



**The Cultures of Alternative
Mobilities
Routes Less Travelled**

Edited by Phillip Vannini

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Chapter 8

Immobile Mobility in Daily Travelling Experiences in Santiago de Chile

Paola Jirón

Possibilities of being confined exist not only in fixed areas, like the workplace or the home, but also while on the move. This is because even while travelling long distances or daily commutes some people (e.g. see Schivelbusch 1986) “miss” the city in a tunnel-like manner, shut off from the city as they pass it by. Others who travel faster, more expedient, and uninterrupted journeys can also become oblivious to their surroundings, skipping the city voluntarily. Such are examples of the experience of *place confinement*. On the other hand, the experience of mobility may generate *place enlargement*. Place enlargement refers to feelings of spatial freedom and the experience of appropriation of spaces. For example, by accessing new and different places and the objects and people that dwell there, places are “enlarged” (Jirón 2008). Place enlargement and confinement are no elective choices. These experiences depend on people’s lifestyles, biographies, social identities, statuses, and roles.

The possibilities and consequences of mobile place confinement or enlargement are evidence of new forms of urban inequality. The differentiated use of mobility systems—mostly according to income, but increasingly according to age, disability, and gender—shows that there are broader inequalities in societies that are simply reflected on mobility. As a cause of urban inequality, transport systems are unevenly distributed among the population. For instance, the construction of high speed urban highways promoting car privileges for certain groups while resulting in poor public transport systems for other groups generates uneven access to the city in terms of modes, times, and spaces. When such systems are associated with the geopolitics of residential location, a double sort of inequality emerges. These inequalities are exacerbated by the segregation of residential location and the blocking off of city areas.

The consequence of this uneven access is that the city becomes a system of inaccessible tunnels—functioning as impenetrable borders between social groups. The city can then be visualized as a network of tunnels taking people to different places, at different speeds and different times, avoiding each other, minimizing possibilities of encounter. The possibility of enlarging or confining mobile places depends on the mode of transportation, the destinations, the times, the comfort, but also on the way people experience what lies outside, or what occurs inside, while on the move.

Using ethnographic material from research on daily journeys in Santiago de Chile, this chapter recounts the experiences of immobility while on the move, or immobility in mobility, of two urban dwellers: Sergio and Marta. Sergio cycles to his nightshift job as a security guard at a gated community. His experience of the city is limited to spaces around his neighborhood, as he is quite unaware of what occurs elsewhere. Marta takes two buses to her job as a house cleaner. For her, travel time is crammed, stuffy, dark, uncomfortable, and dangerous; the outside world is invisible to her. This ethnographic material was gathered by shadowing daily journeys of urban dwellers living in a specific area of Santiago. The journeys were geo-referenced, recorded, and photographed and are here expressed using time space maps, photographs, and narratives. These experiences help to explain current processes of mobile place confinement in contemporary cities and allow us to reflect on the way the city in movement virtually fragments and immobilizes urban residents and presents a double type of segregation of fixed and mobile confinement.

Background

In *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu and colleagues (1999) identified confined places as those spaces where people with financial, cultural, and social capital have power over those with lesser capitals and tend to self-segregate, whereas those with scarce resources are confined to places they often do not choose. Under the mobility lens, this can generate a double sort of exclusion for those with limited capital: spatial castigation in disadvantaged spaces along with limited possibilities to advantaged areas. Kenyon (2006: 104) calls this "poverty access": a "dearth of services in a locality and both the lack of, or the presence of obstacles, to physical access." In terms of spatial configuration, this situation may lead to phenomena such as the existence of parallel cities within cities, where people overlap but seldom meet, separated as they are by social, cultural, economic, and physical boundaries that define their routes, speeds, times, forms, and means of circulation and socialization.

Place always refers to a location, a locale and meaning, which is an appropriation and transformation of space and nature and which is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of social structures. In this sense, place is open, permeable and always in construction. As Cresswell (2002) mentions, places are never complete, finished or bounded, they are always becoming, in process. Places are about relationships, about placing (or displacing or replacing) people, materials, images, and the systems of difference they perform (Sheller and Urry 2006). Place is both the context for practice as well as a product of practice. Thus the relationship between places and practices, particularly those occurring on a daily basis, are extremely relevant in contemporary urban life, and life in general.

Place-making occurs in fixed spaces and also on the spaces travelled on, by, or within. Those spaces encountered on the move such as buses, metros, cars, or bicycles, become *mobile places*. Those spaces that people experience while moving about, along, or through (such as markets, train stations, bus stops, petrol stations, plazas, and malls) become *transient places* (Jirón 2008). Mobile places are not permanent and occur as a sort of event, an event of place (Massey 2005, 2007), a constellation of trajectories and processes, multiple and not necessarily coherent.

Places as events cannot be predetermined or anticipated. It is during these place-events that actual processes of negotiation take place, persistently modifying the borders that confine or enlarge places, thus generating either *mobile place confinement*—the restriction or limitation of individuals to mobile places—or *mobile place enlargement*—the possibility to create, signify, experience, or access mobile places or transient places (Jirón 2008). Mobile place confinement and enlargement are phenomena depending on the type of movement practiced within the city. Both can have consequences in how a city becomes more or less fragmented, allowing the possibility to see urban inequality not only as fixed enclaves but also as mobile gradients.

Given that places are made through power relations that construct the rules that define boundaries (McDowell 1999), people develop strategies to either encounter other people, places, or objects, or to avoid others. Some of these strategies are subtle and perhaps unconscious and may be seen as tactics in de Certeau's (de Certeau 1986) way, but they may also manifest ways of coping and may become explicit and transgressive, depending on the situation. For example, on public transport, people are required to see, smell, listen, or even touch one another. For many, this is an uncomfortable experience and if the possibility for eliminating it from their daily routine exists, they take it, for instance, by using a car instead. For others, this can be seen as an opportunity to expand their place-even possibilities, hence encountering other people, places, and objects becomes relevant. For others, particularly when the daily journey is reversible, the spaces of struggle, resistance, negotiation, and encounter are not in mobility.

Marta's Journey

Marta is 24 years old; she's married to Ernesto and together they have a seven-year-old daughter named Patricia. They live in a low-income neighborhood in La Florida in the southeastern part of Santiago. Marta works cleaning and child minding in a house in one of the richest and most exclusive neighborhoods in Santiago: La Dehesa. Ernesto works as a security guard at a higher income gated community not far from their neighborhood. His night shift starts at 8:00pm and continues until 8:00am for five days in a row; then he has three nights off and changes to day shifts from 8:00 am to 8:00pm. When he is at home during the day, he mostly sleeps.

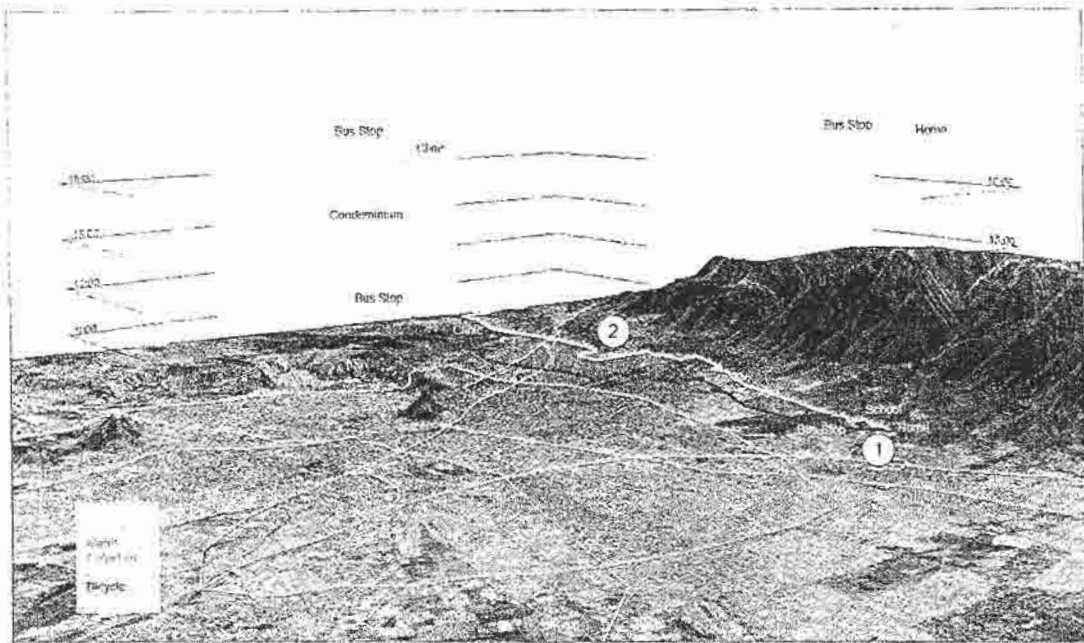


Figure 8.1 Marta's journey



Figure 8.2 Marta and Patricia walk to school

Every morning Marta gets up around 6:30am and prepares her daughter for school. At 7:30 they walk through the park, an empty lot, a pedestrian bridge and a shantytown, to make it to school before 8:00 (See Station 1 Figure 8.1 Marta's journey and Figure 8.2 Marta and Patricia walk to school).

Once she drops Patricia off, Marta walks down the main road to catch the first of two buses she takes to work (See Station 2 Figure 8.1). Because of the busy time of the day, the buses are already too full and the few that pass by do not stop for passengers. She walks longer than necessary to be able to catch her bus. Pushing and shoving, she gets on an overcrowded bus. It is difficult to see inside, let alone outside, since the bus is absolutely crammed, and as she manages to move further in, the passengers inside appear. "It's mainly *nanas*¹ on this bus" she explains. They are going to work to the richer areas of the city, where the better paying jobs are.

The women sitting down are all sleeping; and except for the initial jokes to the driver, bus riders are quiet for most of the way. She stands for most the ride and gets off before her actual stop to be able walk to catch the next bus. She explains: "if I don't do that, the bus is so full, it won't stop for me at the next stop."

Marta travels for another 45 minutes until she arrives at a different Santiago, a clean, green, and empty one. In total, the journey lasts almost two hours, meaning arriving at work way past 10:00am. Her boss complains about her arriving so late and tells her to get up earlier. "She doesn't understand that I can't leave any earlier. I have to take my girl to school in the morning and it's not a matter of getting up earlier," Marta laments.

Marta does not leave her boss's house all day and finishes around 7:00 pm. Once she has showered, she walks to the bus stop, waits for the bus for over 20 minutes and quickly grabs a seat when it arrives. She gets off at the end of the route, runs to take her second bus and manages to find a seat as well. She is very tired but cannot sleep. The curtains are shut and she does not really try to look outside; she does not recognize any of the streets, she does not know their names or what is in them, it is as if she skips the outside world. It is dark by the time she gets to her stop. She buys tomatoes, bread, and butter in a corner shop on her way home and walks for about 20 minutes through the same route she took in the morning. It is very dark and although she knows her way, she prefers to walk quickly, as she is scared. She could take a bus that would drop her off closer to her house, but it would mean longer waiting time and paying for an extra fare. She thus prefers to risk the dark road. When she gets home, Patricia is at home alone, watching TV. She has been alone for about an hour, has done the washing up, and had her tea.

1 *Nana* is Chilean slang for domestic cleaners.

Francisco's Journey

Francisco is 42 years old. He is married to Alejandra and they live in the same neighbourhood as Marta. They have two children: Patty and Sergio, who are 18 and 6, respectively. Francisco and Alejandra both come from the South of Chile around the Concepción area, and both have been living in Santiago for over 20 years. Francisco did not finish high school and does not have any technical training. Upon arriving to Santiago he moved around in various jobs, including butcheries, supermarkets, and construction sites. Now he works as a security guard at a high income gated community close to his neighbourhood. He chose this job because Sergio has a learning or mental disability which has not been properly diagnosed yet, therefore he often needs to go to the doctor, and although Sergio goes to school for a few hours a day, he needs constant attention. Hence, Francisco works on the nightshift and takes care of his son during the day. He says he makes less money than in other jobs he could have, but then he would have to pay for someone to take care of Sergio. He works five nights from 10:00pm until 8:00am and then he gets two days off. Prior to going to work he prepares his lunch box, which usually involves leftover dinner, a few sandwiches, and a thermos full of tea.

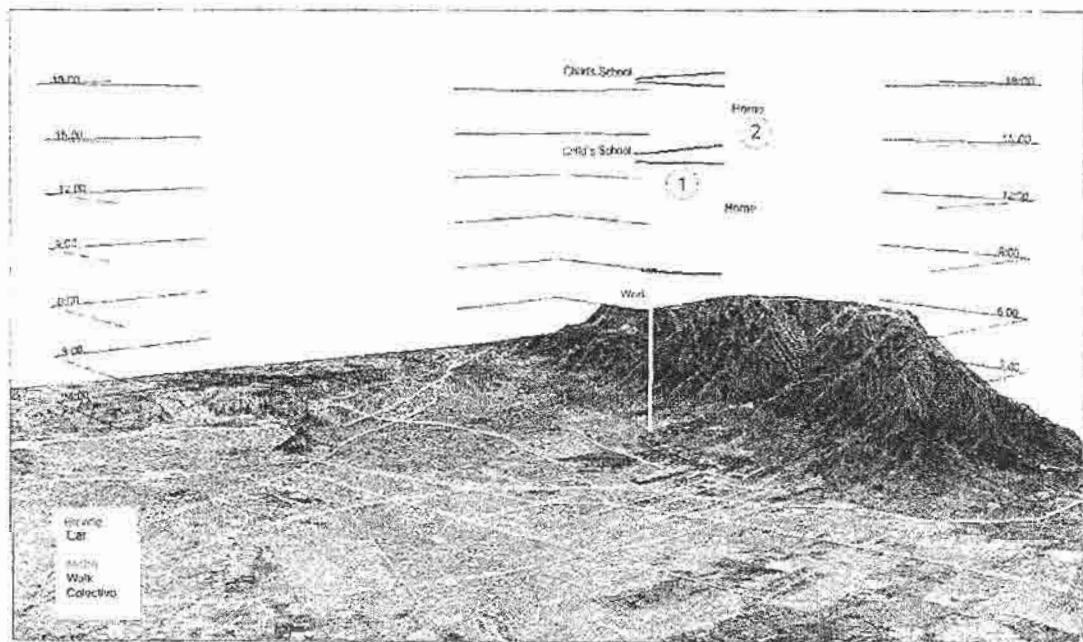


Figure 8.3 Francisco's journey

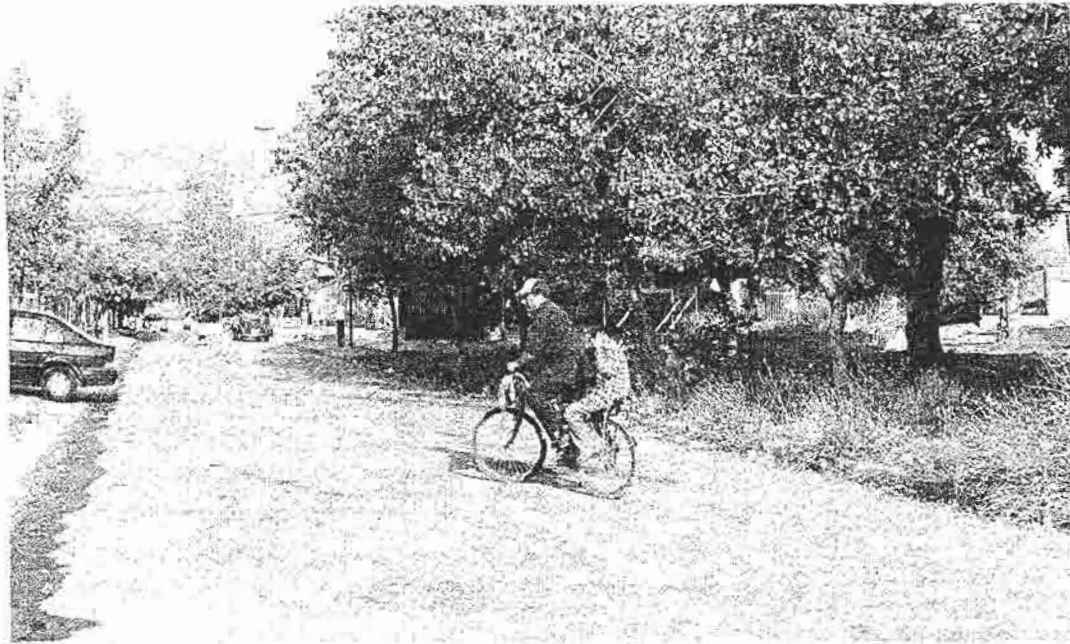


Figure 8.4 Francisco takes Sergio to school

His route is short, less than 4km, and it takes him about 20 minutes through the park, a football field, some empty lots, a shanty town, and then some higher income housing. The gated community where he works covers a large area; it can be entered from one street and exited on the next. When he comes back in the morning he sleeps until around 11:00am, prepares Sergio, feeds him, makes him do his homework, and by 2:00pm he takes him to a relatively close school on a 20 minute bicycle ride West of his house (See Station 1 Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4).

When he comes back he tries to sleep again from 3:00pm to 5:00pm, when he rides back to pick up Sergio, who gets out at 5:30pm. He then prepares his meal while Sergio watches a film, and cleans around the house until his wife Alejandra gets home around 7:30pm. He goes back to sleep until about 9:30pm when he gets ready for work again.

Francisco says he likes riding the bicycle, but it also tires him out:

Taking him there and back, it's two trips plus his weight, sometimes I go to the 14th,² or the *feria*³ on the bicycle, it's tiring ... But I don't take buses or

2 One of the main avenues in Santiago running north to south is Avenida Vicuña Mackenna, it starts at the centre of the city and is numbered by 35 stops until its end at the southern end of Santiago. The closest stop to these neighbourhoods is Paradero 14th. It is also the place where a major shopping mall (Mall Plaza Vespucio) was built around 1990. It has major supermarkets, cinema, shops, and is serviced by a Metro stop and major bus and *colectivo* lines. Surrounding this Mall, are major health centres, with doctors' offices concentrated along with major office buildings and Municipal offices.

3 An outdoor fruit and vegetable market.

colectivos,⁴ unless it's necessary ... It's cold at times riding, but I don't really have much choice because I don't have buses going there, I would have to take a *colectivo*, but they are not available at night. So I would have to walk and it could take me over an hour.

The daily chore of taking children to and from school has important implications in the daily life of urban dwellers, and in the case of Marta and Francisco also for the work decisions they make. Marta explains:

I worry about her [Patricia], you see, she's starting second grade and can't read very well yet and I think it's partly because she's alone all the time ... but it's hard, you see. I get home tired, the bus takes a long time, the traffic, then walking here ... by the time I get home at 9 ... it's too late, I have to feed her and it's too late to do homework, it's too late.

Marta's concerns oscillate between her daughter and her job. She knows there is no way she can stay at home, as she gets bored, and the money she makes helps at home. But she says she needs to be there for her daughter, unlike her own parents who sent her to a foster home when she was very young. She is thinking of quitting her job and finding another one closer to home to avoid travelling for four hours every day and spend that time with her daughter. However, even if she does manage to get a job close by, there still will not be anyone to pick Patricia up from school, and the money would not be as good as what she makes now. The irony is a painful one: Marta takes care of more affluent people's children, yet she does not have the social networks or the money to take care of her own.

Although the gender division of labor persists in Chile, and women often undertake a bigger burden in terms of the responsibility of raising children, men also get involved and also make decisions accordingly, like Francisco. When asked why he changed his job to be a security guard, he replies

Well once the construction was over, they started firing people, and my boss said, you know, you are the last one to fire, but they need a night guard here, and I thought of Sergio, always staying at other people's homes to take care of him, and I started seeing, maybe it'll be less money, but I can be with Sergio. So I took it, but only nights, no day shifts, just the night one ... Because we used to pay to leave Sergio at different homes, they don't take less than Ch\$120.000⁵ per month, because they are supposed to take care of him all day, and he's not easy, he has to go to the doctor a lot, he gets ill, and he has his ways, he can really tire you out, I prefer to earn a bit less, but be at home. Plus Patty is starting to be a young girl, and I have to keep an eye on her, no one knows how life is, she's

4 Colectivos are shared fixed route taxis.

5 Approximately GBE120.

very smart, but innocent ... Still, it's like I do two shifts, because in the morning I have to watch Sergio, take him to school.

Sleep deprivation and the physical hardship of cycling make the sustainability of this pace questionable, as Sergio gets bigger and Francisco older.

Marta's strategy to deal with a more comfortable ride is limited mainly to walking further to catch emptier less crowded bus. In the afternoon, she tries to arrange for her husband or friends take care of Patricia but her social network is not broad enough and thus she often ends up paying someone to pick her up. Marta faces temporal, organizational and financial barriers, as she needs to sort out her daughter's situation prior to setting off to work. This forces her to face rush hour in a system that does not operate adequately at such times. Her organizational barriers are based on her lacking the social networks to help her ease her responsibilities and thus her journey, either to take Patricia to school or pick her up. At times Ernesto does it, when he has night shifts. At other times a neighbor takes care of her, but they have to pay for this service. Double earning households invariably face the difficulties of having to leave their children with others.

The strategy Francisco's family uses for coping with their child who needs constant attention is having a "split shift parenting arrangement" (McDowell, Ward, Fagan, Perrons, and Ray 2006), as one of the parents is constantly with him. Alejandra also works cleaning a house close to where they live, but walking is too far and dangerous for her, so she takes a *colectivo*. She chose to work there as a strategy to be close to home in case of an emergency. The area where she works is dangerous at night, so she tries to come home early, but it is not always easy to leave work before 6:00pm when her boss arrives. The rigidity of Francisco's job (fixed hours of required presence at night) and Alejandra's daily job, allows this household to be able to take turns taking care of their child. Any other situation would require them to pay for a service that they cannot easily afford. This strategy also allows Francisco to be able to drop him off at school everyday, talk to the teachers, and take him to the doctors as many times as he is required in one week. The daily burden is on both of them, as Alejandra's work as she faces constant danger in the neighbourhood where she works, and on Francisco's health, as he looks at least 15 years older than his age. Moreover, the pace is also harmful on their relationship, as Alejandra constantly complains about not seeing him enough, as he usually goes to sleep when she arrives. His way of being connected to the needs of his child, the doctors, and the schools is by having such a job.

Marta does have time, but she is forced to waste much of it. In fact, the time spent on the bus is wasted time; she cannot sleep, read, or even look outside. Although urban laborers like Marta cross the city at least twice daily, their knowledge of it can be minimal because they seldom look outside. Often, although the same route is taken daily, passengers barely know where they are, the names of the streets, or what lies outside the bus. This is certainly the case for Marta, who has been taking the same route for over two years yet she does not know where she is, has never gotten off at a bus stop that is not her own, and barely looks outside

mostly because the bus is too overcrowded and the curtains shut. Although she crosses the city almost daily, she also skips it, completely confined inside the bus. She complains about the daily journey:

On the way there I can't read, I can't sleep, can't talk, don't even get to see outside because there are too many people. I really don't like it. I don't remember anything from the journey, nothing special, and nothing that calls my attention but there's really nothing to see, there's nothing about the journey that I like. It's boring. On the first bus on the way back when there are seats available, I want to fall asleep but the journey is too short, I start relaxing, get sleepy and by the time I fall asleep, I have to get off, it's too short, about 25 minutes, unless there is traffic, but normally it's 25 minutes. And then I take the other bus and it's too full to fall asleep.

Marta takes the same bus at least three times a week; she doesn't know the name of the streets or the actual route.

My journey is such a routine; everyday is the same that there really is nothing special about it ... I can't sit because it's too full. On the way there I'm one of the last ones off; most get off at the shopping mall. Some men work on construction sites, but otherwise it's mainly women on the bus, nanas.

The trip is also tiring, "we all do the same, alternate one foot to rest, especially in the afternoon. We carry each other's bags if one is sitting down, even if we don't know each other."

Francisco is limited in terms of the places he goes to, he has a job that he enjoys, encounters others that are different to him, and although everyone is polite to him at work, he does not really have the chance to mix with them, nor is he interested in it. Francisco's family area of routine circulation is limited to approximately a 5km radius, and although they enter higher income neighbourhoods their form of integration to these areas is functional in terms of employment. Their circulation area involves activities related to work, doctors' offices, markets and school. Their relations are limited to relations of employment and to a few relatives who live in their same neighbourhood. Their mobility scope is constrained, with very little possibilities of encountering new forms of socialization. Moreover, the places they circulate by are significant to them, but very similar to their own in terms of vulnerability and deterioration. Their barriers to mobility include organizational ones, mainly related to their son's activities. However, physical barriers are also present in their circulation routines, as due to physical barriers (river, shanty towns, bridges, or unconnected streets) they are not able to take direct routes and thus need to use bicycle or other forms of transportation which circumvent existing barriers. But perhaps their most insidious barrier is particularly time-related. They require constant coordination to manage their son's various activities and this leaves them restricted in their mobility.

For lower income groups, transport costs are an important mobility issue, as Marta explains: "I want to leave my job, because I spend too much time and money on transport. I spend about Ch\$1,500⁶ daily, it's a lot of money, but I don't get extra money for transport, I make Ch\$200,000⁷ monthly, and I take the transport from there, about Ch\$30,000⁸ a month. But I need daily cash; if not, I can't go out to work." Paying someone to take care of Patricia would cost almost half of what she makes. All areas of Marta's life are impacted by her mobility difficulties, making her decisions mobility dependent.

Francisco on the other hand, cycles everywhere and does not spend money on transportation. For Francisco the physical distance to his job becomes an opportunity, being able to cycle to work and be able to be close to his son is something that he values, and he forgoes extra pay, for the sake of being able to be with his son during the day. The organizational dimensions of his days make it difficult for him to sleep, as he is constantly moving around in order to take Sergio around. His job and lifestyle have had to find a solution to his highly mobile world, and the bicycle solves all his mobility problems, until he becomes too old to ride it or his son too big to be carried on it.

Marta's lack of social ties to contribute to the organization of her household life, along with her limited time availability, is linked to her gender responsibilities. This situation relates to Chant's (2007) discussion on the "feminization of poverty," which explains how women are overrepresented among the poor, and how women's poverty is raising in relation to men's, and this relates to women-headed households as the poorest of the poor. Chant criticizes this argument as offering a static view of poverty in terms of income, overemphasizing female-headed households, and neglecting men and specificities of gender inequality, and suggests looking instead at the "feminisation of responsibility and obligation" (Chant 2006: 206). This means that although the number of women working outside the home has risen, and men are increasingly active in household chores, the bulk of unpaid domestic and care work is still carried out by women. Like Marta, women are still responsible for household chores and childcare; this has an impact on the time available to carry out the activities they do, the decisions they make about employment and the way these organizational, time constraints, and responsibilities affect their mobility experience in a negative manner. This makes many women in low income households "cash poor" as well as "time poor", which leads them to being mobility poor.

Although it has been broadly recognized that gender differences generate different access to transport, affecting women in particular (Grieco, Pickup, and Whipp, 1989; Levy 1992; Turner and Grieco 2000), the complexity of everyday life means that solutions cannot be simple. For instance, providing childcare alone will not solve Marta's problem as someone would still have to take Patricia to

6 Chilean Pesos \$1500 is approximately £1.5.

7 Approximately £200.

8 Approximately £30.

school and be present for moments of crisis, like illness. On the days she needs to go to the doctor, she has to take a whole day off, as she does not know how long it will take her to be seen. Understanding this chain of activities would provide a better idea of the diverse amount of difficulties faced by women and men in urban settings.

For women like Marta leaving the house is a way of changing their life, of allowing them independence. For many women leaving the house going out is important because it means having a routine, making money, without having to stay at home, even if it means going out to do the same thing at someone else's house: clean and take care of children. Having money means more independence and it makes working very important. Thus for them the journey is a crossing, a gateway; unfortunately the mobile places they encounter along the way are often restricting and many experience feelings of incarceration on the move.

Conclusion

Public transport and transit infrastructure tend to allow for encounters of people who are alike. As such, urban infrastructures can be seen as a border. This is particularly interesting as different forms of infrastructure (transit, parks, roads, etc.) can be seen as a possibility of place enlargement, thus providing multiple opportunities for urban planning in the future. However, limited mobility or lack of mobility options can generate a sense of confinement typical of fixed places like the home, which is exacerbated when residential neighborhoods are in segregated areas. The situation worsens when places in the city are blocked off. The possibility of enlarging or confining mobile places depends on the modes of transportation, destinations, times, comfort, but also on the way people manage to appreciate what lies outside, or enjoy what occurs inside, while on the move.

Analyzing current forms of urban inequality from a mobility point of view highlights the complexity of the matter and captures a shift in the way urban reality is being experienced today. Leaving it to the market to resolve urban inconveniences results in extreme forms of uneven access to mobile practices, relations, and places. Yet little is known about how these urban mobile inequalities are experienced, or the specific strategies people use to overcome them. Exclusion on the move generates parallel cities, where the possibilities of encounter can become even more restricted.

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