consumption patterns as that of tourists, their presence significantly impacts urban dynamics, making them a crucial demographic to study (Calvo, 2018).

2.3 International students as new nightlife consumers

According to Eurostat (2023), about 386900 students that graduated in 2021 in EU nations have studied abroad for at least 3 months during their tertiary education degree. This means that out of the 4.3 million graduates in the EU, 9% have been engaged in a mobility programme abroad. Research such as the one by Chatterton (2010) and Calvo (2018) has widely explored how the increase in concentration of international students in cities of Europe is giving rise to what he refers to as ‘exclusive geographies’. Studentification through the combination of fiscal and regulatory processes and the involvement of the private sector, has built an environment for specific consumer lifestyles to take place. International students, referred to as migratory elites, often come from social and educational backgrounds that are more advantaged than that of higher education students in general. Since most international students in Europe are young, with the average age being 22.5 years, they often receive financial aid from their parents, making them consumers more than producers of specific European middle-class to upper-middle-class lifestyles (Calvo, 2018). Engaging in these practices of consumption in the current neoliberal entrepreneurial turn, these urban elites play a major role in reinventing urban areas (Chatterton, 2010; Florida, 2002; Calvo, 2018).

A pull factor for most international students in European cities is the leisure activities offered by these places constructed through the overall city image. International student culture in European

cities is hence often centered around frequent alcohol consumption, attending sex positive parties, and the want to socialize with other communities of young foreigners during their stay abroad (Calvo, 2018). As a way of assimilating into the new destination with their active involvement in the leisure industry, they socialize primarily with other international students and those who have been former exchange students with English proficiency. Their consumption patterns are hence often similar to those of tourists, who usually consume institutionally marketed commodities such as museums, night-life spaces, cafes, retail shops and music festivals, curated in collaboration with the local leisure industry, municipal authorities, travel agencies and higher education institutions (Calvo, 2018). However, Hiernaux-Nicolas and González-Gómez (2014), are talking of a phenomena called 'post-tourist', wherein the mobile creative class are now wanting to venture into 'untouched' or 'authentic' spaces of cities, in order to experience the 'real' urban life in these tourist cities. This is leading to commodification of newer spaces, built based on the cultural imaginary of these newcomers (often working-class areas) where they can have the 'authentic' experience of the traditional neighborhood (ibid.).

Even though international students come with their own set of privileges, they also might also face some disadvantages in the host cities. Research such as the one by Valentine (1989), states that individuals who have strong connections to their local community, both socially and spatially, impacted by their long stay in a given place, tend to possess greater confidence when interacting with strangers and navigating unfamiliar environments within that area. They are also more aware of where they should go to seek assistance when feeling anxious or unsafe. However, when people travel or are positioned in foreign or unfamiliar countries or societies, their understanding of public spaces becomes more intricate and complex (ibid.). International students are hence at a high risk because they can stand out prominently as temporary strangers, lack knowledge about the laws of the city/country they're visiting, and can be socially isolated, which might also affect their help-seeking behavior in situations where they experience fear or unsafe. Their unique process of constructing their individual identities and navigating social worlds involves balancing significant vulnerabilities and privileges. This makes them an important group to study when researching experiences and safety in the nightlife industry, as it can provide valuable insights into the complexities of urban nightlife dynamics and inform strategies to enhance safety and inclusivity for diverse populations.

Nightclubs compared to other nightlife venues such as bars, are often sites where power dynamics play out in more visible and pronounced ways. The crowded nature of nightclubs, combined with high alcohol consumption, dim lighting, loud music and the presence of security personnel, creates a space where issues of consent, vulnerability, and safety are magnified. Additionally, the desire of international students to engage in heavy partying in order to experience the night culture of their host city (Calvo, 2018), often leads to them frequenting these venues. Hence for the purpose of this thesis, I will specifically focus on nightclubs to understand the experiences of international students while navigating these spaces.

2.4 Nightclubs as gendered spaces

Nightclubs are made up of a distinct life world governed by its own norms and expectations of behavior, styles, bodily practices and social exchanges; performances of which are created and naturalized through the process of social spatialisation (Shields, 1991). Shields (1991) explains social spatialisation as the material manifestations of how space is established and reproduced through social imaginaries, the built environment and individual's spatial and social practices. These perceptions of space are dynamic and reproduced using organized performative codes, which constantly change based on the 'reality' and everyday practices of individuals (Cantillon, 2015). The aesthetics, vibe, marketing tactics and spatial arrangements play a significant role in the social spatialisation of the nightclubs (Cantillon, 2015). Mainly characterized with low set dance floors, VIP areas, raised platforms, mainstream nightlife establishments such as nightclubs, facilitate voyeuristic gaze directed towards the objectification of women's bodies. This is also evident through the presence of scantily clad female staff and hired dancers, as well as stripper poles present at mainstream nightclubs which actively display hegemonic sexuality and hyper feminine or masculine behaviors (ibid.).

Men, in such spaces are assumed to internalize and reproduce these ideals, wherein they are often found using performative heterosexual tactics to demonstrate their masculinity, by portraying a specific image that elevates their status amongst their peers (Kovac & Trussell, 2015). Women in these spaces also have to act in specific ways which are dictated by standards of social and sexual respectability. Women who do not adhere to these ideals of gender normativity either by dressing too 'provocatively', by partying too much, consuming drugs or having multiple sexual partners, are considered to be transgressing femininity; and can risk social exclusion not only from men but also other women (ibid.). Such narratives are found throughout history, wherein femininity has typically

been linked to an upper-class concept of womanhood, characterized by qualities such as ease, grace, calmness, and restraint. In contrast, working-class women have often been portrayed as resilient, sturdy, and occasionally masculinized (Hutton, 2010). Both black and working-class women are assigned sexual and deviant labels, serving as a contrast to the 'passive' femininity that is established. This dichotomy between the sexual and feminine aspects holds considerable importance in the level of conduct, where a woman's appearance becomes a prominent indicator of her behavior and, by extension, her moral character (ibid.). Foucault's (1995) disciplinary gaze is relevant in understanding of how these unwritten rules are monitored in club settings, wherein individuals- both men and women, instill a sense of discipline through self- surveillance, monitoring one's behavior whether they are being watched or not, by internalizing the 'gaze' of each toward everyone else.

Several studies have attempted to record the experiences of those who use nightlife spaces for recreational purposes highlighting how gender norms influence the ways in which individuals navigate nightlife environments, perpetuating traditional gender roles and reinforcing social hierarchies (García-Carpintero et al., 2022; Fileborn, 2015; Sheard, 2011). A major common factor amongst the experiences of women, was the idea of safety, especially with respect to sexual violence. Most recounted experiences of unwanted touching, inappropriate comments, being trapped in corners, groped, and even subjected to masturbation by men who took advantage of crowded areas in bars or clubs or dimly lit solitary locations (García-Carpintero et al., 2022) Due to this, women participants expressed fear of sexual harassment or sexual violence leading to injuries, kidnapping, and even death. In contrast, male participants either did not worry about their safety at all (Fileborn, 2015) or were concerned about general crime, robbery, or physical violence inflicted by other men; but never by women (García-Carpintero et al., 2022). By positioning oneself in relation to ideals of masculinity, cis-gender heterosexual men occupying these spaces often portray themselves to be fearless and tough, who are capable of protecting women or inflicting fear on them if needed (Day, 2011, as cited in Fileborn, 2015), reflecting the broader social dynamics and gender expectations prevalent in nightlife settings. Since violence experienced in nightlife settings is gendered and significantly affects individuals' perceived fear and safety, this thesis will mainly focus on sexual violence while analyzing the experiences of women in nightlife settings.

2.5 Reporting of violence experienced by women

Various factors influence women's choices regarding whether they wish to notify law enforcement, about incidents of sexual assault or harassment they've encountered. These factors encompass the

nature of their relationship with the offender, the extent of physical injuries, and concerns about potential reactions from others, particularly the police (Gilmore & Pittman, 1993; Jordan, 2011). In numerous ways, women's experiential knowledge regarding the violence faced by them is denied, invalidated, and pushed into the shadows, through methods adapted to cultural and political circumstances (Kelly & Radford, 1990), having a major impact on their help seeking behavior.

The legal system, which in itself a social construct shaped by societal norms and values, plays a central role in determining what is recognized as a crime, particularly in cases of sexual violence (Kelly & Radford, 1990). This system tends to prioritize the most extreme cases, often sidelining the broader spectrum of experiences faced by many women. Consequently, only a portion of women's complaints are considered legitimate according to the law, with legitimacy defined in terms of the actions, behaviors, and relationships of the male perpetrator and the female victim. This perspective perpetuates the idea that clear distinctions can be drawn between violence and non-violence, and between abusive and 'normal' men (ibid.). While reporting crimes of sexual nature, women often have to deal with the victim blaming attitude of the police, where they are often made to feel that they are partially responsible for the crime that has taken place. This is especially common in situations where the victim has consumed alcohol, frequently leading to them lying or downplaying the quantity of alcohol they consumed when giving a statement to the police. This can weaken the legal case, as the victim's silence or non-disclosure of certain events that have taken place on the night in question can increase police skepticism, leading to them abandoning the case. Additionally, racial bias evident in different layers of the legal system through racist policies, racial profiling, high wrongful convictions rates of racial/ethnic minorities, and excessive police presence and violence in immigrant neighborhoods also leads to lack of trust in law enforcement agencies and institutional support among racial minorities. (Decker, et al., 2019)

Like discussed before, media discourses on cases of sexual harassment and the disproportionately high attention given to 'false reporting of rape' has also contributed in creating the image of women as being 'cunning', who would resort to lying to get what they want (Jordan, 2011; Valentine, 1992). Such narratives act as warning signs for victims of sexual harassment/assault showcasing that coming forward and talking about the harassment experienced by them carries the risk of them being disbelieved by the public (ibid.).

Due to the above listed factors, data regarding sexual violence experienced by women in nightlife settings is largely limited. However, the available data indicates that it is a significant concern.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2013) conducted a comprehensive survey on violence against women across 28 EU Member States. The findings revealed that approximately 8% of women reported experiencing the most severe incident of non-partner violence in a nightlife environment. The prevalence varied across countries, with Italy reporting 1% and Denmark reporting 18% of women experiencing such incidents. Another study conducted in the UK found that 70% of female respondents had at least once experienced unwanted sexual contact during a night out in their lifetime (Duch et al, 2019). Another study focused on drink spiking in Scotland showed that none of the female participants who experienced sexual violence at a nightlife space made a formal complaint to legal authorities due to the fear of being blamed for it coupled with their own tendency to downplay such incidents (Brooks, 2014).

The Noctámbul@s Report (Fundación Salud y Comunidad, 2018), examined the prevalence of sexual violence in nightlife spaces among individuals who consume alcohol and drugs in Spain in 2017-18. The report highlighted that 57% of young women have encountered situations of normalized sexual violence in these environments throughout their lifetime. Apart from nightlife spaces themselves, the study revealed that the second most common location where female participants faced violence was during their commute from the pub/nightclub to their homes particularly when they had to walk alone on the streets at night. When faced with sexual violence, 12.8% women respondents said that they would never go to the police, while 13.3% said they wouldn't they take medical help.

Lack of safety in public places has led to a surge in activism and advocacy across the world for safer environments, particularly for women and marginalized groups (Harrison-Cripps, 2024; Nasreldin, 2021; The Times of India, 2017). Some of these movements are specifically bringing to light the normalization and passivity towards violence experienced by women in nightlife spaces, further demanding accountability and safer spaces from city officials and nightlife operators. The "Girls Night In" was one such movement carried out across the UK, wherein women boycotted nightclubs due to the high prevalence of drink-spiking and sexual harassment. Gaining support in approximately 50 locations, the movement shed light on the normalization of such incidents in university drinking culture in the UK (Gallagher, 2021). A similar protest took place in Brussels in 2021, called 'nightlife Blackout' with a large number of people, including feminist organisation, occupying the centre threatening to boycott the Horeca sector in response to the astounding

number of testimonies given by women on experiencing sexual assault during a night out (The Brussels Times Newsroom, 2021).

2.6 Crime prevention in nightlife spaces

In the Fordist regime, crime prevention measures at night largely involved strict control and restraint of the police and legislative measures through state involvement and censorship. These governance instruments continued to exist in the post-industrial era, however, with the involvement of new actors such as real estate developers and the entertainment sector, governing nightlife is now becoming more complex and fluid (Chatterton, 2002).

Taking into account the demands of women's protests on building safer cities, bystander intervention programs are increasingly being recognized as an effective approach to preventing various forms of violence (Banyard et al., 2007; Fenton et al., 2016, as cited in Quigg et al., 2022). The overarching goal is to prevent and address instances of violence by fostering a sense of community responsibility, thereby shifting the focus from an individual to taking a more collective approach. These programs often take a multi-organisation effort where nightlife establishments collaborate with the police, local authorities and agencies that have designed safety manuals for such venues. Initiatives such as Good Night Out Campaign (White ribbon UK 2020) and Licensing SAVI initiative (City security magazine, 2022) in the United Kingdom, STOP SV (Staff Training On Prevention of Sexual Violence) (Duch., et al., 2019) in Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, and best practises for nightlife establishments in New York City (New York City hospitality alliance, 2018) work with multiple stakeholders who are involved in the management and regulation of nightlife activities in a city, to prevent violence and crimes in such settings.

'Ask for Angela' was one such initiative in England which was aimed to transform the prevailing culture of violence within nightlife spaces, especially concerning instances of sexual harassment that take place within the confines of bars or restaurants (Banayan, 2023). Nightlife establishments were encouraged to display signs with the name 'Angela' to foster an environment where users, particularly women, were assured knowing that they could reach out to the management if they have experienced any sort of violence in the space and needed assistance for the same. Upon a guest asking for Angela, the bartender or bar staff are required to follow the predetermined safety protocols such as booking a cab for individual or even notifying the police, until the situation is deemed safe for the concerned person. Similarly, 'angel shot' has gained popularity as an additional

safety measure, particularly in response to the crimes taking place with the increase in prevalence of online dating. Angel shot is a coded drink order that patrons can ask for to alarm the staff or request for help if they encounter discomfort within the premises of a bar or restaurant. This concept gained widespread visibility and recognition through social media where influencers such as Benjamin Smith, that have a large following amongst the youth, created explanatory videos on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, to spread awareness about such safety initiatives (ibid.). 'Ask for Clive' is another such initiative which operates the same way as 'Ask for Angela', and looks at ensuring the safety of the LGBTQAI+ community in nightlife spaces (Weller, 2022). Strengthening of such bystander strategies to prevent sexual violence in nightlife is likely to align with and be reinforced by broader initiatives aimed at combating sexual violence and systemic harm against women and girls (Quigg, et al., 2022).

Case of Madrid

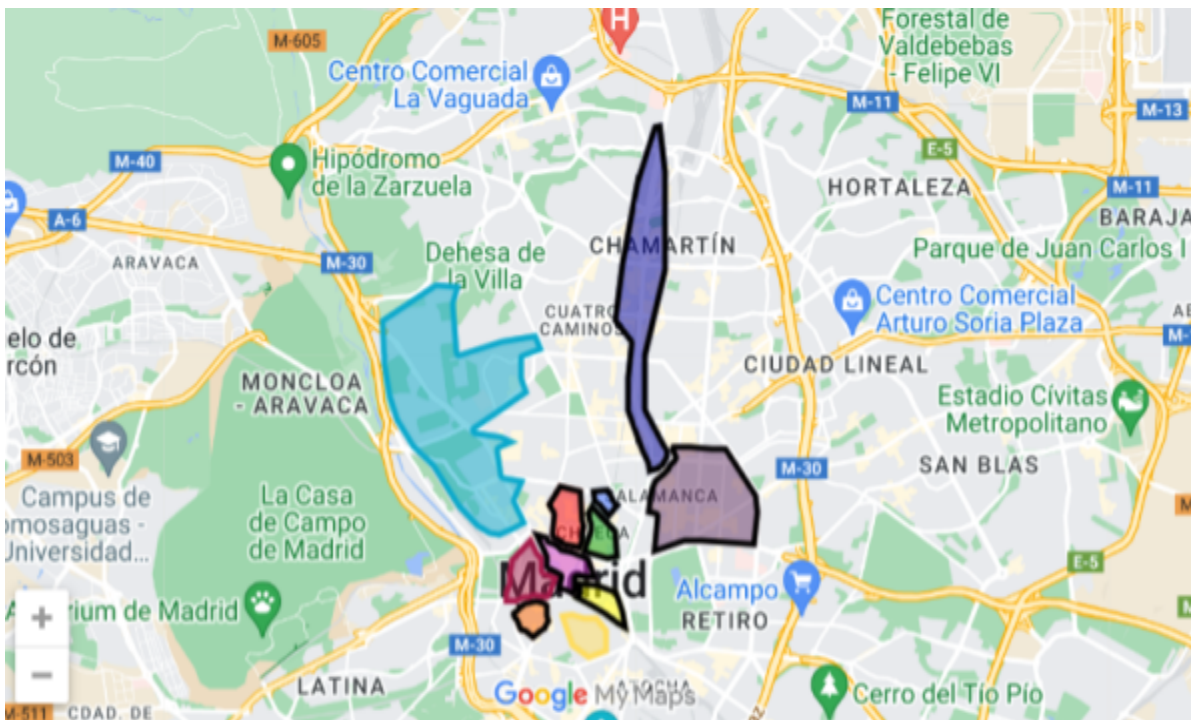
1. Changing nightlife in Madrid

Nightlife spaces in Madrid have gone through major transformations from being spaces of resistance and radical expression to more controlled, commercialized, and sanitized environments in the neoliberal era (Aramayona & García-Sánchez, 2019). During the authoritarian regime in Spain led by Generalísimo Franco from 1939 to 1975, nighttime spaces served as a form of resistance against the regime's strict moralistic catholic sentiment that controlled private and public life. Even though the Franco regime allowed and also participated in some nightlife spaces of the city, the central districts of Madrid also gave rise to clandestine nighttime cafés for political groups to meet, brothels, cabarets and dingy bars looking to escape the strict censorship of the fascist government. In the post Franco era, with the establishment of the democratic government of Spain, various cultural movements started by the youth transformed the nightlife scene of the city, providing spaces to different marginalized groups. For example, the neighborhood of Chueca birthed the gay militant movement, Malasaña came to be known for its underground bohemian and punk scene, whereas Lavapiés was recognised for its leftist politics along with its squats (ibid.).

With the pursuit of making Madrid a global city, aided through private-public partnerships, Madrid's nightlife cultural scene began to be replaced by 'cleaner' and 'daily-oriented' spaces of consumption in the mid-1990s and 2000s (Aramayona & García-Sánchez, 2019). For example, the saunas and 'back rooms' where sexual activities within the gay district of Chueca were carried out, began to be replaced by 'sanitized' 'gay-friendly' cafes and eateries pertaining to the middle class. The radical, feminine and trans-inclusive image of the neighborhood, was substituted with rich and masculine representations of 'gay men in a suit' disseminated through mass media and event organizers. The radical and dark nightlife scene of Malasaña died down as art galleries, luxurious thrift shops and vegan restaurants for the wealthy became the new neighborhood aesthetic (ibid.).

Additionally, the emergence of what can be called as 'moral panic' in relation to the alcohol culture within southern European countries, added to the state-control on the nightlife activities in the city in the late 90s (Aramayona & García-Sánchez, 2019). The common leisure time activity in the 1980s within Spanish cities and villages known as Botellón, consisted of informal gatherings mainly of the youth, in public spaces such as streets, squares, parks, often involving the consumption of alcohol. The Mediterranean weather, along with the small sizes of the houses and the economic practicality

of the option compared to restaurants and bars made it a common pastime practice. In 2002, the Spanish government passed a law, banning the consumption of alcohol in the streets (unless one is at an outdoor café or bar). Additionally, the law also prohibited the sale of alcohol to individuals less than 18 years old, and the sale of alcohol to anyone post 10 pm. This law was mainly passed to put an end to the Botellón culture, changing the country's liberal approach to young individuals consuming alcohol as an important measure towards public safety in the post-Franco era (Chatterton, 2002). These 'safety measures' align with the broader strategy of the city officials to make public spaces more orderly and polished for the upper-middle class consumers, often by excluding users that are not considered as 'legitimate'. This is an example of state-led gentrification, wherein the new urban governance regime seeks to commodify and extract rents from urban spaces, often using heavy policing in order to remove unruly people from spaces-to-be-gentrified (Hubbard, 2004).



Map 1: Madrid city government advertising different neighborhoods and the type of nightlife they cater to (Madrid Destino Cultura Turismo y Negocio, n.d.)

2. Creating a nocturnal tourist city

Madrid has long been promoting its image as a vibrant tourist city renowned for its nocturnal life (refer to Map 1). The city offers around 10,000 establishments, including bars, clubs, restaurants, and other entertainment venues, as reported by the Madrid City Council (2019). Evidently, a report by the Madrid Tourism Board (2019) states that the city received over 10 million international visitors in 2019, many of whom were attracted by the nightlife. This effort has not only attracted millions of international tourists but also a growing number of international students that are drawn to the city's leisure options. According to Spain's Ministerio de Universidades (2023), international student



Image 1: Neoliberal forces marketing Madrid's nightlife (Nightlife Madrid, n.d.)

enrolment in Spanish universities reached a record-high of 224,080 in 2022. Additionally, according to a study by Uniplaces.es conducted in 2016 (Madridiario, 2016), international students in Madrid mainly prefer to live in the central districts of the city. Within the center, the most preferred neighborhood is Sol, where 8.5% of international students live, followed by Malasaña (7.5%), Lavapiés (6.5%) Austrias (5.3%) and La Latina (4.1%). The study also states that most international students give priority to location rather than the rental price, as the cost of renting a room in Sol or Malasaña on an average is €460, which is higher than average rent of a room in the rest of Madrid, which is €409 per month. With the student community mostly living in the central neighborhoods, and having upper-middle socio-economic backgrounds, accommodating this new urban elite, and creating spaces of leisure for them has had an adverse effect on housing wherein it has become more 'exclusive'. This phenomenon extending outwards from the center has contributed towards the

suburbanisation of poverty and increased housing prices (Crespi Vallbona & Domínguez Pérez, 2022; Velasco González et al. 2019).

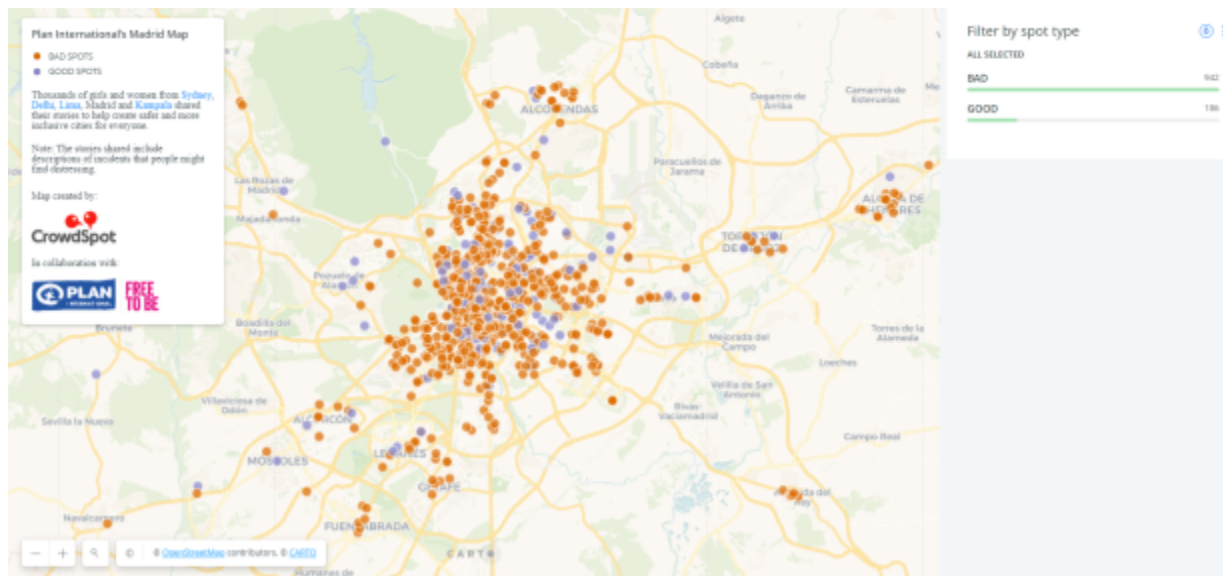
The neoliberal economies of the 'Tourist City' and its colonization of the central neighborhoods of Madrid, as mentioned above, has thereby heavily impacted the everyday lives of the local individuals. Studies conducted in Madrid point towards the locals' dissatisfaction and complaints towards the displacement of residents due to rise in short term rentals (Velasco González et al. 2019), loss of the neighborhood identity (Hidalgo-Giralt et al. 2022), closing of local businesses to accommodate stores catering to tourists (Cabrerizo et al. 2016), or cohabitation with tourists who are noisy and disrespectful (Hidalgo-Giralt et al. 2022).

Additionally, this has led to new instances of stigmatization of individuals who are labeled as 'problematic bodies' in public spaces. For example, an organization started by the local residents of La Latina neighborhood, predominantly consisting of adults and the elderly, was established in 2006 to voice concerns regarding the massification of the area's night time economy. They criticized the transformation of their neighborhood into an 'alcohol-fuelled district' and blamed the rise of noise pollution and littering on the increase of low-cost establishments. Several websites, such as 'Residents against Shoko' and 'Let's restore La Latina, Madrid of the House of Austrias.' were created to express disapproval of the loss of their neighborhood's traditional identity due to overcrowding (Aramayona & García-Sánchez, 2019).

While Madrid offers a promising environment for studying nightlife establishments, there remain gaps in knowledge that warrant further research. With the increasing number of international students in the city and their active involvement in nightlife, it becomes crucial to focus on the experiences of this group, which is also under-researched within the realm of nightlife. Adding to this, the local population's growing concerns about the negative impacts of tourism and the commercialization of their neighborhoods can translate into heightened scrutiny of non-local individuals, including international students. Contextualizing issues of safety within nightlife establishments when such narratives are in place becomes essential as it can influence the effectiveness of systems that are in place to safeguard individuals from safety concerns. To fully grasp these dynamics, it is also essential to assess the prevalence of crime in Madrid, specifically concerning gender violence and examine the measures implemented by the government and local organizations to combat this issue.

3. Prevalence and measures to combat gender violence in Madrid

According to Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2021), Madrid recorded 25,454 reports of gender-based violence in 2021. Notably, there were no convictions for false reports during that year. The incidence of reported cases in Madrid in 2021 was 377.7 per 100,000 inhabitants, which is higher than the Spanish average of 344.1 per 100,000 inhabitants. Out of this, in 2021, 33 men (0.9%), were convicted for sexual harassment, while 15 men (0.4%), were convicted for sexual abuse. As highlighted in the literature (Kelly & Radford, 1990; Decker, et al., 2019) a significant number of sexual violence cases go unreported, suggesting that the true extent of these incidents is likely much higher than official statistics indicate. A survey by Plan International (2018) in 2018 conducted with young girls and women to map safety in Madrid, highlighted that 87% of the respondents have had some sort of a negative experience with safety on the streets. Public transport and the park were the second most reported place where women felt unsafe. Additionally, in 85% of the cases, sexual harassment in public spaces was mentioned, out of which 72% was verbal sexual harassment while 11% was both verbal and physical sexual harassment.



Map 2: Safe and unsafe places as mapped by women in Madrid (Plan International & Free to be, n.d.)

Gender violence is a salient issue in Spanish public discourse, evident through various feminist movements such as #MeToo, #Cuéntalo, and 8M (Publico, 2018; Nagovitch & Garriga 2021; Ramírez, 2023). Some legislations concerning gender violence have also been open to public scrutiny. For example, a law known as ‘Only yes means yes’ led to a public outcry for having a

loophole which worked in the favour of sexual offenders such as the ones involved in the La Manada case (five men convicted for a gang rape of a woman during the Sanfermines festivals in 2016) by reducing their sentence, prompting the Prime Minister to issue a formal public apology. (Henley, 2023; El Confidencial, 2024).

Having said that, Spain has committed to many international and European frameworks and has enacted several laws and national plans to address gender violence within the country. Being a highly decentralized country, responsibilities concerning gender-based violence in Spain are distributed based on the principle of 'interconnected public policies' across the state, autonomous communities and municipal authorities (Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament and Equality, 2019). Through these various legislations, certain provisions have been made available to those facing gender violence in the country:

- State police and security forces: The state police and security forces are responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of gender violence and protecting women who are victims of this violence. 173 Family and Women's Units (UFAM), are available across Spain in police stations, consisting of a total of 1,272 specialists employed in it.
- Telephone services addressing gender violence: ATENPRO Service, is a telephone service which provides immediate remote assistance to victims of gender violence, enabling permanent contact with a support center that can respond quickly to any situation. This service is available throughout the day, 365 days of the year. 016 Service is also available to offer information and legal advice on issues of gender-based violence, and is accessible through the quick-dial number 016.
- Free legal aid: As stated by the Organic Law 1/2004, all victims of gender violence have the right to free legal aid upon presenting an accusation or legal action or by initiating criminal proceedings. This aid is sustained as long as the criminal action is ongoing or when a guilty verdict has been passed.
- Courts for violence against women: Started under the Organic Law 1/2004, there are specialized courts which have jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases involving acts constituting gender violence.
- Crime Victim Support Offices: These offices provide integrated support and care in legal, psychological, and social aspects for victims of crime, including those who have experienced gender violence. Support is offered in four stages: Accessing shelter, information provision,

intervention in social (assistance in accessing psycho-social support resources) and legal matters, and effective coordination with other bodies such as the court, police, among others.

In the case of Madrid, Law 5/2005 of 20 December, was passed which addresses gender violence comprehensively (Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament and Equality, 2019). This law mandates several measures to prevent gender violence and support victims (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2006):

- Awareness Raising campaigns: Under this law, awareness raising campaigns are carried out using various media platforms, including social media, highlighting the rights and resources available to victims in Madrid.
- Training of important stakeholders: Stakeholders who have to deal with victims of gender violence such as health professionals and social workers have to go through mandated training. This training is focused on detecting cases of gender violence, and guiding victims on the rights and resources available to them.
- Victim support service: Madrid also has the 'Victim support service' which is equivalent to the Crime Victims Support Offices, assisting victims of crimes (including gender violence) in Madrid. Assistance is provided with regard to recovery from the after-effects of violence, which includes medical treatment and psychological support, providing victims with temporary shelter, as well as other measures to address the victims' economic, legal, social and safety needs. There are five offices in Madrid providing specialized support and care for victims.

In 2017, the Madrid city council carried out a campaign called '*Fiestas libres de violencias machistas*' (Parties free of gender-based violence; refer to image 2 and 3) across various nightlife venues and festivals in the city (Madrid city council, n.d.-b). By collaborating with stakeholders such as 'Madrid en Vivo' (association of concert and performance venues in Madrid), and music festivals taking place in the city, the campaign worked on dissemination information on various ways in which a victim can receive help if they suffer from sexual violence and how they can report such a crime (even as a witness) in these settings. This was done by installing purple information points at different locations at music festivals, where activists and volunteers who have received prior training on assisting victims of gender violence, were stationed. In the year 2018, three cases of sexual violence

were reported through these purple check points at music festivals in the city (Diario de Madrid, 2018). This campaign was carried out till 2019, during the summer months when music festivals are common in the city. As a part of the '21 priority measures to eradicate violence against women' approved in 2019, and the 'Villa Agreements' approved in 2020, the Madrid city council issued a campaign called '*¿Ni una!*' (Not a single one!), focusing on the youth to raise awareness on the everyday manifestations of sexual violence in public places but also its occurrence through digital means (Madrid city council, n.d.-a). The campaign disseminated informative posters in public areas like bus stops and also used social media to raise awareness on the 24 hours crisis hotline available to the victims of sexual violence experienced in Madrid.



Image 2: 'Fiestas libres de violencias machistas' campaign by the Madrid city council addressing gender violence in Nightlife settings (Madrid city council website, n.d.)



Image 3: Awareness generation for 'fiestas libres de violencias machistas' campaign of the Madrid City Council (Diario de Madrid, 2017).

Even though legal measures exist to address gender violence in Madrid, more subtle forms of violence, such as stares, unsolicited compliments, and unwanted approaches, might still remain difficult to penalize. Additionally, while awareness campaigns are being conducted, their accessibility to non-locals is uncertain, especially for those who may not speak Spanish or engage with Spanish media. Hence, I will use this as a hypothesis for my thesis, to assess how female international students navigate nightlife spaces in Madrid, keeping all the above mentioned debates in mind.

Methodology

As mentioned before, the study focuses on non-local women who use nightlife spaces within Madrid to uncover new insights and perspectives that may not be fully captured by existing studies which mainly focus on local women (García-Carpintero et al., 2022; Fileborn, 2015; Sheard, 2011).

Initially, it was decided to include the nightlife experiences of both female international students and tourist women under the umbrella of non-local women. However, as the research progressed, it became evident that it would be more effective to focus exclusively on the experiences of international students. As discussed in the literature, international students represent a significant and growing demographic in European cities, attracted by the nightlife and leisure options that these cities have to offer (Chatterton, 2010; Florida, 2002; Calvo, 2018). As part of the new migratory elite, they exhibit unique consumption patterns and contribute in producing exclusive geographies wherein specific spaces are created to cater to their preferences and needs. Their economic advantages compared to the locals often places them in a privileged position, by allowing them to engage in unique consumer lifestyles (ibid.). However, their status as non-locals introduces vulnerabilities, wherein they might lack social capital, stand out as 'outsiders', and not have comprehensive knowledge of local laws, significantly impacting their sense of safety and their ability to seek help when needed. While gender violence remains a significant issue in Spanish discourse (El Confidencial, 2024), and various government initiatives exist to combat it and support victims (Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament and Equality, 2019; Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament and Equality, 2019), the effectiveness of these measures in addressing more subtle forms of violence (such as stares, unsolicited compliments, and unwanted approaches) and their reach to international students remains uncertain. Hence, keeping this as my hypothesis, this focus on international students provides a more in-depth exploration of the unique challenges and perspectives of this specific group, which is also less explored within Nightlife studies. Unlike tourists, whose spatial understanding is often superficial, international students reside long enough to develop deeper insights into their environments. The interplay between their status as non-locals, their interactions with local residents and establishments, and their own agency within these spaces reveal nuanced power dynamics.

Although my research primarily focuses on the experiences of cis-gender women, I also included one non-binary individual in the semi-structured interviews and two in the focus group, all of whom are Assigned Female At Birth (AFAB). The decision to include their perspectives was made after

careful consideration and dialogue with these participants, who expressed that being AFAB often led to them being perceived as a 'woman' in public spaces by others. As a result, they experienced misogyny similar to cis-gender women, compounded by the added layer of having their gender identity invalidated on multiple occasions. By recognizing these commonalities in nightlife experiences, I included the perspectives of non-binary individuals to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these intricate dynamics at play in these environments.

Under 'nightlife spaces' I have mainly focused on the experiences of participants in nightclubs of Madrid. Compared to other nightlife venues such as bars, nightclubs due to its socio-spatialisation (Shields, 1991), are spaces where existing power dynamics are more prominently visible, making it an important space to study issues of safety accessibility. Additionally, to understand the whole process of having a night out, I have also recorded their negotiations and experiences before they go to the nightclub, and their return home from the nightclub. This approach acknowledges that the experience of nightlife is not confined to the time spent inside the club but is influenced by multiple factors before, during, and after their time at the venue.

The intricate and layered experiences of non-local women, specifically international students navigating nightlife spaces in Madrid underscore the need for a research approach that not only acknowledges but actively centers their unique perspectives. For this reason, a feminist epistemology offers the most suitable framework for this study, as it foregrounds their lived experience and allows for a nuanced understanding of how power, gender, and identity intersect within nightlife spaces.

Feminist epistemology

This research is grounded in Feminist epistemology, which can be defined as feminist values guiding "The nature of knowledge, its scope, and the assessment of the reliability or degree of warrant of knowledge claims" (Stanley & Wise, 2003, p. 23). But what does this truly mean? To understand this, we must first critique scientific knowledge production which has been universally structured around the ideas of rationality and objectivity wherein men have been the primary voices of science, creating a male scientific culture "characterized by male sociability and grounded in an academic machismo" (Cooks & Fonow, 1986, p. 6). Harding (1987), points towards the historical fallacy in recognising women's research work, where it has often been trivialized or ignored, to further ask the questions- who is allowed to produce knowledge? Or what kind of knowledge is worth producing? Research conducted by women is carried out in a specific manner- It often focuses on the perspective of

women to understand the 'reality' through their lived experiences. By doing so, it emphasizes the importance of 'studying oneself' to critically examine the sources of power. Secondly, research on women by women recognises that the marginalization of women is the object of knowledge. This ethical consequence of research is further acknowledged and efforts are made to empower and transform the status of women in society through their research contributions (Reinharz, 1992).

However, is all research conducted by women feminist in nature? Schrijvers (1995) delves into answering this question stating that gender theory and feminist theory are both complementary to each other as they both have women as their subject of research and follow the pursuit of understanding how existing power structures impact the lives of women. However, Schrijvers (1995) also adds that feminist theory further goes on to study other systems of oppression and segregation which intersect with gender to sustain the status quo. for example, intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989;1991), recognizes that gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class, and sexuality to shape individuals' experiences and vulnerabilities. It recognises that "woman in itself is a 'contested and fractured terrain", with experiences that are shaped by individuals who have vastly different interests (Nash, 2008, p. 3). Hence it goes on to discard universalisms around gendered practices of women, by urging researchers to be more critical and reflexive in their research process.

Feminist epistemology acknowledges that knowledge is always situated, as is produced and shaped within specific circumstances (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). This approach criticizes the strict dichotomy that exists in neopositivist research that treats the people that are being studied as objects, thereby forcing the researcher to have an impersonal and neutral relationship with them in order for the research to be considered good and 'factual'. This creates a power imbalance, wherein the researcher holds a superior and often an exploitative position, which can make the research process intimidating and harmful for those involved. This hierarchical relationship, as well as the dismissal of personal experiences as being potential threats to objectivity is questioned by feminist epistemologists (England, 1994). They strongly believe that the knowledge of those being researched is greater than that of the researcher and stress the importance of using reflexivity as a strategy for contextualizing this knowledge. This can be done by doing away with the false claims of neutrality and universality that are often associated with academic knowledge, by urging the researcher to introspect on their personal identity and its relationship with the broader world (Rose, 1997). Reflexivity urges the researcher to analytically think about their positionality and encompassing

factors such as race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, and sexuality, as it directly influences their fieldwork and consequently impacts the data collected and the knowledge constructed. As highlighted by Stanley and Wise (1993), the researcher needs to keep their 'self' and consciousness in the center while conducting academic research. As researchers are also humans with their own set of emotions, their life experiences have a major impact on what they observe, what they do, and how they understand and construct what is around them. "This consciousness and experience should be made explicit within the research. It should not simply be taken-for-granted as its backcloth, because it isn't any 'backcloth' but instead the absolutely and totally central feature of any research process. And so, it must be made a central part of the research report, not hidden from view and disguised through claims of 'objectivity' and 'science'" (Stanley and Wise, 1993, pp. 60). Reflexivity is also essential in order to understand the intersubjective nature of social life, its nuances and challenges. Feminist epistemology believes that these complexities can be grasped only if shared meanings are created through a joint project between the researcher and those being researched (England, 1994). Within this epistemology, by being transparent about one's position, fieldwork is hence viewed as a collaborative process between both the researcher and the participants, wherein knowledge is co-constructed.

Positionality

My nightlife experiences over the years have not been free from violence and these past experiences have significantly tainted my sense of safety when I occupy these spaces. Conducting research in these settings, which are dictated by toxic heteronormative expectations, has been especially challenging, as these vulnerabilities make the spaces all the more intimidating for me and also raise significant safety concerns. Due to these concerns, I found it difficult to be entirely alone in these spaces while doing my field research. To feel more at ease and also reduce these risks, I often asked friends to accompany me during my research activities at nightlife spaces. However, at times the surroundings did become increasingly distressing and I had to make a decision of whether to leave the nightclub immediately or bear with my discomfort a little longer for the sake of my research. I realized that, as a woman, navigating these spaces while conducting research, required continuous assessment of my personal safety and well-being, which could also have an influence on the quality and scope of my study. Additionally, being a 'foreigner' in Spain added to my vulnerability, as my lack of proficiency in Spanish, made it all the more difficult to communicate effectively with others. This language barrier intensified my sense of insecurity, while navigating these spaces on my own. The

measures I took to ensure my safety and well-being underscore the broader negotiations required of researchers, particularly women, when engaging with fieldwork. Reinharz (1992) speaks of this challenge wherein feminist ethnographers and researchers must be prepared to “deal with the intersection of their behavior and the gender ideology of the setting they are studying” (p. 62), by being willing to frankly and reflectively discuss their challenges in these settings.

On the other hand, being a woman and an international student myself, who is also of a similar age as most of my respondents, made it easier for me to approach potential participants at nightlife spaces. I was not perceived as a threat by other women and this comfort often made them more willing to engage in conversation with me. This also made it easier for me to build rapport with my respondents, and allowed me to gather personal insights more effectively. Given our shared experiences, I was also able to relate to the participants on a personal level, which allowed for a deeper understanding of their lived realities as well as led to a more nuanced analysis of the data. Additionally, being a woman of color in a predominantly white society made me sensitive and mindful towards the specific challenges and forms of discrimination that women from diverse backgrounds may face within these settings.

Hence, by using a feminist perspective to analyze and document the emotions (specifically those associated with fear and safety), that emerge in the everyday experiences of non-local women, I aim to shed light on the subtle resistances of these individuals. These resistances bring to light the negotiations, vulnerabilities and the everyday patriarchal bargains made by women while occupying nightlife establishments and also inform their visions about urban environments and its transformation into safe and accessible spaces. Through my research, I have tried to accurately represent the lived realities and challenges of women from different backgrounds by contextualizing it within the broader discourse on nightlife spaces and the women's experiences.

Throughout the research process, I was aware of my subjectivities, personal experiences and vulnerabilities within these spaces and how they could introduce bias, such as generalizing the experiences of women in nightlife spaces based on my own background or interpretations data in a way that confirms my pre-existing beliefs. However, I made sure that I critically reflect on my assumptions, values, and positionality at various levels of my thesis journey and also sought assistance from my participants to provide feedback on my interpretation of their experiences, as a means to reduce bias as much as possible. As De Vault (1996) highlights, the construction of a

feminist methodology is an ongoing process, and I wish to contribute to this evolving field through my reflective and intersectional approach to research.

Qualitative study

This study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research consists of a wide variety of approaches and methods that can be applied to investigate aspects of the 'natural social life' (Saldaña, 2011, p. 3). It is conducted when one wants to gain a deeper understanding of the processes and patterns of human behavior, which are not easily quantifiable (Tenny, et al., 2023). These methods are valued for their ability to capture the rich and nuanced aspects of diverse social groups and personal experiences (Jackson, 1985, as cited in England, 1994), by allowing the participants to answer the 'why' 'how' or 'what' questions regarding their feelings, thoughts and behaviors in a given situation under investigation (Tenny, et al., 2023). As my research focuses on the perceptions of fear and safety and how they influence the behavior and decision-making of non-local women while navigating nightlife spaces in Madrid, this 'how' question is best addressed through qualitative data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods effectively capture the nuanced and subjective nature of emotions like fear and safety, which arise from the lived experiences of women, making it easier to unpack these complex layers in a rich and detailed manner that cannot be fully acknowledged through quantitative methods.

Ethnographic study

This study is ethnographic in nature. Ethnographic research focuses on understanding the 'everyday life' and social interactions of individuals, by participating, over a period of time, in their 'natural' setting. The Etymology of the word combines ethno, which means "culture (or race)," with graphy, which means "to record or describe" (Harrison, 2014, p. 225). Thus, the practice of conducting ethnography can be understood as the act of writing, documenting, and explaining culture (ibid.). Hence, conducting an ethnography means that one must take part in an intellectual dialogue of figuring out what culture is in general. Wolcott (1990), highlights that it's important for a researcher conducting an ethnography to possess "an analytical sense and meaning making" (p. 49), in which he must be able to not just recount and describe events, but to extract a theory of cultural behavior out of his fieldwork.

Under ethnography, 'micro-ethnographies' are increasingly being used to conduct research when there are limitations of time and scope. Micro-ethnographies concentrate on a specific cultural

'scene,' focusing on a particular behavioral aspect of the cultural setting, rather than examining the entire cultural system (Wolcott, 1990). Instead of taking a completely atheoretical, and open approach which would aim to look at all those who use nightlife spaces in Madrid or study all the emotions involved in navigating these spaces, a focused approach was used, guided by my research question, and theoretical framework.

In my study, I have focused on nightlife as the cultural scene, under which I specifically investigate the underlying "default conditions" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 5)- the habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving of non-local people while occupying such spaces. As "Through the individual we come to understand the culture" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 5), the everyday practices of women, and their emotions of fear and safety reveals deeper insights into the broader cultural dynamics of nightlife spaces, and their influence on aspects of inclusivity, accessibility and safety concerning marginalized groups.

Data collection tools

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews

I decided to use semi structured interviews as the main method to collect data for this study, as it provides flexibility in data collection by allowing me to introduce new topics or pursue specific issues which may arise while engaging in a conversation with the participants (Bryman, 2012; Rubin and Rubin, 2011). As a sampling method, I initially visited nightlife establishments and made contact with non-local women who use these spaces for recreational purposes, who are also willing to participate in the study. From there, using the snowballing technique (Bryman, 2012), I asked them to introduce me to more people who also occupy these spaces for the same reasons. Apart from this, I also got introduced to other international students studying in Madrid through my contacts in Madrid. The numbers of respondents that were included in the study depended on time, language and resource constraints. Occasionally, some women I met at the nightclub initially expressed willingness to be interviewed but did not follow up. I was able to interview twenty international students using nightlife establishments within Madrid. The interviews were conducted from 20th February 2024 till 28th May 2024.

Given that nightlife establishments typically have loud music, some initial questions were discussed casually in these settings. However, I thought it would be more effective to arrange a follow-up meeting in a quieter environment, ensuring a secure and comfortable space for respondents to share their opinions and feelings. The date, time and place for the interview was mainly decided based on

the convenience of the respondents. Six respondents out of twenty said that they preferred that the interview takes place online, instead of meeting in person. Three respondents out of them were no longer living in Madrid. For this purpose, the Zoom platform was used to conduct face-to-face online interviews. I had prepared a semi-structured interview guide before the interview took place. This interview guide was only used as a reference, as I had memorized most of the key questions, to facilitate a more relaxed and conversational atmosphere for the interviews. All respondents were willing to be recorded for the interview. All of them said that they preferred being interviewed in one meeting due to their busy schedule, but many also expressed willingness to be contacted again for any additional information. All the interviews were conducted in English as that was the common language between the respondents and I. Given the nature of the research, which focuses on aspects of safety and fear in nightlife environments, several sensitive topics were discussed. These included personal accounts of sexual harassment and instances of consuming illegal drugs. The sensitivity of these subjects required careful handling to create a safe and supportive environment for the participants. The identity of the respondent has hence been kept anonymous by changing the names of the respondents to protect their privacy and ensure confidentiality.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants and overview of semi-structured interviews

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Duration of stay in Madrid (prior to the date of interview)	Date of interview	Duration of interview
Salma	23	Woman	Senegalese	4 months	20 February 2024	31 mins
Alessia	20	Non-binary	Italian	4 months	29 February 2024	35 mins

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Ammie	21	Woman	Vietnamese/ Australian	5 months	1 March 2024	20 mins
Clara	26	Woman	Ecuadorian	8 months	2 March 2024	26 mins
Annemarie	23	Woman	German	9 months	3 March 2024	28 mins
Cicilia	26	Woman	Australian	1 year	9 March 2024	32 mins
Marie	28	Woman	Colombian	7 months	15 March 2024	22 mins
Jasmine	27	Woman	Lebanese	1 year	17 April 2024	30 mins
Giulia	20	Woman	French	8 months	19 April 2024	21 mins
Anne	27	Woman	Norwegian	4 months	22 April 2024	24 mins
Simon	20	Woman	French	6 months	22 April 2024	26 mins
Cher	21	Woman	American	4 months	23 April 2024	29 mins
Agnes	22	Woman	French	8 months	30 April 2024	34 mins
Bianca	20	Woman	Italian	4 months	2 May 2024	40 mins
Aurora	23	Woman	Italian	5 months	7 May 2024	28 mins

Lucia	21	Woman	Hungarian	5 months	14 May 2024	20 mins
Luna	25	Woman	Brazilian	1 year, 8 months	20 May 2024	32 mins
Martina	21	Woman	Italian	9 months	22 May 2024	35 mins
Alice	20	Woman	American	5 months	24 May 2024	45 mins
Savia	25	Woman	British	2 months	28 May 2024	40 mins

2. Participant observation and auto-ethnographies

I also made use of participant observation as a data collection tool. By being present at a nightlife establishment and observing the actions and interactions of those around, I gained a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to the experiences of safety and vulnerability of women, and how they navigate these situations. I also maintained a journal to write about my experiences while occupying these spaces. Keeping my positionality in mind, I attempted to conduct autoethnographies while occupying these spaces in Madrid. Autoethnography is a “reflective, cultural reporting of self, most often through narrative” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 15). By incorporating my personal experiences and insights, as someone who is also an international student and cannot communicate in the local language of the host city, helped me “name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political.” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 2). The auto-ethnographies were based on my visit to six nightclubs (as mentioned below). They were written keeping in mind the following three aspects, and their influence on my perceptions of safety and fear during the night.

- **Physical setting of the nightclub-** I paid attention to factors such as lighting, space layout, crowd density, among other infrastructural factors present at the nightclub.

- **Social environment of the nightclub-** I analyzed the social environment before I visited the nightclub and during the actual visit. Before going to each nightclub, I checked the online reviews, opinions of my peers who have visited the club, and social media to form an initial perception. At the nightclub, I paid attention to the crowd's behavior, interactions of the nightlife users with the patrons to understand the presence of any social hierarchies or gender dynamics.
- **Infrastructural aspects in the city-** I focused on the broader urban infrastructure available in Madrid at night during my commute to the nightclub as well as my commute back home from the nightclub. Factors such as availability of transportation options, security presence, street lighting, were analyzed.

Table 2: Overview of auto-ethnographies conducted at nightclubs in Madrid

Name of the nightclub	Neighborhood	Date	Time when I entered the venue	Time when I left the venue
Discoteca Rincon Chaqueno	Arganzuela	16 March 2024	12:30 am	4:30 am
El Sotano	La Latina	20 April 2024	1:30 am	6 am
Sala Villanos	Arganzuela	3 May 2024	1:30 am	4:30 am
Mon Madrid	Chamberi	2 June 2024	8 pm	2:30 am
Epoka the club	Chamberi	9 June 2024	1 am	6 am
Grace Madrid	Salamanca	30 June 2024	2:30 am	6 am

3. Focus group discussion

For the purpose of this thesis, I decided it would be valuable to conduct a focus group discussion with the women and non-binary people from my masters program, which is planned across four different European cities- Brussels, Vienna, Copenhagen and Madrid, over the course of two years. Focus groups are “a form of qualitative interviewing that uses a researcher-led group discussion to generate data” (Given, 2008, p.352). Developed by Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld in the 1940s, focus group discussions only started to be used as an crucial qualitative data collection tool in the 1980s (Given, 2008).

Focus group discussions are often understood synonymously to group semi-structured interviews as they too help uncover the participant's values and perceptions. However, unlike semi-structured interviews, wherein the researcher takes the role of an investigator, in a focus group discussion, the researcher is only expected to moderate the conversation between the participants, taking a minor rather than a center-stage position (Nyumba et al., 2018).

For a focus group discussion, it is generally advised to have a participant pool that share similar characteristics such as their age, gender, and racial/ethnic background. However, there are also some researchers, such as Thomas et al. (1995) that believe that it is better if the focus group is more heterogeneous in nature, as it encourages participants to be more truthful and give unprompted responses, challenging already existing group dynamics and power hierarchies. Purposive sampling is generally recommended, as focus groups are heavily reliant on the ability and capabilities of the respondents to share relevant information based on the aim and purpose of the study. (Nyumba et al., 2018).

All of these factors were carefully considered when curating the focus group for the study. The participants that I chose for the focus group were women and non-binary people from my masters program, who had participated in nightlife activities in all the four cities, with a particular focus on Madrid. The group consisted of seven people (five women and two non-binary individuals), all within a similar age range but with diverse national backgrounds. This diversity was deliberately sought to provide crucial insights into how safety is perceived differently across cultures and how these perceptions influenced their ability to navigate and negotiate social relations within nightlife spaces in Madrid. Additionally, having spent considerable time together in the past two years, their nightlife experiences (especially in Madrid) were often intertwined. Hence it was decided that a focus group would be the best data collection tool to collectively examine these shared experiences, allowing participants to discuss and dissect the nuances of their experiences amongst each other. This aided in identifying common themes, as well as differences with respect to cultural backgrounds, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, among other factors, on their perceptions of safety. The focus group discussion was conducted on the 31st of May and went on for 95 minutes. I prepared a list of questions that guided the focus group discussion. Considering the participants' comfort, accessibility to the venue, and levels of distraction, we decided to conduct the interview at my accommodation in Madrid, as it was a familiar setting for all the respondent and there was sufficient space for different activities within the focus group discussion to take place (Nyumba et

al., 2018). Two of the participants were not in Madrid anymore, and joined the focus group using the Zoom platform. The participants did not wish to remain anonymous, and preferred if I used their actual names and other identifiers.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of participants included in the focus group discussion

Name	Age	Nationality	Gender
Bea	25	Austrian/British	Non-binary
Asiya	28	Pakistani	Woman
Gabriella	27	American	Woman
Sofie	25	Romanian	Woman
Robin	27	Swiss	Non-binary
Isabel	28	Brazilian	Woman
Sashna	24	Indian	Woman

Data analysis

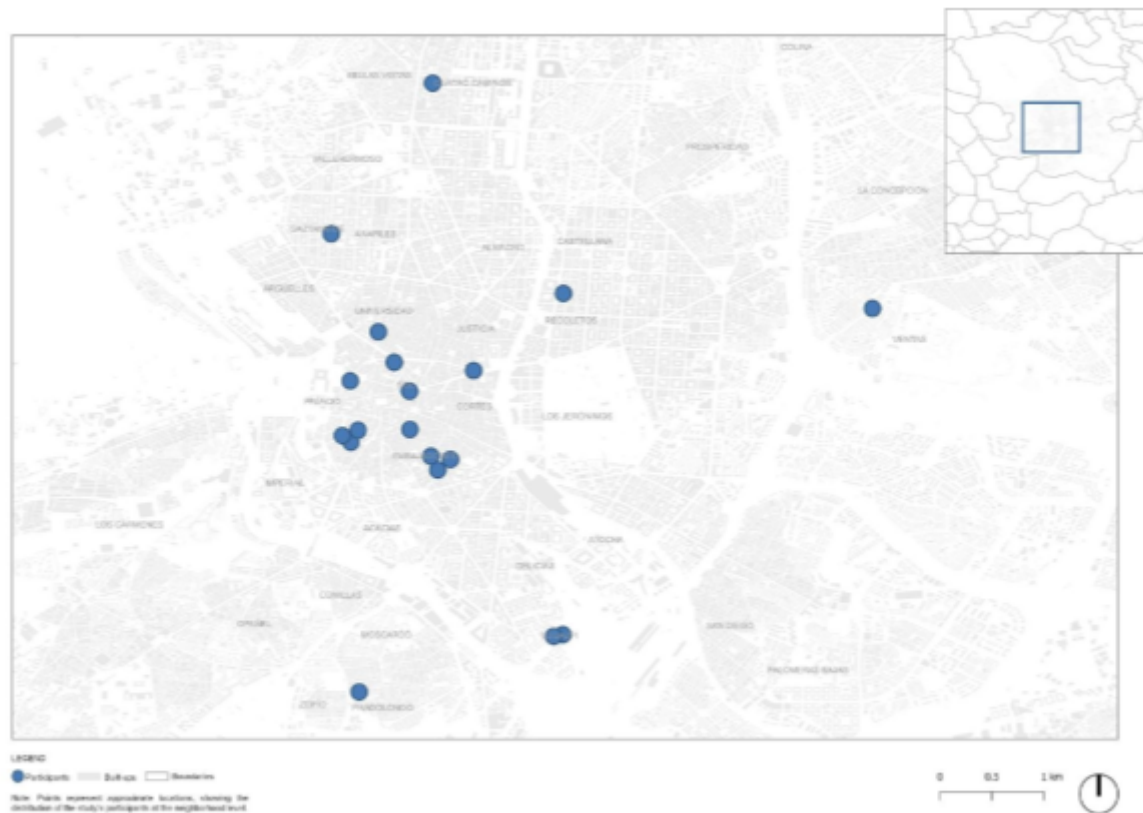
After careful consideration, thematic analysis was chosen to analyze the quantitative data collected for this research. Thematic analysis as explained in Braun & Clark's article (2006), is an analysis that can be used to draw broad patterns across participant's narratives. This analysis mainly consists of six steps: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (ibid.). The transcripts of the in-depth interviews that were recorded, served as the main source for the analysis. I made use of NVivo, a qualitative analysis software to systematically code my interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were uploaded on NVivo, and relevant information was coded using pre-defined nodes, based on the behavior and decision-making of women regarding safety before they go to a nightclub, at the nightclub, and when returning home from the nightclub. Over a period of time, as I went through more data, I found the need to create sub-codes as well as new codes to capture nuanced insights. For example, other axes of inequalities, such as the role played by temporality and language barrier in perceptions of safety and fear were coded separately. By organizing the data into categories, it became easier to analyze and interpret the information, allowing for the identification of key findings and insights (Saldaña, 2011). These findings were then cross-referenced with secondary literature and theoretical frameworks to contextualize the results in existing debates on

nightlife, its accessibility to different groups, and right to the city particularly for women. Additionally, to spatially represent a part of my data, I also made use of visual representation softwares such as OpenStreetMap, GeoFabrik, QGIS, and Google Earth which helped in collating specific experiences to coordinate geographies of the city.

Results

The results section is based on a comprehensive analysis of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, as well as the auto-ethnographies, and observations conducted while navigating nightlife spaces in Madrid. It starts with a brief overview on the spatial presence of international students in Madrid. The rest of the analysis has been mainly structured around the three phases of nightlife. This involves the behavior and decisions taken by women with respect to their perceptions of safety and fear before they go to the nightclub, when they are at the nightclub and their return home from the nightclub. The last section looks into other axes of inequalities, such as temporality and language barrier that also shape women's experiences at night.

1. International students' presence in Madrid



Map 3: Map by Author. Residential locations of participants in Madrid. 1:2800. Sources: GADM, Google Earth, Open Street Map

Map 3 represents the neighborhoods in which the international students that I interviewed live in Madrid. Similar to the study conducted by Uniplaces.es (2016), it is evident that most international students prefer to live in the central districts of Madrid. Even though based on a limited data set, this

could suggest a significant supply of student accommodation in these neighborhoods. Such accommodations often arise from the conversion of single-family homes into apartments designed for multiple occupants (Calvo, 2018). Rise in student accommodations in certain urban areas also lead to increase in economic developments such as entertainment and retail services for students, all of which contribute to the wider processes of gentrification in these areas (Calvo 2018; Crespi Vallbona & Domínguez Pérez, 2022). The concentration of international students in central districts not only impacts the urban landscape, but it also significantly shapes the social experiences of these students by allowing them to have easy access to Madrid's nightlife, coupled with the challenges of navigating it.

2. Behavior and decision making before going to the nightclub

2.1 Information sources of nightclubs

Most of the participants said that their primary method to get recommendations for nightclubs was through word-of-mouth. These recommendations were from people that had lived in Madrid for a longer time than them (such as their peers in their educational institution, or other people that they knew in Madrid) and hence had a better idea on the nightlife scene of the city, while some also trusted their friends who had visited Madrid as tourists, and had participated in nightlife activity during that time. There was a great deal of trust put in their peers' recommendations, as it was assumed that they would enjoy similar spaces as them. This applied even more in situations where their friends had a bad experience at a nightclub. For example, one of the participant said:

“I tend to take the experiences of my female friends very seriously. If they do not feel comfortable there... there's a million clubs and bars, not going to one will not make or break my experience here. I feel the culture in a club is very important, and if it's feeling exclusionary or dangerous...I wouldn't necessarily attribute someone's discomfort to, like, oh, maybe, that was just a bad night. I feel like, oh, maybe that space is not that safe for life” (Alice, 20 years, personal interview, 24 May 2024).

Since a large section of my participants were Erasmus students who were in Madrid for a fixed time period- they were also part of various Erasmus groups online. Most of these groups were used to promote parties taking place in the city. Some parties were advertised as ‘Erasmus parties’ specifically targeting international students, evident through the experiences shared by the participants. This could be seen as an example of touristification intersecting with the

studentification where nightclub organizers and promoters view international students as a lucrative demographic to tap into, by designing parties tailored to their preferences and expectations, which often differ from those of the local population. (Calvo, 2018). Some of the participants that had recently moved to the city, and did not know many people in Madrid, heavily relied on these groups to decide which nightclub to go to on a specific day based on what was advertised on the groups.

Some also checked Google reviews or the social media of the nightlife spaces that were already recommended to them. This gave them a general idea of the physical structure of the nightclub, especially to see how big the space is, the general demographic of its patrons, wherein assumptions were made based on how the users presented themselves through their dressing or styling, as well as the culture or the values of the space as advertised by the club themselves or as felt by others who have occupied these spaces. Reading safety based on how individuals in a space present themselves through their style or clothes highlight important insights on how these factors influence a person's feeling of belongingness in a place. For instance, users dressing in androgynous or non-conforming styles might suggest that the venue is inclusive and accepting towards diverse gender expressions. This can have an impact on the perceived safety of those who also prefer such styles. These geographical imaginations are also influenced by class, race or other socio-cultural factors. One participant recounted an experience where she checked the google reviews for a club which was frequented by most of her classmates. She noticed that the club has more than a hundred reviews mentioning accounts of racism by the staff. She chose not to ever go there and also sent a message in their university group chat, informing others about the same (Cicilia, 26 years, personal interview, 9 March), highlighting the significance of shared safety concerns.

Some of the participants used mobile applications such as Resident advisor or Dice, which advertise the events taking place at various clubs in the city. After staying in the city for a longer time, some participants also felt the need to try out newer nightlife spaces than the ones they had tried before. They again used social media advertisements that they had encountered while using applications such as Instagram and Tiktok, to discover new spaces. There were also respondents that preferred to stick to the places that they had already been to before and had enjoyed their time there, rather than trying out new places every time, emphasizing the close association of familiarity with perceived safety.

While selecting venues to conduct my auto-ethnographies, I also primarily relied on recommendations from friends for four out of the six visits. One of my friends is a local in Madrid

and had significant experience in the city's nightlife, making him my principal source for these recommendations. I found one of the nightclubs, Sala Villanos, through the social media page of 'La Parcería,'. La Parcería is an art collective based in Madrid that collaborates with marginalized communities to promote urban social transformation through artistic expressions. Their advertisement was for a 'Salsa and Cumbia night,' that they co-hosted with Sala Villanos. I had previously attended one of the events hosted by this collective and had felt that the organizers made conscious efforts to be inclusive and create safe spaces for all attendees. This positive experience reinforced my perception that this event too would be both safe and enjoyable for me. For one of my ethnographies, I used the Dice mobile application to select a venue. I noticed that the application provided basic information about the events that were being hosted by nightclubs in Madrid during the week, such as the type of music, entry prices, age limits, and other details. This helped me make an informed decision while selecting a nightclub to visit.

2.2 Factors considered in choosing a nightclub



Map 4: Map by Author. Clubs frequented by participants. 1:18000. Sources: GADM, Google Earth, Open Street Map.

Location within the city was an important factor for most participants in choosing a nightclub. As seen in Map 3, most participants lived within or close to the Centro district of Madrid (which is considered the center of Madrid), and hence preferred to go to nightlife spaces in the same district (refer to Map 4). Apart from proximity to their homes, most neighborhoods of the Centro district were perceived to be relatively safe. For the participants that did not live in the center, they still preferred to go to nightclubs in the area as it is well connected through public transport with the rest of the city, since the commute to and from the nightclub was something the participants considered from the start. Even though the city center was generally perceived as being safe compared to other areas, participants still identified hierarchies of safety within different neighborhoods in the center itself. Through conversations with their peers, as well as their prior experiences, some participants had a negative image attached to specific localities, which they avoided going to especially at night. For example, a handful said that they avoided the neighborhood of Lavapiés at night altogether. I

too was told to avoid this neighborhood in the initial days of moving to Madrid. Such collective narratives on neighborhoods like Lavapiés, which have a high immigrant population, has contributed to 'territorial stigmatization' (Larsen & Delica, 2019) which can have major socio-spatial consequences.



Image 4: Nightclub in Gran Vía with 'Show Girls' Signage- Illustrating the commodification of women in nightlife to attract male patrons, an example of gendered marketing strategies

The culture of the nightclub, as mentioned above, also played an important role in choosing a space. Especially when participants belonged to marginalized groups such as the LGBTQIA + community, they preferred to go to places which catered to this specific sub-people or that explicitly stated their policy in support of this sub-group (on social media, for example). From their past experience, queer nightlife spaces have been more inclusive, and hence felt safer, allowing individuals to express their queer identity freely without

judgment or bias. Since the neighborhood Chueca is known to be the gay district of Madrid, most of them tried out nightlife spaces in that area.

Some participants, said that they preferred spaces that were occupied by a more diverse crowd- with respect to gender, age, race, sexuality and nationality, and avoided those where only “old, Spanish men” (Alessia, 20 years, personal interview, 29 February) went to, while others said that they preferred nightclubs where the ‘locals’ frequented, as having a night out was often perceived as an opportunity to interact with the Spanish residents of the city, and have an ‘authentic’ Spanish nightlife experience. This desire to have an authentic experience can be tied to Hiernaux and González’s (2014), concept of ‘post-tourist’, where ‘authenticity’ is now become a ‘hot travel commodity’, wherein international students prefer to try out spaces where the locals would go to, as

opposed to going to obvious tourist-traps. However, this idea of authenticity is also based on the cultural imaginary of these newcomers, which the urban entrepreneurs capitalize on. As a result, international students in Madrid might consciously avoid highly touristic areas like Sol, which is famously known as a tourist hub, but instead might choose to go to other venues that seem more "authentic" to them. Ironically, these other spaces also might be specifically curated to cater to their tastes and expectations, wherein their perceptions about the local culture are capitalized on by using marketing strategies aimed at fulfilling their demands.

Most participants also choose nightclubs based on the type of music they were playing on a particular night. Two of them expressed that the type of music also had an impact on their perceived safety:

“Maybe when you go to clubs with a certain theme or a certain music, you can also feel more comfortable or less comfortable inside. And like I still have some judgment towards the type of music that they play in a club. Because twice it happened to me that clubs that do Latino music or like Spanish reggaeton, it felt that the men inside the club were hunting. Like you wouldn't really feel comfortable” (Sofie, 25 years, Focus group member, 31 May 2024).

“I've noticed that in commercial clubs usually the people that go there, I don't really feel 100% comfortable with... while usually in clubs where there is more techno music, people are much more open and the crowd is much safer” (Martina, 21 years, personal interview, 22 May 2024).

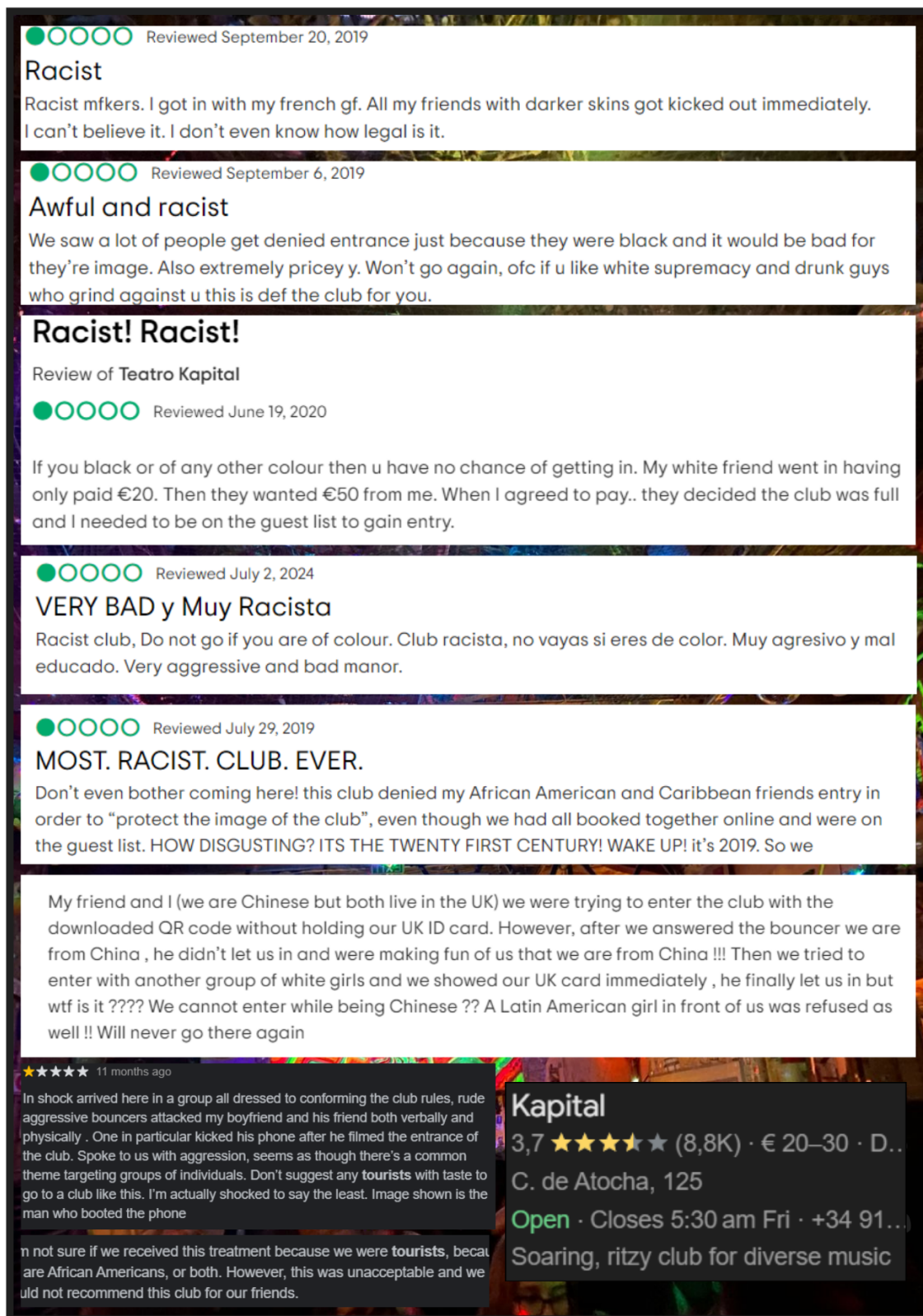
Both the respondents above also clarified that they preferred Techno music, and their personal comfort was hence influenced by this familiarity with the music genre. Additionally, broader cultural imaginations also influenced their perceptions of safety with respect to music. As techno music has roots in underground, countercultural scenes, spaces that play techno were perceived to be inclusive, open-minded, and focused on individual expression rather than on traditional gendered interactions commonly visible in mainstream clubs such as flirting or physical advances. On the other hand, the dance associated with reggaeton music due to its close proximity with one another and suggestive nature, in addition to their lack of familiarity with it, was perceived to be aggressive or invasive.

Lastly, a sizable number of participants also mentioned that they preferred nightclubs that were spacious or were not typically overcrowded. These women deliberately chose venues that adhered to capacity limits, as it ensured there was enough room for them to move around freely without having

to be in close physical contact with strangers, particularly men. Some also took into consideration the amount to be paid as an entry fee, and often chose clubs which charged less compared to others.

Location was also an important factor for me while choosing a nightclub in Madrid. Since I lived in the center, (specifically in the neighborhood of La Latina) my familiarity with the place made me feel safer while going out at night in these areas, as opposed to going to a neighborhood that I did not frequent. I also considered the cost of the entry fee, as I was on a student budget, and did not want to spend too much on a night out. Most of the time I was accompanied by my friends, and we collectively decided on which nightclubs we wanted to go to. We paid attention to how events were advertised, wherein there was a preference towards venues that hosted queer events, as many of my friends identified as queer, and felt safer to occupy spaces that were specifically curated for queer people. As a result, two of the nightclubs I visited were hosting queer parties. Racial diversity was another factor I considered while choosing a nightclub. I have previously had to deal with uncomfortable stares and intrusive questions about my ethnic background from other patrons, while occupying nightlife settings in Europe. Due to these experiences, I wanted to steer clear from spaces that were mostly occupied by white patrons, and preferred environments where I would feel more comfortable and accepted, and did not particularly stand out. I was told by many people that 'Teatro Kapital' was a 'must visit' nightclub in Madrid, as it was marketed as one of the city's most famous venues, often frequented by most tourists. However, after reading the online reviews on Google and TripAdvisor on various accounts of racism experienced by the patrons, and the inaction to the same by the management, I decided not to visit the nightclub (Refer to image 4). I came across one of the nightclubs that I visited, called Grace Sundays, through the Dice app, and noticed that they specifically catered to Afrobeats music. I later checked the Instagram pictures that were posted on their account, wherein it looked like the nightclub catered to a racially diverse crowd. One of my friends, who is also a person of color, had previously been to this nightclub and had expressed that she had a positive experience there. All these factors influenced my decision to visit this nightclub.

Image 5: Reviews on Google and TripAdvisor for a nightclub in Madrid signaling racism experienced by patrons from club management/staff



2.3 Precautions taken before going to a nightclub

Precautions taken by international students before attending nightclubs in Madrid were similar to those they adopted in other cities they had lived in. These measures were also informed by advice shared by their peers on how to ensure safety in nightlife venues in Madrid. Most participants ensured that they went to a nightclub with a big group of friends as opposed to them being alone. Some also mentioned that they only would go with people who they are close to; those who they can trust to look after them if need be. While some felt safer when a male friend was present, as one could seek his protection if needed. Most women mentioned that in situations where they are being troubled by a man, having a male friend present is always helpful because their 'no' is respected more than theirs. This dynamic highlights the gender difference in how refusals and boundaries are perceived and respected in nightlife environments. In most situations, male authority is given more weight over female autonomy making women feel compelled to rely on their male friends not just for physical protection but also for the legitimacy their presence provides to validate a woman's refusal.

Some women also dressed in a particular manner to receive less attention from men (during their commute to and from the club, as well as while they are at the club). For example, one participant said that she would wear clothes that covered her body more-

"I don't know if I had to choose between a pair of pants or like a skirt and then I knew that I had to walk home for 30 minutes, then maybe I would wear the pants this time"(Martina, 21 years, personal interview, 22 May 2024).

Whereas a few participants also choose to dress in a 'less flattering manner' to the male gaze, by wearing more masculine clothes or not wearing makeup that would attract more attention towards them-

"I make a lot of choices about my appearances that help me feel safer. And they actually do make me safer in a way...stupid things, but like, growing out my armpit hair since I noticed so much that when I do that, I have a lot less unwanted attention. Or even, if I dress with slight like masculine touches, that definitely helps"(Cicilia, 26 years, personal interview, 9 March 2024).

The lifeworld of mainstream nightclubs which is largely dictated by heteronormative expectations, contributes towards the construction of femininity wherein women are expected to exhibit traditionally feminine features such as wearing makeup or maintaining certain grooming practices to appease to the male gaze (Cantillon, 2015). However, as the quote above highlights, incorporating masculinity or resisting traditional gender norms through their dressing style, can serve as a tool to avoid unwanted attention from men. In such spaces, where safety is an ongoing concern for women, dressing in a way that defies conventional standards of beauty hence becomes a strategy for self-preservation. This can also be viewed as an empowering act as it allows women to assert control over their bodies and their presence in these spaces by challenging, in a subtle manner, the pervasive norms that attempt to control female bodies and dictate how they should present themselves.

3. Behavior and decision making at the nightclub

3.1 Stressors at the nightclub

There was a strong belief that nightlife spaces or the night in general, is unsafe for women. This was largely influenced by the participants' previous experiences with violence in nightlife spaces in their home cities or other cities where they have lived. This can be an example of disposition fear (Cattell and Scheier, 1961), wherein the individuals' prior experiences with situational fear, in this case, experiencing gender violence in nightlife settings in their home cities, makes them more prone to being fearful of experiencing the violence again while occupying similar spaces in other cities as well.

A common anxiety felt by most women was to do with drink spiking, which could lead to them being victims of sexual violence. One participant noted:

"I feel like I've had, you know, close to a decade now of experience in, like, drinking and drug-using spaces that I feel like it's just drilled into me like substance caution" (Cicilia, 26 years old, personal interview, 9 March 2024).

Additionally, during their stay in Madrid, most respondents had already experienced different forms of gender violence in nightlife spaces in the city, which impacted their perceived safety and fear while occupying these spaces again. For example, three women mentioned instances of their drinks being spiked. Another participant recounted her uneasiness with men not respecting her personal space at nightclubs-

“I think sometimes larger people, who are usually men, while dancing, can be really rough and I’m not very robust as a person like I’m not very strong and it's quite easy to push me over or like hurt me or like step on me like I’m kind of thin. So, I’m always very body conscious if there's people being rough” (Cicilia 26, personal interview, 9 May 2024).

The rest endured unwanted touching/groping, lewd comments, repeated sexual advances (being pressured to dance or engage in conversations), derogatory remarks, non-consensual photography, from men occupying these spaces, in Madrid. Similar to the findings by Pain (1997; 2000) the prior experiences of the respondents with sexual violence inflicted on them by men (both in Madrid and other cities that they have lived in), led to them viewing unfamiliar men as threats; wherein interactions with them had to be avoided or reduced as much as possible, to ensure one's safety.

In addition to facing other forms of gender violence in nightclub settings, I have had my drink spiked before, which resulted in me losing consciousness. Although this incident occurred in Goa, and not in Madrid, it has heightened my awareness and caution regarding drink safety and losing control in nightlife environments, creating a dispositional fear of the same. This experience has heavily tainted my perception of safety in nightclubs and the predatory nature that can exist in these settings, influencing how I navigate and approach such spaces.

The participants' concerns inside the nightclub were also heavily influenced by stories from others who had lived in Madrid and faced violence or unsafe situations in nightlife settings. For example, five participants reported knowing someone who had their drink spiked at a nightclub in Madrid, which heightened their fear and made them extra vigilant about protecting their drinks.

Stereotypes about individuals from specific countries also influenced their treatment from other patrons and made them more prone to violence in nightclubs. One respondent narrated an experience at a club where a random man grabbed her hand to dance, without her consent, and then proceeded to say “aren't you Columbian?”, assuming that being Columbian meant that she was ‘easy’ and would be willing to dance with anyone (Marie, 28 years, personal interview, 15 March 2024). The man's comment reflects a racial bias that categorizes Latin American women as hypersexual and inherently available for male attention. These stereotypes contribute to these women experiencing higher risks of harassment and violence, as they are seen as more accessible targets for unwanted advances.

In some instances, certain forms of sexual violence, such as inappropriate touching were perceived as 'not as bad' and therefore seen as either acceptable or an unavoidable consequence of going out to a nightclub. This perception heightened the level of discomfort of women while occupying these spaces, because they could not hold the men accountable for their actions. One participant shared:

"I feel like when it's super crowded and stuff, like, something that I hate a lot is also when someone does something wrong and then, you can't even confront them because they're not taking responsibility. Like it's just also messy and crowded and like, I think sometimes it's a bit like an expectation that it's fine" (Clara, 26 years, personal interview, 2 March 2024).

The normalization of less severe forms of sexual violence reflects how the boundaries of acceptable behavior in nightlife settings are often blurred. When inappropriate touching or other forms of harassment are downplayed, it contributes to a culture where such actions are tolerated and not effectively dealt with. This normalization is often rooted in the belief that certain environments, like nightclubs, inherently come with risks, especially for certain groups such as women, and that they should expect to encounter inappropriate behavior if they chose to occupy such spaces. As a result, the responsibility is shifted onto the victims, who are expected to navigate these spaces with caution rather than holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Their prior experiences with gender violence in nightlife spaces were further reinforced by media portrayals and societal narratives on the lack of safety in nightlife spaces for women (Valentine, 1989; 1992). One participant mentioned:

"I saw a documentary or something about it once. It said there are two different buckets with ice. One ice is spiked and one is normal. So, the guys get normal ice. It's totally insane. It happens so often in the UK as well. But that's... I think I saw one friend... Like, one friend of mine definitely got spiked once in Madrid. That was also wild" (Annemarie, 23 years, personal interview, 3 May 2024).

Another prevalent concern was having their belongings stolen- especially their phones or ID cards. As international students, they felt they stood out as "tourists" and were therefore common targets for theft. I could personally relate to this experience, as my phone had gotten stolen while in Madrid. I also questioned whether my use of English while occupying public spaces in Madrid made me hyper visible and stand out more as a non-local.

Six respondents interviewed and six members of the focus group identified as queer. Most of them stated that commercial nightclubs in Madrid did not make them feel safe enough to express their sexual identity. There were instances where their queer identity was not recognized or respected in these spaces. One participant recounted an experience at a nightclub in Madrid where they were repeatedly misgendered by other attendees, despite clearly stating that they identified as non-binary. This incident occurred just a month after they had undergone top surgery, which significantly increased their feelings of gender dysphoria (Robin, 27 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

Two participants shared a common experience wherein they were kissing another girl at a nightclub in Madrid and were heckled by men around them. The men passed inappropriate comments and also made sexual advances towards them (Martina, 21 years, personal interview, 22 May 2024; Alice, 20 years, personal interview, 20 May 2024).

One of the respondents shared that when she is getting intimate with another girl at a nightclub, it is often sensationalized and treated as not being 'normal', but when her straight friends do the same, it does not get equal attention (Alice, 20 years, personal interview, 20 May 2024).

These experiences highlight a troubling dynamic within mainstream nightclubs where queer expressions of affection, such as two women kissing, are not seen as being legitimate displays of sexual orientation but are instead sexualized and appropriated by onlookers, who are most often cis-gender men. Having their identities invalidated time and again, has an effect on the sense of belonging of queer women, especially when they occupy environments that cater specifically to heteronormative expectations, such as mainstream nightlife venues.

One of the participants, who identified as non-binary, said that most of the gay bars or nightclubs that they visited in Madrid were often dominated by gay men, which affected her sense of belonging in these spaces (Robin, 27 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024). Another respondent had a similar experience where she said she found it extremely difficult to find spaces in Madrid that were curated for 'women or non-binary people only' (Maddie, 21 years, personal interview, 23 April 2024).

Another respondent, who also identified as non-binary, narrated their experience at a drag show organized at a gay bar in Chueca, wherein a cis-man misbehaved with them and their friend-

"He was dancing and flirting with only women. Including Ellie. And me as well. And at one point he tried to get people to go on the stage and dance. And she was like, no, no, no, I

don't want to dance. And then he tried to pick her up and bring her to the stage. And she was like, no, no, no. And I was like, what?" (Bea, 25 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

They then added that even though it is not right to police people's identities while entering a queer nightclub (as it can often be transphobic); at the same time, they felt that it allowed certain people to go into those spaces and behave much more liberally than they might otherwise in other places. It is common to find straight girls at a drag show harassing the drag queens and also straight men feeling very comfortable to take advantage of the fact that the women in such a space feel more comfortable and are more likely to dance with a man because they might assume that he's gay.

Queer nightlife venues were born out of necessity in times where being queer meant that one would to face violence, discrimination, and safety concerns in most public spaces. These venues were designed to be inclusive, accepting, non-judgemental and free from the heteronormative pressures that governed mainstream nightlife venues (Betsky, 1997). From being highly political spaces where the queer community could freely express one's identity, queer nightlife venues are now being increasingly commercialized. In the case of Madrid, Chueca- the 'gay district' has been capitalized on by profit driven corporations increasingly making it a tourist attraction. Corporatised spaces are complicit in reproducing existing heteronormative structures, as capitalism itself finds its roots in patriarchy, where one feeds on the other. I hence believe that such spaces, even though advertised as being 'queer friendly' still exhibit patriarchal norms, allowing certain infiltrations to take place. This phenomenon is known as 'rainbow-washing,' wherein corporations use queer-friendly advertisement as a form of performative allyship to attract queer consumers without making substantive changes that benefit the community (Li, 2021). With respect to the above quote, the increasing presence of non-queer individuals in queer nightlife spaces, particularly those who may not respect the norms and boundaries of these environments, compromises the very safety and sense of community that these spaces were intended to provide. However, despite these concerns, management driven solely by profit and potentially engaging in rainbow-washing may not actually be concerned with creating safe spaces for the queer community, allowing these infiltrations to continue.

Another respondent spoke of how she has to constantly negotiate between two aspects of her identity- being queer and being a brown person, while finding nightlife spaces in Madrid which are safe and diverse. She felt that she often had to compromise one aspect of her identity in order to be able to express the other. Mainstream nightlife spaces often had an international crowd, but they did

not make her feel safe enough to look or act queer. While queer spaces in Madrid, according to her, were more accepting in that sense, but could also be othering as they were mostly occupied by white Spanish people (Sashna, 24 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024). This experience highlights the pervasive issue of intersectional exclusion, where the intersection of race and sexuality creates unique vulnerabilities and challenges that are not adequately addressed by both mainstream or queer nightlife spaces.

3.2 Nightclub environment influencing perceived safety

The nightclub environment, encompassing both social and physical factors curated by the management, significantly impacted the participants' perceptions of safety.

Social aspects of the nightclub:

❖ Behavior of staff at the nightclub

The participants' first interaction with the club management typically occurred at the entrance, where they encountered the security at the door. Some participants expressed that if the security is extremely heavy, and if they are rough with people at the entrance, it makes them feel less safe. Even though most participants admitted that having security checking the bags and pockets of those entering the nightclub (especially those of men), to see if they were carrying any weapons or illegal substances, was an important safety measure, they noted that coarse behavior from security personnel made them less approachable when help was needed. One participant also narrated her experience at a nightclub in Madrid wherein her friend was shamed for wearing clothes that were considered to be 'too provocative' by the security at the entrance, who then did not allow her to enter the nightclub (Bianca, 20 years, personal interview 2 May 2024). Another participant mentioned feeling judged by the security for choosing not to wear makeup or for dressing in a 'conservative' manner (Marie, 27 years, personal interview, 15 March 2024). Both the above quotes highlight how women's bodies and appearances are subject to constant evaluation and control, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards femininity and sexuality. As highlighted by Wilson (1995), cities are sexualised spaces, wherein women's bodies are constantly policed based on ideals of purity and morality which are attached to appropriate feminine behavior. Most women, by internalizing these rules, feel the constant pressure of adhering to these acceptable forms of female presentation; while those who don't are subject to exclusion and judgment and are referred to with derogatory names such as 'whore' or 'slut'. At the same time, women are also judged for showcasing

a lack of sexuality with respect to the male gaze, whereas terms like “prude” are used to scrutinize a woman's disinterest in appearing ‘attractive’ to men. Both these ideals of female expression are sides of the same coin, that attempt to police women's bodies by creating a thin line between what is perceived to be ‘too provocative’ and ‘too conservative’.

Five respondents interviewed and three members of the focus group were people of color. Most of them were very much aware of how their race influenced the treatment they received in nightlife spaces especially with regards to the staff; consequently affecting their perceptions of safety.

One respondent recounted an experience where her skin color led to differential treatment at a club entrance-

“It wasn't a big cover charge, but you had to buy a drink and then you get to enter. There were two people from our cohort who were visibly white, who were just allowed to enter without a drink as well. And Divine and I, Divine is a Black person, we decided to take shots. We had a receipt to go inside, but the bouncer stopped the both of us. And we're like, we just got a drink. He's like, you're not allowed, you have to take the drink inside because you just can't have a shot and go inside. So, I was confused because I was like, I have paid for it, it is as much as a drink. I just don't want to carry it. So, I kind of was like, "I don't want to be in a place that is racist” (Asiya, 27 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

Another respondent shared an experience wherein her Black friend was not allowed to enter a nightclub, and then was verbally abused by the security at the entrance for ‘dressing like a slut’ (Ammie, 21 years, personal interview, 1 March 2024). She spoke of how people of color, especially women are often exoticized and sexualized, and at the same time policed for their appearance and behavior. Such biases find roots in colonial history that continues to shape perceptions of race, gender, and sexuality. The policing of their appearance and behavior, as described in the respondent's experience, reflects the way colonial powers historically sought to control and dominate colonized peoples, imposing their own standards of propriety and decency. As highlighted by Hutton (2010), while white women were perceived as being fragile and sexually timid, black women were characterized as being sexually aggressive and perverted, justifying the lack of respect or over-sexualisation that these women experienced. These ethnocentric ideals of femininity and respectability still continue to marginalize and exclude women of color in today's modern society.

Another respondent mentioned that her treatment in Madrid's nightclubs depended on the company she kept (Alice, 20 years, personal interview, 24 May 2024). When accompanied by her mostly white or white-passing friends, she was treated kindly by the staff. However, she felt that if she were in a group of mostly black people, the service would be markedly different.

On the other hand, a white respondent from Australia acknowledged her racial privilege: “The fact that I'm white and an English-speaking expat would dictate a lot of, like, I'm accepted into a lot of spaces in Madrid. I think I'm just extremely lucky in that lots of bars will automatically ask me in English, I think just because I'm pale and have blue eyes, like it's that obvious” (Cicilia, 27 years, personal interview, 9 March 2024).



Image 6: Security guard at the entrance of a nightclub in Gran Vía, Madrid- Gender, physique and intimidating demeanor having an influence on approachability

Additionally, the staff working inside the clubs, such as bartenders, or bouncers, also played an important role in women's perceptions of safety. Participants shared stories of dealing with men who continued to bother them despite being told to stop. Even in front of bouncers, there was often a normalized attitude toward certain forms of violence that were considered "not too bad." One of

the participant narrated her experience when a man was recording her and her friend dancing without their consent-

“Well, the barman was just in front of us and he was saying to me and my friend, don't mind him. He is just drunk and that's it” (Simon, 20 years, personal interview, 22 April 2024).

Most participants said that they would typically handle such situations on their own, as they lacked confidence in the nightclub security to be helpful. Another participant mentioned that she had noticed that there was a high tolerance towards sexism, homophobia, and racism in Spanish culture. This tolerance, while reflective of a general easygoing attitude, meant that discriminatory attitudes were not immediately challenged by the staff (Robin, 27 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024). The participant explained that this cultural leniency towards inappropriate comments and behavior contributed to creating an unsafe environment for those who might be discriminated against.

A further indication of this normalization towards sexism was highlighted by another participant who shared that one of the first phrases taught in her Spanish class was how to tell men to back off or stop bothering them (Asiya, 27 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024). This, she felt, indicated how ingrained such confrontations were in the culture.

One participant mentioned that the only time she had noticed the security take action was when there was a physical fight at a nightclub, when the men involved were asked to leave the premises (Simon, 20 years, personal interview, 22 April 2024). On the other hand, two participants spoke about their experiences wherein the security has been kind and observant, and have acted effectively in situations where patrons seemed vulnerable or distressed. For instance, a participant narrated an experience wherein her friend was extremely intoxicated. Noticing her friend's state, the security offered her water and ensured that they left the club safely (Bianca, 20 years, personal interview, 2 May 2024). These efforts significantly impacted their feelings of safety at the club.

During my visits to nightclubs in Madrid, the behavior and attitude of the bouncers also had a major effect on my perception of safety. In most cases, the bouncers were often white men of large stature and had an intimidating presence, which made them appear to be unapproachable. Despite their role as security personnel who were expected to ensure the safety of patrons, their demeanor often felt counterproductive. In one instance, while I was in the dance area of a nightclub, I noticed that there were numerous bouncers present who were noticeably aggressive towards the crowd. Due to the limited space, people were being pushed around, and I also was pushed by another person. When I



Image 7: Bouncers conducting bag checks at the entrance of a nightclub in Sol, Madrid- Heavy security presence as a measure to ensure safety

attempted to address the situation, I was reprimanded by a bouncer who told me to 'calm down.'. At one point, during the same night, I was inappropriately touched by a man. Since the room was very crowded and dark, I could not tell who the person was. Since the bouncers did not seem approachable, I chose not to report the incident.

On the other hand, at one of the queer events I attended, the experience was markedly different. The bouncer at the entrance was dressed in drag and conducted bag checks, while at the same time communicated politely regarding the queer friendly policy of the venue, wherein violence and discrimination against the group would not be tolerated. Additional staff, who were predominantly women and who also spoke English, who were

stationed in the corridor leading to the dance floor. They reassured my friends and I that we could approach them if we ever felt uncomfortable. There were a few bouncers present in the dance floor areas to ensure the safety of the crowd. They were walking around to inspect the unattended drinks on the table. A few times we were also asked if the drinks on the table were ours. If no one was near the drinks, they were taken away, to ensure that they do not get spiked. This proactive and polite nature of the staff positively influenced my perception of safety, making me feel comfortable knowing that assistance was readily available if needed.

❖ Safety protocol of the nightclub:

As previously noted, participants generally felt safer when there was a bag check at the entrance. Additionally, some women mentioned feeling safer when nightclubs made their safety protocol explicit, by either having inclusive posters inside the nightclub, or having mechanisms such as panic

buttons in the women's washrooms. This transparency gave them reassurance that there were people they could reach out to if they are in a dangerous situation, thereby increasing their trust in the nightclub.



Image 8: Poster outside a nightclub in Madrid illustrating their profit driven motives- Prioritizing financial gain over safety of patrons

In my experience, even as bag checks were conducted, they were often performed hastily and not in a thorough manner. This raised concerns about the effectiveness of these checks in ensuring safety. For example, during one of my nightlife visits in Madrid, a person who had accompanied me was caught by the bouncer inside the nightclub consuming the illegal substance that he had carried. The bouncer's reaction to the situation was lax, wherein he asked the individual to leave the nightclub for 15 minutes, after which he was allowed to re-enter. This leniency made me wonder if the bouncer

would have reacted similarly if the person was not a white man. I also reflected on whether his lax reaction was being influenced by the cultural norms of Spain, wherein minor drug use is not considered to be a big deal and was hence dealt with in a more lenient manner compared to other countries. I also considered whether the bouncer's response was driven by the need to avoid responsibility, wherein by asking the person to leave the venue temporarily, the nightclub would not have to deal with any immediate consequences of the person's intoxication inside the venue. This suggested that the nightclub's safety protocols may be more about minimizing liability and protecting the club's reputation rather than ensuring the actual safety and well-being of its patrons. Additionally, aside from the instance where the nightclub's safety protocol was explicitly

communicated through conversation with the staff, I did not observe any posters or other visual aids that clearly outlined these protocols in any of the other nightclubs I visited in Madrid.

Safety, according to me, also encompasses the nightclub's commitment towards providing access to basic facilities such as water, which was notably lacking in most of the venues I visited. One of the nightclubs I visited was densely crowded, creating an uncomfortably warm atmosphere. The line to the bar was also very long. I wanted water, and did not want to wait in the line, so I decided to fill water from the sink inside the toilet. A bouncer was guarding the toilet and would decide when people could go in. As the heat and dehydration started to affect me, I began to feel uneasy and a bit sick. I noticed that there were other women around me who were also visibly uncomfortable due to the heat and lack of water. This shared discomfort, particularly amongst women, pointed towards the failure of nightclubs wherein they fail to provide basic services to its patrons, such as easy access to water. Adding to this, at another nightclub, when I used the toilet, I noticed that the sink only had extremely hot water flowing out of it. There was no way for the temperature of the water to be controlled. I later realized that this was a deliberate attempt to ensure that the patrons do not drink water from the sink, but instead buy a water bottle at the bar (I tried asking for a glass of water to prove my suspicion, and the bartender said they do not serve it in a glass and I will have to buy a bottle instead). The decision to prioritize profit over the safety of the patrons (by giving them free access to water), according to me, was extremely unethical and could also be dangerous particularly when heavy alcohol consumption is common in such spaces.

Physical aspects of the nightclub:

Like mentioned above, the availability of space inside a nightclub, especially on the dance floor, also impacted the perception of safety of the women interviewed. Additionally, most participants spoke of how the lighting of the club, especially if it's too dark, made them feel uncomfortable, as it hindered their ability to keep track of their friends and monitor for men lingering around them.

The physical layout of the nightclubs also significantly influenced my perception of safety. Most nightclubs I visited had small dance floors, which led to crowding and frequent pushing, making me feel as though my personal space was being invaded. However, one of the nightclubs I visited which was advertised as a 'gay nightclub'. had two dance floors, on different levels. The first-level dance floor, which included a bar, was relatively empty. The ground-level dance floor was busier but still had ample space to move freely. There were also tables on both the floors on a slightly elevated surface, which anyone could access. This thoughtful design, which effectively managed space

constraints and offered multiple areas for movement and relaxation, contributed positively to my sense of safety.

At one of the nightclubs (wherein the crowd was mainly cisgender, heterosexual, white men), the toilets for men and women were located in the same area, and were only divided by the sink in the middle. While I was waiting for my friend inside the toilet area, drunk men approached me. Since the waiting area inside the toilet was very cramped, it made me even more uncomfortable to occupy such a limited space with men who were making advances towards me. In comparison, one of the queer events I attended, the bathrooms at the nightclub were gender-neutral. Even though I was sharing this intimate space with 'men', I relatively felt safer in the area as compared to my previous experience and was also impressed with the club's commitment to inclusivity especially for its transgender or non-binary patrons through its gender neutral infrastructure. The nightclub's inclusive infrastructure, coupled with the type of patrons the nightclub received, contributed to a sense of safety and mutual respect, which was evident in how individuals navigated this intimate shared space.

A common feature in most mainstream clubs, which was evident in three of the nightclubs I visited, was having an exclusive VIP area which is physically separated from the general crowd, often by being located on an elevated surface or guarded behind velvet ropes, with the presence of security. These sections are designed to attract wealthier patrons who are willing to pay an extra amount for privacy. This spatial separation, according to me, reinforces social hierarchies within the nightclub, creating an environment where status and wealth are prominently displayed, as opposed to creating an inclusive space where everybody feels welcomed.

The social-spatialisation of the nightclub based on the culture of the venue and the patrons they target is very much evident through these examples of both social and physical aspects of the nightclub as curated by the management (Shields, 1991). Queer nightclubs, through their gender neutral toilets, hosting events centering queer individuals such as drag shows, androgynous dress code of staff, queer friendly posters and decorations, spacious dance floors, and clearly expressed safety measures, create a space wherein the identities, preferences, and safety needs of queer patrons are kept into account, ensuring their sense of belonging in these spaces. Mainstream nightclubs on the other hand, having packed dance floors, VIP areas, Staff (most of the time men with a strong built) dressed in suits, marketing tactics using imagery of women dressed in a specific manner (often appealing the male gaze) attract a crowd where men and women feel pressured to conform to the

gender binary, with men often displaying exaggerated forms of masculinity and women adhering to conventional standards of femininity. As highlighted by Massey (1994; 2005), Spaces are dynamic, and produced based on the social interactions of those who occupy them. In this context, the nightclub becomes a space where societal norms around gender and sexuality are both reinforced and challenged, depending on the type of venue and the cultural expectations it upholds.

3.3 Tactics to feel safe at the nightclub

Fear of drink spiking, as mentioned above, led to women remaining watchful at all times. This involved keeping their drink in hand and never letting it out of their sight. Most women expressed that they preferred to be present when the bartender poured their drink to ensure that it was handed directly to them, without any opportunity for someone to tamper with it. Some refused to accept drinks from strangers altogether, while others accepted them with a high degree of suspicion regarding the person's intentions.

Receiving unwanted attention from men was perceived as a common and unavoidable consequence of having a night out. When faced with the need to turn down a man, most women carefully planned and carried out their rejection in a way that did not come across as too harsh or too confident, to avoid triggering any aggressive behavior from the man. Some women avoided eye contact with men altogether to avoid such interactions from taking place.

In order to stay alert at all times, most women controlled the amount of alcohol or drugs they consumed. Some women completely avoided drinking alcohol/consuming drugs. These negotiations were made based on who was present with them at that point, how they would get home (mode of transport), or whether they would have to travel back home alone or not.

Another approach taken by most women to manage risks at nightlife establishments was the implementation of a buddy system, in which a group of friends would safeguard and support each other from expected dangers. Within the system, women took on different roles, with some acting as caretakers (keeping an eye on a friend who is dancing with a stranger, ensuring that no one leaves without informing someone else, among other things) while others relied on their friends for support. One participant spoke about the unsaid co-community care implemented in her friends group:

“If I notice that one friend is getting particularly drunk, or, like, is drinking more than usual, I will, deliberately drink less, or sober myself up, knowing that I need to take care of them. And I feel like there's always a balance, like a dynamic in a friend group that maybe happens naturally” (Salma, 23 years, personal interview, 20 february 2024).

Some women also recounted feeling pressured to control or regulate their movements in these spaces, trying to take up as little space as possible. For example, when it came to dancing, some participants mentioned that they would avoid dancing freely or ‘too provocatively’ to steer clear from attracting too much attention. By controlling how much space they take and how they express themselves with their movements, these women are constantly negotiating their presence in the nightclub by balancing, on one hand, the desire to have a good time, and on the other hand, avoid being targets of gender violence. These negotiations arise from the internalization of societal narratives on the lack of safety in public spaces for women, which have historically been seen as male-dominated domains. Hence, the participants employing both risk confronting and avoidance tactics (Van der Burgt, 2015), to avoid unsafe situations that they might encounter during a night out, is not merely about ensuring one's safety but is also dictated by the underlying fear of being blamed for any potential violence they might face in public spaces, where they are not supposed to be in the first place. This internalized risk-averse moral framework (Morgan, 2010), and sense of responsibility stems from and also contributes to the culture of victim-blaming, where the onus is placed on women to prevent violence against themselves. (Fileborn, 2015; Valentine, 1992).

3.4 Challenging gender norms inside the nightclub

Even though all participants expressed feeling some level of unsafety in nightlife venues and conveyed their hypervigilance towards violence in such spaces, there were also some women who actively wanted to challenge these patriarchal notions on women's vulnerability and reclaim space inside the nightclub.

For example, in instances where they were being bothered by a man, while most participants would choose to ignore the situation, or carry out rejection in a less threatening manner, there were also instances where some women attempted to challenge such gender normative notions by handling unwelcome attention through resistance and assertiveness, as opposed to solely resorting to avoiding confrontation:

“I mean, if a guy comes and I don't want to talk to him, I say no. And then I go to my friend or something. And if he's being persistent? I'll be like, fuck off” (Jasmine, 27 years, personal interview, 17 April 2024).

When it came to dancing, one participant mentioned that going to a nightclub was a ‘meditative’ experience for her, and she would not let anything get in the way of that-

“I will dance on the bar table. Like that actually happened, one time the DJ called me up to the bar and I was dancing and then a bunch of older men came up to me and were like wow you were really good. I don't even know... but basically that is to say that no I will not alter my behavior” (Luna, 25 years, personal interview, 20 May 2024).

This participant by making a conscious effort of prioritizing her own enjoyment and autonomy is resisting the social pressures that make women control their movements in certain spaces with the fear of being sexualised or objectified by men. By describing this experience as being ‘meditative’, this participant reframes an activity that could be sexualized by the male gaze as something deeply personal and empowering for her.

Two participants also mentioned that sometimes they go to a nightclub along with their friends often with the intention of meeting potential sexual interests. While they acknowledged that strangers who are especially men, can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous, they felt confident in their ability to navigate such situations with care while ensuring they still had a good time.

The stigmatization and policing of women's consumption of alcohol and drugs was also challenged by some women. One participant shared her experience of consuming drugs in a nightlife spaces, as a bonding activity with her friends-

"Using drugs in a safe and controlled way with friends can make the night so much more fun. I feel like it's a shared experience that brings us closer, you know?" (Ammie, 21 years, personal interview, 1 March 2024).

Despite the pervasive sense of vulnerability and the need for constant vigilance, these women by choosing to challenge these norms and asserting one's agency, demonstrate the multiple ways in which feminine identity is both produced and negotiated in these environments. While these acts of resistance are empowering for women, they are also performed with an awareness of the risks

involved. Hence through calculated risk-taking, these women are not merely passive actors in the nightlife scene but active agents in the construction of their own feminine identities (Hutton, 2010).

4. Behavior and decision making while returning home from the nightclub

4.1 Choice of transport

The choice of transport to return back home from the nightclub mainly depended on the time and distance from the nightclub to their homes. Most participants that lived close or within the central neighborhoods of Madrid, preferred to walk back home. However, some said that they would not do the walk alone, and would only do it if they have company. Since the metro does not run from 2 am till 6 am, majority of the respondents mentioned that this was when their fear within the city intensified. Some participants said that they would usually wait until the nightclub shuts completely to step out into the city, while two participants said that they would wait at a nearby restaurant that is open (like McDonalds) until the metro reopens, to go back home. A few respondents also said that they would take the night bus. One of them said that the night bus mostly was used by young people around her age, who also went out to party, which made her feel safe (Asiya, 28 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024). However, apart from these people, the rest did not prefer this option as the wait for the bus would be long, and they did not want to encounter any uncomfortable interactions with men on the streets while waiting at the bus stop.

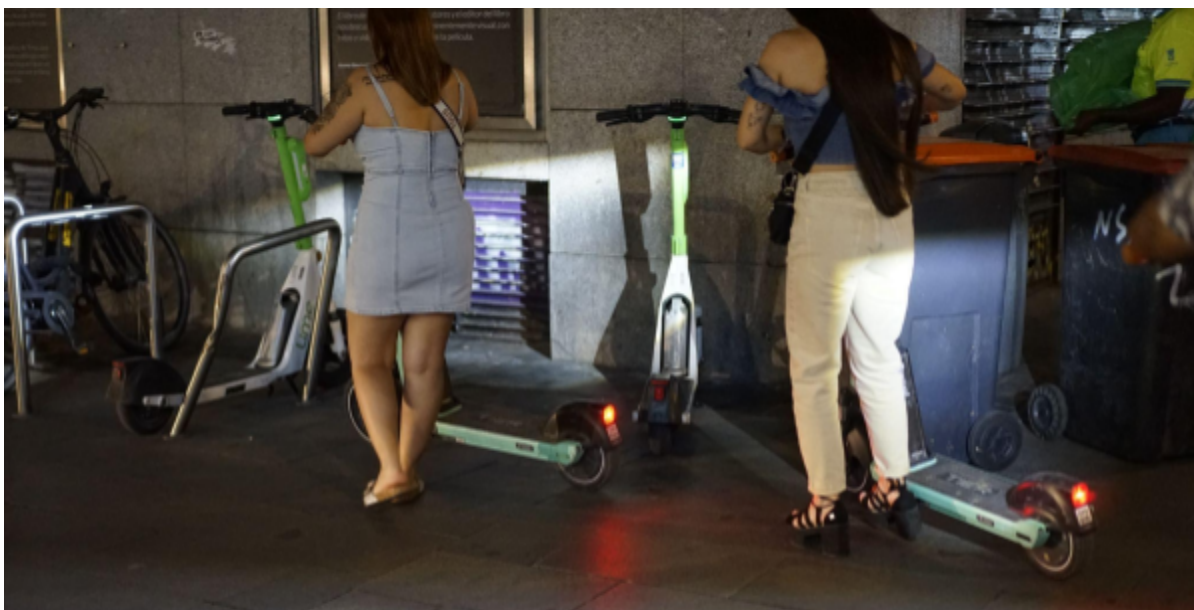


Image 9: Women taking semi-public mode of transport (rental scooters) after a night out

Some participants also choose to take semi-public modes of transport available in the city, such as rental scooters or a taxi instead of walking or taking public transport, especially if they think that they have had a bit too much to drink. Some would use mobile applications such as Uber or Cabify, while others would take the first taxi they see on the streets, since they are readily available in the center.

One participant said that she would avoid taking public transportation at night all together because of her past experiences with sexual violence in these spaces:

“I try not to take public transport at night. Like that really freaks me out. There was once in Vienna, it wasn't until that late night, that someone followed me through public transport. And this guy like he saw me and you know, there was this pole dividing us. And like if I kept my hand on top, he kept it right on top, if I moved it to the bottom, he moved it to the bottom” (Sashna, 24 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

She later added that she would prefer to ride her cycle to the nightclub because she felt like she had more agency because of the vehicle. Another participant said something similar, and felt like her choice of taking an electric scooter at night instead of walking made her feel safer (Bea, 25 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

One participant said that her choice in transport was dependent on the clothes or shoes she wore. If she's wearing boots that don't make a sound while walking, then she would choose to walk. On the other hand, if she's wearing heeled boots, she would prefer to take a taxi home, to avoid signaling to anyone that she's a woman walking alone at night, before they notice her. In this context, the clothing of the respondent and her transport choices are interwoven strategies aimed at maximizing her safety. This co-construction involves constant assessment and adjustment based on the interplay between attire and the urban environment.

4.2 Perceptions of safety while navigating the city at night

Since most participants had to walk some distances, even if they are taking public transportation later, most of their perceptions of fear were associated with this walk at night.

Cultural norms played an important role in the perception of safety of the participants in Madrid. Almost all participants shared that in Madrid, it was common to find people out in public spaces until late hours. This made them feel safer, as they believed there was a lesser chance of being

attacked in public spaces when there were other people around. They also felt reassured that if they were in a dangerous situation, they could ask passersby for help.

However, another participant felt that Spain, as a country, was highly gendered, as she noticed more cis-gender men occupied public spaces and seemed more comfortable taking up space than women. This aspect made her feel uneasy especially while being out in public late at night, as she found this markedly different from her experiences in New York (Cher, 21 years, personal interview, 23 April 2024).

Many participants expressed that they felt uncomfortable and more vulnerable in areas where lighting was insufficient, as it increases the likelihood of them being attacked by strangers, who might be lurking in the darkness. The presence of drunk men, particularly in poorly lit areas, was also a significant source of anxiety for many women. The homeless population was seen as a threat by a few participants. This perception is often rooted in societal biases and stigmatization, intertwined with issues of social class. Homeless bodies in the public imagination are frequently associated with danger, dirt, deviance, and unpredictability, and are seen as the 'other', for failing to conform to the social norms and essentially offending the upper-class sensibilities. This process of othering and the negative symbolisation of homeless people, contributes to their dehumanization causing their further exclusion from society (Olufemi, 2002).

Two participants also expressed their discomfort in the main party streets in the Sol neighborhood, due to the presence of club promoters who would wait on the streets to convince people to enter the nightclub. These participants narrated experiences wherein they were heckled by these promoters who would often make inappropriate comments or even follow them down the street. These aggressive tactics of the nightclub promoters symbolize the culture within these venues wherein profit and male pleasure is prioritized over women's comfort and safety. Women in such spaces are seen not as individuals with autonomy, but as objects that need to be lured into nightclubs, where their presence is commodified. This objectification begins even before they enter the venue, as they are subjected to sexualized comments and unwanted attention by the promoters on the streets, even when they visibly look disinterested in entering the nightclub, or uncomfortable with these interactions.

As mentioned before, participants' perception of safety in Madrid was influenced by their experiences in other cities where they had lived. One participant compared their experience in Madrid with New York, stating that:

“In New York, I'm scared that someone is going to shoot me or has a weapon and like is going to do real harm. In Madrid, I just feel like a lot of, in my experience, European and in particular Spanish men are a lot more handsy, a lot more presumptuous, just a little aggressive with women in ways that maybe they wouldn't be as much in the States” (Cher, 21 years, personal interview, 23 April 2024).

This fear was influenced by the participant's awareness of gun violence and crime rates in the U.S., which are statistically higher than in many European cities. Additionally, her comment on the behavior of Spanish men could stem from differences in cultural norms dictating the expression of masculinity in social interactions, in Madrid, compared to New York.

Another participant drew a comparison with Italy, noting that Italian culture was pervasive with misogyny and homophobia. They felt that Milan was much more unsafe due to these cultural attitudes, which were less pronounced in Madrid (Alessia, 20 years, personal interview, 29 february 2024).

Race also influenced perceptions of the participants on who might be capable of committing violence in public places. As mentioned before, several respondents mentioned avoiding Lavapiés because they heard it was unsafe. This neighborhood, known for its high immigrant population, suffers from a reputation marred by racial bias (especially towards the African diaspora), heightened media attention on violence, and a visible police presence. While talking about her experience in Lavapiés, one respondent spoke about reflecting on her internalized racism which affects her perceptions of safety:

“When I feel unsafe in Chennai at night, I have no qualms about being aggressive towards men, like I have no worries that like they might have not meant it that way and I misconstrued it. But coming to Europe, first when I was 17, I had this idea that it's not as bad here. That's why I was sent here on my own in the first place. So, I felt some guilt to be protective of myself. So like when I was walking home at night and I felt fear when a young man was walking towards me, I didn't know if it was okay for me to shift the lane and walk the other way, because I thought this person was going to be offended. And as I spend more

time here, in a city like Madrid, for example, and if I feel unsafe in Lavapiés, I question myself before I question my environment. Is this my own implicit bias of racialized bodies somehow creating a lack of safety in Lavapiés?” (Sashna, 24 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

Participants' perceptions of the police were also influenced by race (Decker, et al., 2019). Black and Brown participants expressed a high level discomfort and distrust toward the police, even in situations where they might need help. They spoke of instances of police violence in Madrid, wherein they often target African immigrants, which contributed to their negative views. One participant shared her thoughts:

“I am a Black person in public, but I'm also a mixed light skinned Black person, and I'm not a cis-man. And so I'm not the person that they first go after. But also, I have never in my whole life felt comfortable to go to the police for anything. And I've also felt hyper visible in public space, which I am. But I think, particularly in a Spanish context, they particularly go after, like, dark skin, West African, young men who were in Lavapiés. So, I always behave very jumpy when I see them, which is fucking all the time, every street corner you cross, and even when I'm cycling or scooting, and I have my headphones on, or I do an illegal maneuver, I'm waiting for them to do something” (Bea, 25 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

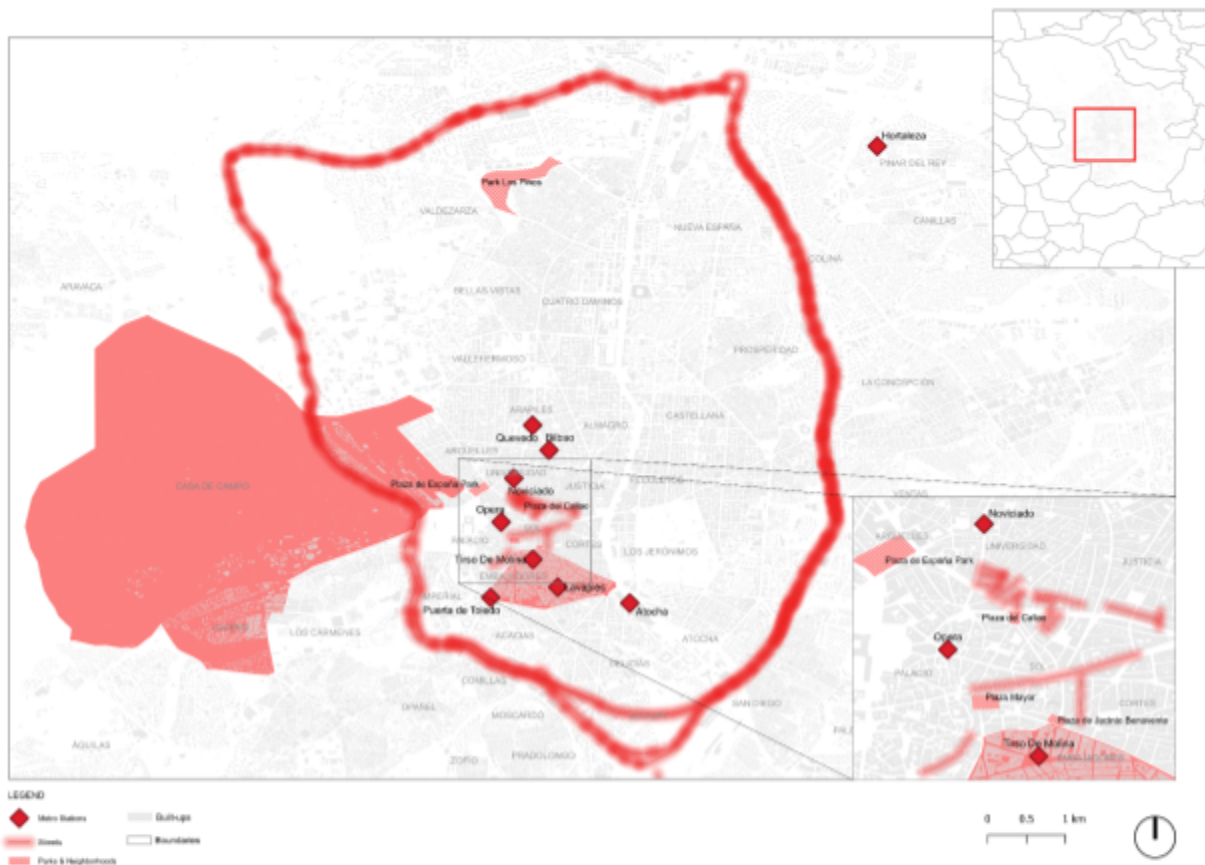
These discussions on the impact of race on perceptions of security personnel made me reflect on one of my experiences in Madrid. After one of my night outs, I was waiting outside the nightclub along with my friends for the metro to start working again. During this time, I observed three police cars stationed outside the nightclub. They waited in the area for about half an hour, and then left without taking any visible ‘action’. I wondered if this behavior of the police was racially motivated, considering the nightclub's clientele was predominantly black. This observation resonated with my broader awareness of how police interactions with immigrant populations in Madrid are often violent and racially motivated, leading me to be particularly cautious and suspicious of their intentions during such encounters.

In contrast, many white participants said that the high police presence in Madrid made them feel safer and welcomed more patrolling in localities at night.



Image 10 and 11: Hyper-surveillance of police at Sol, Madrid, which is frequented by tourists

4.3 Tactics to feel safe while navigating the city at night



Map 5: Map by Author. Participant's mental maps on unsafe spaces in Madrid. 1:39000. Sources: GADM, Google Earth, Open Street Map.

Several participants said that they would avoid smaller streets or alleys while walking at night, especially if they are not well lit, such as the smaller streets of Gran Vía. They would prefer to take busy streets, as they felt that there was less chance of them experiencing violence when there are other people present around them. As mentioned above, some also avoided specific plazas, squares or parks in the city where they have noticed a lot of drunk youth or people consuming illegal substances, such as Plaza de Callao or Park los Pinos. The area outside certain metro stations, like Tirso de Molina, Puerta del Toledo, Atocha, and others, marked in Map 5, were also perceived to be unsafe, as the respondents had previously noticed homeless people or drunk youth sitting outside, and shared that they had experienced uncomfortable interactions there. To avoid such encounters, they would quicken their pace when passing through these areas. The places that participants identified as ones to avoid were largely informed by the mental maps they had developed over their

time in Madrid to ensure one's safety and reduce the risk of violence (Refer to Map 5). These mental maps were shaped by their experiences, interactions, and observations throughout their stay in the city; as well as the experiences of others that have been shared with them. One participant shared her experience while walking to her home in Legaspi; which influenced her mental map of safety in her neighborhood at night:

“There are two *alementacions* right outside the train station and there are people just getting drunk there. And when you walk past them, they either catcall you or stop you to wait. Like that has happened to me, like they've stopped my way and I've suddenly changed my route, because I don't want to engage with them” (Asiya, 27 years, focus group member, 31 may 2024).

Cat-calling was viewed as an unavoidable consequence of walking home at night. To escape the situation from worsening, most participants would walk the streets with a fast pace and heightened attention. A few participants carried an extra jacket or a shirt to cover themselves during their commute. Some also carried a ‘weapon’ with them, such as a metal water bottle, or a deodorant or would choose to walk with their keys in their hands, just in case they encounter a dangerous situation where they have to protect themselves. Some women also said that they would share their live location with their family or friends on their commute back home, or even be on a call with someone to feel safer. These accounts illustrate how women's sense of safety in public spaces is constantly negotiated, shaped by both the physical environment and the social dynamics around them. The constant state of vigilance that women must maintain when navigating public spaces, particularly at night, even during the most mundane activities like walking home, reveals the persistent undercurrent of fear that shapes their image of the city on an everyday basis.

While conducting my ethnographies, I realized that the routes that I took, the areas I avoided, and my pace while walking in certain places was also largely determined by my mental map of safety that I had created over my time in Madrid. Image 11 highlights specific areas where I felt unsafe, followed by Table 4, which provides the reasons why I felt unsafe in those areas and time of the day when my fear intensified.

Image 12: My mental maps of unsafe places in Madrid

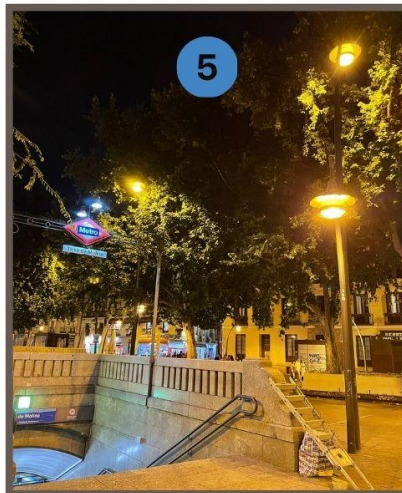
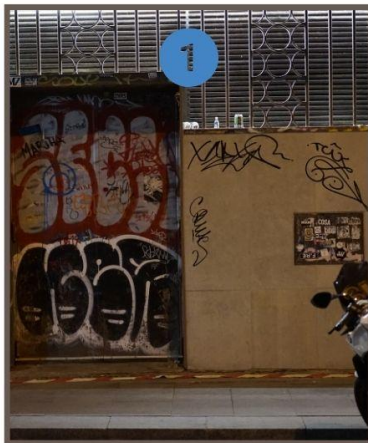


Table 4: Overview of my mental maps of unsafe places in Madrid

Sr. No.	Location	Time of the night when my fear intensified	Reasons for feeling unsafe
1.	Calle del Caballero de Gracia	12 am to 6 am	Poorly lit street that is usually empty, fear of someone lurking in the darkness, general image of being 'unsafe'
2.	Calle del Carmen	9 pm to 6 am	Presence of drunk tourists, previous experience of being cat-called
3.	Calle Arco del Triunfo 1	2 am to 6am	Presence of men who are drinking, fear of someone lurking in staircase
4.	Calle del Almendro	1 am to 6 am	Presence of drunk tourists
5.	Calle de Santo Tomás	2 am to 6 am	Long alley which is usually empty, fear of someone lurking in the corner
6.	Tirso de Molina Metro station	2 am to 6 am	Presence of men who are drinking or consuming drugs
7.	Calle Jesús y María	12 am to 6 am	Previous experience of being cat-called and followed by men, anecdote of a friend who was robbed on the street

5. Other axes of inequalities influencing perceptions of fear and safety

5.1 Language barrier

Even though all the respondents were not local to Spain, some were from Spanish speaking countries, while some could speak the language fluently or enough to be able to make basic conversations. All the respondents that did not speak or understand Spanish expressed that their language barrier put them in a vulnerable situation and made them feel less safe. It made them more hesitant to ask for help from security personnel at the nightclubs or the police, affecting their help-seeking behavior in situations that were perceived to be dangerous.

One respondent shared that not knowing Spanish made her stand out as a tourist in the city:

“I think maybe one thing that is more representative for Spain is how many tourists come here to party at night. So, the fact that you do not speak in Spanish or do not look Spanish or like, don't fit into the ‘Spanish category’ of being Spanish, people immediately put you in the category of being a tourist that came here to just get drunk or party” (Sofie, 25 years, focus group member, 31 May 2024).

She then added that being viewed as a tourist, and coupled with the negative image of tourists as being loud, inconsiderate, and a general menace, meant that locals were hostile towards them, further affecting their sense of safety in the city. As stated by Aramayona & García-Sánchez (2019), the over-tourism in Madrid and its ill-effects on the daily lives of the locals, is leading to stigmatization of certain bodies in public spaces, who are considered to be a nuisance. This hostility was felt by most respondents, making it difficult for them to seek help from the locals when needed.

A few participants also expressed that speaking in a language other than Spanish also made them obvious targets to crimes in public spaces such as pick-pocketing. An English-speaking expat expressed that she received a disproportionate amount of attention from strangers for speaking in English, especially in an American accent in public spaces, wherein she was often stopped by strangers and asked personal questions that made her uncomfortable (Alice, 20 years, personal interview, 24 May 2024).

Those who spoke and understood even a little bit of Spanish, felt safer in comparison while having to navigate nightlife spaces and the city as a whole. One respondent expressed that she always made an effort to speak to the service staff in Spanish, as to not get treated poorly:

“I work super hard to be a really good customer, like I have learned how to make my order in Spanish really well because I know that if I don't and I am speaking in English like a tourist, they're going to hate me and I can tell” (Cicilia, 26 years, personal interview, 9 March 2024).

The above experience illustrates how language serves as a powerful tool for negotiating one's position in a foreign environment. Language proficiency, or the lack thereof, thus has an influence on one's treatment and sense of belonging within a space.

5.2 Temporality

The participants in the study had lived in Madrid for varying lengths of time, from approximately two months to two years, and this variation influenced their perceived safety.

Those who had been in Madrid for a longer period had built mental maps based on their past experiences with unsafe situations experienced in nightlife venues or specific areas of the city. These mental maps reduced the likelihood of them relying on place mythologies to determine their level of safety. Even though stigmatized neighborhoods were still navigated with caution, if the participants themselves had not had a negative experience in the area, their perceived safety in the neighborhood also increased over time. Additionally, participants who had spent more time in Madrid felt more confident finding their way around the city streets, reducing their reliance on tools like Google Maps to get home. This significantly impacted their perceived safety as it reduced the likelihood of them getting lost in a city or finding themselves in unfamiliar places that are potentially unsafe.

However, this is not to say that the participants' sense of safety is a product of familiarity with Madrid as it was also shaped by their broader urban experiences. The build-up of negative experiences, whether in Madrid or elsewhere, also shaped their perceptions of safety. For example, those who had experienced or witnessed violence or harassment in specific spaces approached those areas with heightened caution, even if they had lived in Madrid for a considerable time. The above negotiations elucidate that safety is not static but a dynamic condition which depends on various factors such as the physical environment, past experiences, familiarity with the place, among others.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has examined the perceptions of safety and fear of non-local women, specifically international students, in order to understand its influence on their behavior and decision making while occupying nightlife spaces in Madrid. It addresses the gaps in existing body of literature on experiences of women in nightlife spaces which mainly focuses on women who are residents of the place, excluding those women who are in the city for a limited time or those who are not 'local' to the place, who come with their own set of vulnerabilities and privileges. With Madrid attracting a significant number of international students who want to partake in its nightlife scene (Madrid Tourism Board, 2019; Ministerio de Universidades, 2023), it becomes crucial to understand how their non-local status, coupled with their gender identity and other intersectionalities, give rise to specific challenges, further informing the accessibility, inclusivity and safety of nightlife spaces in the city.

This section thereby attempts to highlight the key findings of the research based on the aims of the study:

1. To understand how gender based vulnerabilities influence the experiences of women users of nightlife spaces in Madrid, who are not local to the place

Through the analysis of the findings it became clear that all participants were cognizant of the gender dynamics that are in play in most nightlife spaces. They recognized how these environments are essentially masculine spaces shaped by heteronormative expectations, which can put them in a vulnerable position. Despite their awareness, participants often found themselves entangled in these gendered expectations. However, they did not simply succumb to them; but resisted, as pointed out by Sanz and Gil (2020), sometimes consciously and sometimes unknowingly, through patriarchal bargains (1988) of employing tactics and strategies to carefully navigate these spaces. For example, in certain situations some deliberately decided to challenge the gendered norms of 'appropriate femininity' (Wilson, 1995) which expect women to be timid and sexually passive, by engaging in 'reckless' behavior such as consuming drugs, using nightlife spaces to meet prospective sexual partners, or taking up more space than they are expected to. But there also existed other subtle resistances such as planning one's path and pace depending on the mental maps of safe and unsafe spaces (Valentine, 1989) that they had built over time in Madrid, which were equally powerful. This duality of internalizing gender norms and resisting them at the same time demonstrates their active

role in shaping their experiences. Being international students, their strategies were not just a response to Madrid's nightlife but were largely shaped by their experiences in other cities and nightlife spaces. Additionally they were also impacted by experiences of other women who have dealt with violence in such places and who choose to share their stories and strategies with others. This collective responsibility felt by most women to create and share knowledge about safety in cities is also a crucial form of resistance towards demanding their right to the city at night (Sanz and Gil, 2020; Lefebvre, 1968). All these factors influencing the negotiations of women while navigating night-time spaces, contribute heavily to shaping their feminine identities which are more fluid than one dimensional, and are constantly being redefined.

2. To learn from the lived experiences of non-local women to make nightlife spaces more accessible and inclusive for all

The experiences of participants, along with their struggles bring to light various ways in which power dynamics function to make spaces at night unequal and othering for certain social groups (Rodó-Zárate, 2023). At the same time, their emotional knowledge in navigating cities with caution and care can also be used as a tool to understand how cities and its spaces can be made safer, accessible and more inclusive for marginalized communities such women and queer individuals.

Most of the nightclubs in Madrid function merely as corporatised spaces complicit in reproducing existing power structures, wherein women's bodies are under constant sexual vigilance. The social spatialisation (Shields, 1991) of these spaces dictate and influence the movements of women, their appearance and expression of femininity, while simultaneously allowing men to display hyper-masculine behaviors. Such environment not only permits sexual violence but also contributes to its normalization. Inherently, while such violences took place in these spaces, participants felt discomfort and hesitance when approaching nightclub security or bouncers, largely due to their strict and aggressive demeanor, which was often exacerbated by their gender. They expressed feeling more comfortable if there were more female or queer staff present at the nightclubs. Additionally, this also stresses on the need to ensure that the staff goes through some sensitization and safety training before being charged with the responsibility of maintaining the safety of the users who occupy these spaces. The participants also stressed on the importance of making safety protocols of the nightclub more explicit from the start, which would significantly impact their safety perception in these spaces. Apart from having inclusive posters (queer friendly, anti-sexist, anti- racist) and having visible bystander interventions such as panic buttons in the bathroom, the nightclub should also have clear

guidelines on the rules of the nightclubs, as well as how they would deal with violence at the nightclub, but also ways in which they would hold the staff accountable if they do not adhere to these protocols. This underscores the need for nightclubs in Madrid to take the issue of safety far more seriously than they do, instead of treating it as a mere formality, under their profit driven agendas. Additionally, offering women or queer exclusive parties in nightclubs by ensuring that infiltrations do not take place, would also serve as an important measure in ensuring a sense of belonging for these groups, helping to counteract the exclusionary dynamics often present in mainstream nightlife venues.

Being mindful of the design details in the nightclubs is also another important factor. Paying attention to how the lighting, size of nightclub, and other physical features impact the perceptions of safety of its users is essential for creating welcoming spaces for all. Extending this consideration to the city's infrastructure, participants expressed that their fear peaked during the hours between 2 AM and 6 AM while they were returning home from the nightclub when public transportation options would be limited. This suggests that the participant's perceived safety in the city can be largely improved if either there were more night buses running during these hours or if a few metro lines were open throughout the night. Keeping in mind the pressure on the state budget and sustainability concerns, this provision could be implemented specifically on weekends when the presence of people in public places at night is higher than on weekdays. Additionally, ensuring that there are street lights in most parts of the city, especially in smaller allies, or parks where women felt unsafe is also an important consideration for creating safer city spaces. Most participants expressed that there was already a lot of police presence in Madrid for civil protection purposes, however, some also spoke about their distrust in the police because of their racial bias and hyper-surveillance. Such situations again stress the importance of police sensitization and ensuring that action is taken against law enforcement agents who are being counterproducing by marginalizing those who are already vulnerable. Additionally, nearly all participants reported being unaware of governmental services available for victims of sexual violence, while some were even unaware of the emergency police number. This highlights a significant gap in the reach of these state awareness campaigns especially when it comes to international students. The government can hence collaborate with higher education institutions to make such kind of information available through workshops, informative posters, orientation sessions, and other channels, so that it reaches international students.

Overall having more female presence in public spaces is a critical factor in enhancing safety and inherently their right to the city. As seen in the study, much of the fear experienced by the participants was deeply embedded in the way gender functions in society, making it difficult to address through protectionist policies alone. Gender norms enforced through family, media, and peers, and their actual experiences of violence in public spaces, influence women's feelings of lack of belonging in public spaces, making them experience public spaces differently than men. This 'geography of fear' as highlighted by Valentine (1989), makes women perceive men as both a threat, but also as their sole protectors from other men while occupying public spaces; further reinforcing women's vulnerabilities in these environments. This understanding of women's perceived fear in public spaces highlights that the solution to enhancing their safety is not necessarily to remove cis-gender men, or protect women from these 'predators', but making spaces more accessible for women by ensuring that the presence of cis-gender men is not dominant. This could be achieved by diversifying the profiles of those occupying public spaces. This would include having more women, queer individuals, and non-cis men in law enforcement, public transport and other positions where they engage with the public, as well as promoting a visible and active presence of diverse bodies at night through gender mainstreaming.

"What would happen if we were to envision city spaces where the predominant discourse is not safety but inclusion? What if we imagined a city where there were no hierarchies of access to public space? Some might see this vision as portending anarchy but in my perception it holds possibilities for democratizing space and fundamentally questioning the discriminations within class, community and gender" (Phadke, 2007, pp. 1516-1517).

Limitations of study

A limitation of the study was the short amount of time available to conduct the research. The study was conducted over the period of 9 months, which included the time spent to conduct field work as well as the time involved in the writing process. This impacted the scope of the research, and the topics that could be explored in depth. Another limitation was my lack of proficiency in Spanish. I could only interview participants that could communicate in English, excluding others that could not speak the language. The limited time and lack of Spanish proficiency also meant that I could not involve and communicate effectively with other important stakeholders that I had initially wished to include in my study, such as those working in nightlife establishments, that could have provided a deeper understanding of safety within nightlife spaces. Additionally, this limitation also made it

difficult and less accessible for me to go through policy documents and other relevant academic literature on my research topic that was situated in Madrid or in Spain, as it was mostly in Spanish. The use of snowballing as a dominant sampling method also meant that there was less diversity of the sample as some of the respondents were from similar friend circles.

Implications of study

As a theoretical implication this study has added to research on nightlife, within the realm of urban studies. This research being situated in Madrid, can also be extrapolated to other tourist destinations where nightlife is a pull factor and a major attraction. It highlights the need for further investigation into the experiences of individuals who live in a city for a limited period, examining how their presence impacts the urban fabric while also exposing their vulnerabilities in the context of safety. Beyond discussing these vulnerabilities in terms of fear and safety, this research also stresses the importance of studying the experiences of these individuals and their emotions as acts of resistance and demand over rights to the city as their strategies and assessments of risk bring to light the inequalities that exist within public spaces in cities.

Overall, such research could help in envisioning and creating safer and inclusive spaces, and cities as whole, not only for local or not local women, but other marginalized groups whose issues are sidelined in mainstream urban planning, such as those belonging to the queer community. As a practical implication, this research could help build on policies with respect to tourism or nightlife and the safety of its users based on user experiences.

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Appendix

Semi structured interview guide

Background information:

- What is your age?
- Which city/country are you from?
- Do you speak/understand Spanish?
- How long have you been studying in Madrid?
- Where do you live in Madrid?

Before going to a nightclub:

- How often do you visit nightclubs in Madrid?
- Are there certain nightclubs you frequent? Can you give me some names?
- How did you choose the nightlife spaces that you wanted to go to? (online reviews, recommendations by friends/family)
- What are some of the factors that you consider before deciding which nightclub to go to?
- How much do other people's experiences, as shared online, or experiences of your peers, impact your decisions?
- Have you ever avoided a venue due to concerns about inclusivity or diversity?
- Have you ever avoided a venue due to concerns about its gender atmosphere?
- Have you ever avoided a locality/area at night because it's known to be unsafe? Give examples.
- Who do you go to nightlife establishments with? Do you ever go to these spaces by yourself? If not, why?

At the nightclub:

- How would you define a 'safe' nightlife experience?
- Do you have any anxieties while occupying these spaces? (why are you afraid of these things? Is it because of past experience, stories of others that have been shared with you?)
- Have you ever felt unsafe while participating in nightlife activities in Madrid? (Have you encountered situations that made you feel unsafe in these nightlife spaces?)

- How safe do you feel while using nightlife establishments in Madrid compared to your home city/place?
- Have you ever had to leave a nightclub in Madrid because you have felt unsafe?
- Have you ever altered your behavior due to safety concerns while engaging in nightlife activities in Madrid? (do you act in a certain way so as to not receive unwanted attention while being at a nightlife establishment?)
- Sometimes certain nightclubs have safety protocols in place to ensure the safety of the customers. Have you noticed any certain measures taken by the nightclubs in Madrid?
- Do you think alcohol or drug use has a co-relation to feeling unsafe or putting oneself in a vulnerable situation while being at a nightlife establishment? (Do you ever avoid the consumption of the same for safety reasons?)
- Are there any precautions you take to feel safe while occupying a nightlife establishment?
- Do you take any steps to ensure the safety of others who are present with you while occupying nightlife spaces?
- How do you deal with unwanted attention?

Returning home from the nightclub:

- Are there any differences in your perceived safety while occupying certain neighborhoods in Madrid during the day versus the night?
- How do you travel back to your place after having a night out?
- Have you encountered any unwanted behavior while traveling from the nightlife establishment to your home?
- Do you ever avoid certain streets/localities/areas when you're walking home alone at night?
- Are there any precautions you take to feel safer in the city at night? (Do you carry pepper spray or a pocket knife to feel safer? Or carry a change of clothes to cover yourself?)
- Do you think not being a local in the city has any effect on your perceived safety? If yes, how?

Suggestions:

- What are some of the changes you think can be brought about in nightclubs or in the city to make your experience with safety better?



Photo by: Alia Sharp