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Creating Sustainable Cities through Cycling Infrastructure? Learning from Insurgent Mobilities

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Abstract: As policy makers grapple with rapid motorization processes, cycling facilities are gaining new urgency, offering non-polluting and affordable alternatives to automobility. At the same time, urban sustainability paradigms tend to focus on purely technical solutions to transportation challenges, leaving questions of history and social power aside. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork in Aguascalientes Mexico, this article contributes to the transportation and mobility justice literature by focusing on the work of social movements in confronting a variety of challenges in the provision of active-transportation services. First, this research explores how social movements express and negotiate transportation-justice concerns to government and planning authorities. Next, I build on the concept of insurgent citizenship to highlight the processes through which residents contest ongoing injustices and formulate alternatives for building inclusive cities. From the creation of makeshift cycling lanes in underserved urban areas to the search for socially just alternative to policing, social movements are forging new pathways to re-envision sustainable transportation systems. These insurgent forms of citymaking—understood here as insurgent mobilities—underscore the creative role of citizens in producing the city as well as the enormous amount of care work involved in these processes.

Keywords: cycling; social movements; mobility justice; ethnography; insurgent citizenship; sustainable transportation; Mexico

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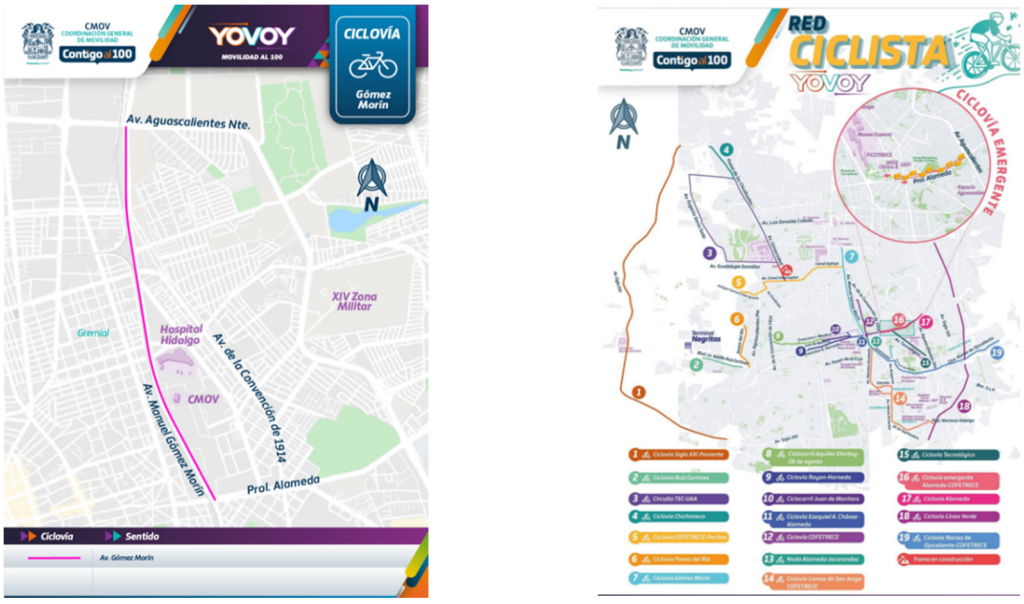
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1. Introduction

In March 2018, I joined a group of bicycle advocates in Aguascalientes, Mexico in an impromptu meeting regarding a series of lighting disappearances on one of the city's principal cycling facilities: *Ciclovía Gómez Morín* (Figures 1 and 2)—a bicycle–pedestrian path on the outer-eastern edge of the city center. We had just attended a celebration organized by the municipal government for the planned expansion of this path; however, the ongoing blackouts raised new concerns for activists, ranging from visibility to personal security. I remember standing together under the streetlamp's darkness for some time, trying to make sense of how the lights' solar-chargers, and at times the entire poles, had been taken mysteriously at night. Rafael, a long-time bicyclist in the city, discussed a particularly devasting mugging that he experienced on this facility at night, which left him seriously injured and bikeless for several months. Araceli, a leader in the bicycle movement, reminded us that these issues have been particularly challenging for women commuters amidst a rising crisis of gender-based violence: "We have to worry about who might be lurking in the bushes," she explained, so "sometimes I'd rather take the risk and ride out in the street with the cars instead of riding on the dark path." I also remember how fear crept around us as twilight loomed, leading our discussion to an abrupt end.



Figure 1. Missing solar charger for light, Ciclovía* Gómez Morín. Photo provided by the author. * In Mexico (and in this paper), the term *ciclovía* is used to refer broadly to a variety of bicycle infrastructure, including cycling lanes, bicycle–pedestrian paths, and shareways. This term is used differently in other areas of Latin America, such as Colombia, where a *ciclovía* refers more specifically to a car-free day (which is generally called a *paseo dominical* in Mexico).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 2. (**a**) Map of Ciclovía Gómez Morín, as of February 2021. (**b**) Aguascalientes' expanded "yo voy" cycling network as of February 2021. According to the state government, the network now encompasses over 100 km of cycling facilities; however, it remains highly fragmented. Images provided by: *Coordinación General de Movilidad*, Aguascalientes.

As we hurried away from the development that evening, questions about the infrastructure's sustainability lingered. While the path was developed as a primary route within

the city's active-transportation network (Figure 2b), the ongoing raids of its solar-powered lighting as well as the muggings that many active commuters have experienced have contributed to a widespread avoidance of this facility at night. Yet for activists such as Araceli and Rafael, these problems extend far beyond a few broken lights, requiring attention to a broad spectrum of social justice concerns. How can these social movement actors help to inform our understanding of sustainable transportation development, including the more precarious aspects of bicycle travel?

Sustainable transportation is broadly understood as networks intended to support mobilities that are environmentally responsible, economically viable, and socially just [1]. Cycling has been defined as one—if not the most—sustainable urban transport mode given its feasibility for shorter and medium-distance trips that are too long to cover on foot [2,3]. Building on speculative theorizing on post-car futures [4], recent scholarship has emphasized the power of bicycle-utopian thinking in the transition to more sustainable urban futures [5,6]. Thus, sustainable cycling infrastructure can be understood as both solid material forms intended to facilitate bicycle travel and prominent imaginary constructs where expectations about environmental futures are played out. Yet beyond the immediate physical implementation of cycling infrastructure, and beyond the environmental imaginaries unfurled in this process, the case of Ciclovía Morín points to the need for a careful assessment of the vulnerabilities that can characterize cycling facilities and the work of local communities in contending with these instabilities.

Questions on infrastructural deficits have been gaining momentum in the social, public health, and engineering sciences [7,8]. Blackouts, breakages, and other shortfalls have surfaced infrastructure in unexpected ways—producing a type of infrastructural inversion [9] that highlights socio-material arrangements that often remain submerged, un-noticed, or neglected [10,11]. Deterioration accentuates how social exclusions are refracted through uneven access to infrastructural provision and maintenance [12,13]. In many Latin American cities, persistent infrastructural breakdown has become the norm as residents contend with constant deferrals and have to improvise in order to obtain the resources and transport necessary for daily life [14–16]. The pilfering of Ciclovía Morín's lighting, and the frequent nocturnal robberies that have ensued, is one example of *infrastructural violence*—a concept that underscores the ways that broad social inequities become operational through urban infrastructure [17]. From this perspective, the crisis of urban violence currently threatening Aguascalientes' cycling facilities does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it needs to be understood in relation to longstanding mobility injustices, including those relating to police brutality and other forms of *systemic oppression*. Theorizing on transportation resourcefulness [18] and grassroots knowledge [19] further help to counter dystopic characterizations of infrastructural degradation in resource-poor settings, bringing greater attention to the creative advocacy and provisional strategies offered by everyday citizens in such contexts.

This article contributes to the transportation and mobility justice literature by focusing on the work of social movements in Aguascalientes in confronting a variety of challenges in the provision of active-transportation services. Given that much of the Latin American literature on bicycle infrastructure has focused on capital and megacities, Aguascalientes offers an unconventional site for exploring cycling socialites in a rapidly urbanizing intermediate city. Despite the city's strong bicycle history and the prevalence of cycling as a major mode of transportation until well into the 1980s [20], the state and municipal governments pursued a rapid neoliberal growth model, including the vast expansion of motorways as well as an increase in direct foreign investment and automobile manufacturing in the city [21,22]. These changes accelerated the expansion of the city's urban area, the growth of new urban peripheries, along with the swift development of new 'gated communities' [22,23]. Edith Jiménez [24] explains that this process has largely taken shape under the influence of a more dirigiste state government and in the creation of land reserves mainly on the eastern and outer edges of the city, allocated for low-income housing, contrasted by the parallel development of high-income enclaves on the city's northern and western

sides. This accelerated pattern of segregated urban growth has further exacerbated existing socio-economic disparities while generating new mobility related inequalities through uneven access to private transport, deteriorating investments in public transit, and the continued privileging of motor-vehicle infrastructure.

Thus, critical thinking on the relationship between cycling infrastructure and urban gentrification [25–27] requires some adjusting in this context. Although some large Latin-American municipalities such as Mexico City show degrees of gentrification [28,29], there is reason to doubt that these processes will be replicated in small and intermediate cities, as often predicted. Latin American cities have not transformed into command-and-control centers of the global economy as in many gentrified cities but have instead retained many of their older functions [30]. That is, gentrification has not simply "lagged behind" in many Latin-American contexts (as commonly posited), but rather, it seems to have configured different forms. Thus, the recent development of sustainable transport policies in Aguascalientes (including new mobility laws privileging active travel) need to be understood in terms of more disperse spatialities of social segregation outside of the urban center [22] ongoing processes of political domination [31] as well as complex patterns of urban contestation. While issues of infrastructural defacement, theft, and conflict have undeniably emerged as a part of these processes, so have collective-citizenship mobilizations pursuing social and mobility justice. The city is home to a thriving network of bicycle movements and active-transportation advocates from a diversity of backgrounds, working not only to expand the scope of bicycle facilities but also to widen civil society participation in transportation planning and to promote an intermodal focus that supports diverse accessibility needs. These movements include *Aguas con la Bici*, *Aguas con las Chicas*, *Bicicálidos*, and *Colectivo Ciclista*, among several others [32].

After discussing theoretical and methodological underpinnings, this paper details how social movements express and negotiate sustainable transportation and social justice concerns to government and planning authorities. Next, I discuss the ways these movements extend mobility-justice objectives through a variety of alternative-placemaking practices and collective care ethics. Lastly, I reflect on the opportunities and challenges of this work and on areas for future research.

2. Ethnographic Engagements with Transportation Justice

Broadly, transportation justice refers to the fair distribution of transport harms and benefits across different members of society [33,34]. As a theoretical lens, transportation justice underscores how transportation systems are co-constituted in relation to hierarchies of social class [35], gender [36], racialization [37], and (dis)ability [38]. With roots in social justice movements, this theorizing brings much needed attention to the social aspects of sustainability. Ersilia Verlinghieri explains that "over time the general focus on environmental, economic and social sustainability has assumed more specific targets and, in most planning and policy arenas, the social sphere and the original commitment to justice have been progressively left aside" [18]. Predominately reflecting a neoliberal model, sustainable transport agendas have come to largely center on macroeconomic-growth objectives [39] as well as the principles of technocracy and modernization [40–43]. Lake Sagaris et al. observe that one of the principal reasons for the slow uptake and follow-through in sustainable transport infrastructure is precisely this lack of attention to the social justice dimensions of sustainability: "This raises the question of whether environmental or economic sustainability are possible, without a strong social component" [44].

Recent theorizing on mobility justice further helps to connect the extended spatial and temporal dimensions of these discussions, including multi-scalar governmentalities and the legacies of colonial violence [45–47]. Mimi Sheller discusses some of the limitations of sedentary theories of justice, arguing that the new mobilities paradigm "enables the development of a mobile ontology which not only tracks the effects of inequalities in mobility across various connected sites and scales, but also shows how justice itself is a mobile assemblage of contingent subjects, enacted contexts, and fleeting moments of practice and

political engagement" [45]. These insights help animate emergent mobility struggles and interrelations, calling for "recognition, participation, deliberation, and procedural fairness to be up for discussion, adjustment, and repair" [45].

This paper builds on these understandings from an anthropological and social movement perspective, bringing specific attention to local mobility struggles and forms of collective action. This study is the result of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Aguascalientes between 2017 and 2018, drawing principally from fieldnote excerpts from participant-observation activities with local social movements. Following scholarship on critical, feminist ethnography [48,49], this study engages with the social movement praxis as a way of "staying with the trouble" [50], enabling the emergence of companion concepts [51] and opportunities to co-labor [52] in movements pursuing more livable futures.

A critical anthropological approach to urban studies involves examining with care the forms of contestation and negotiation that constitute the remaking of cities [53,54]. Specifically, this research builds on the concept of insurgent citizenship [55] to highlight the processes through which residents contest ongoing injustices and formulate alternatives for building inclusive cities. From the creation of makeshift cycling lanes in underserved urban areas to the search for socially just alternative to policing, social movements are forging new pathways to re-envision sustainable transportation systems. These insurgent forms of citymaking—understood here as insurgent mobilities—underscore the creative role of citizens in producing the city as well as the enormous amount of care work involved in these processes.

3. Building Sustainable Cycling Cities? Toward a Mobility-Justice Approach

Over the time I spent working with social movements in Aguascalientes, problems on and surrounding Ciclovía Morín were a constant topic of discussion. The frequent blackouts and robberies [56,57] in many ways exemplified the state of insecurity and fear that many active travelers experience on a daily and nightly basis in the city—concern that evidently extended beyond Morín's edges to include problems of inadequate and fragmented cycling lanes in other areas of the city; public-transit divestment and inaccessibility; difficult road crossings; an increase in cycling and pedestrian fatalities (with pedestrians and cyclists accounting together for over half of traffic fatalities in the state [58,59]); harassment and violence against women; police brutality and widespread distrust of police [60]; as well as a variety of related issues. Perhaps questions on how to save Ciclovía Morín became so prevalent in this context because this infrastructure had, in contrast to other areas of the city, received an enormous amount of capital investment and expert know-how. As per conventional frameworks and metrics in transportation planning, this cycling facility should work. Thus, the paradox of Morín's fragile existence continually surfaced in discussions between activists and local authorities, although social movement advocacy was certainly was not limited to this cycling facility.

As a part of my research, I often tagged along with activists to a variety of formal and informal discussions with municipal and state authorities. We often reported issues such as missing lighting at *Miércoles Ciudadano* (citizenship Wednesday)—a weekly event in which municipal authorities open their halls to the public for discussions on a variety of issues of concern (Figure 3a). We also frequently attended meetings with the Municipal Planning Institute (IMPLAN by its Spanish acronym) and with state government officials. These meetings provided ongoing opportunities to contribute to revisions of the new mobility laws at the state and municipal levels as well as to raise concerns regarding how road space is allocated, the need for a more equitable distribution of public transit and active-transportation facilities, as well as broader community access to transportation decision making.

Municipal administrators and planners were extremely receptive and cooperative in their efforts to address many of these issues. From what I could see, our reports of missing lighting on Ciclovía Gómez Morín were efficiently reported and expedited (e.g., Figure 3b). The (2019) municipal mobility regulation, designed in consultation with civil-

society associations and other residents, expresses a clear directive to give priority to sustainable transportation modes, especially walking and cycling. The regulation also strongly emphasizes sustainable transportation as that which supports residents' "ability to move efficiently, safely, equitability and healthy," including "appropriate participatory measure to preserve the ecological balance, protect the environment and the use of natural resources" (my translation). In an interview with IMPLAN, representatives strongly confirmed this commitment to collaborative planning. The city of Aguascalientes also provided strong financial and organizational support for the 10th National Urban Cycling Congress in Aguascalientes in 2018 (organized by the organizations Aguas con la Bici and Aguas con las Chicas), with transportation equity serving as the key theme (Figure 4). These conversations attest to the dedication of many municipal planners to build more equitable transportation systems—a process that has led to a significant expansion of the city's cycling network in recent years (as shown in Figure 2).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 3. (**a**) Miércoles Ciudadano; (**b**) Repaired lighting on Ciclovía Gómez-Morín following report. Photos provided by the author.

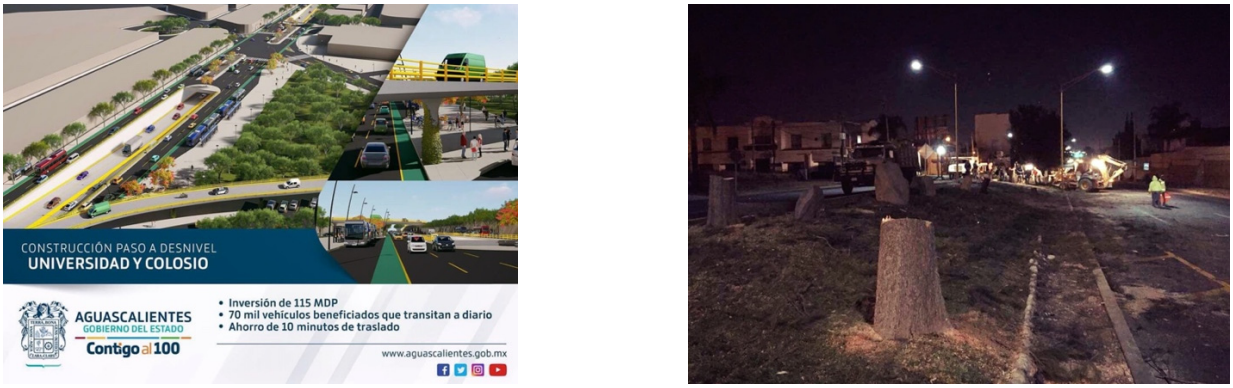


(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 4. (**a**,**b**) 10th National Urban Cycling Congress, Aguascalientes, Mexico, 2018. Photos provided by *Aguas con la bici*.

In theory, these commitments to equitable planning are also present at the state government level, with the (2018) new mobility law explicitly calling for community participation. However, in practice, these commitments have been met with a series of ongoing blockades, including an unparalleled impetus to "resolve" traffic congestion issues through road-widening projects and the construction of multi-level expressways (e.g., Figure 5a) as well as the continued reliance on anti-pedestrian/anti-cycling bridges that privilege efficient automobility over sustainable transport modes (e.g., Figure 6b). In a meeting with social movements, representatives from the state government affirmed their commitment to sustainable transportation but then mentioned that "first we have to finish building the new elevated highways," with the intention of managing the city's growing

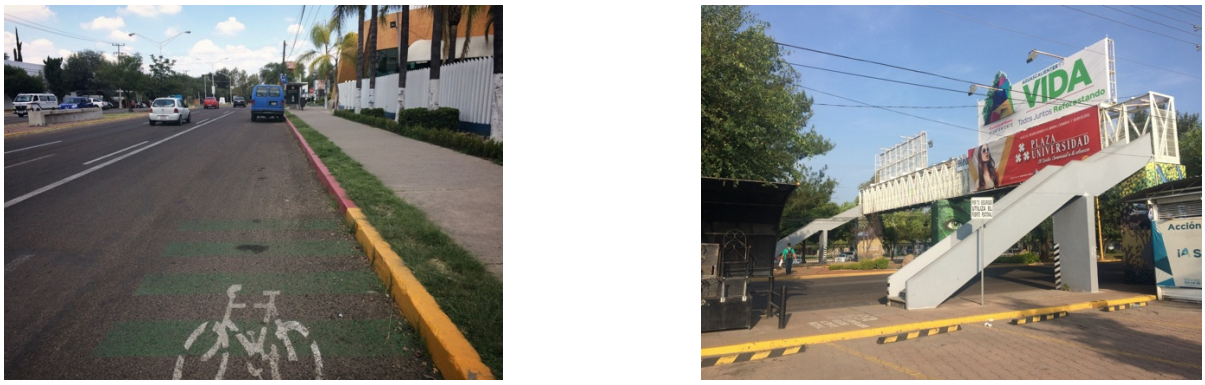
traffic issues with increased investments in motor-vehicle infrastructure. For activists such as Araceli, this strategy is completely illogical: "that's like saying you want to lose weight and then going out and buying bigger pants!" Although state-government advertisements depict these infrastructure projects in harmony with the local environment (Figure 5a), these projects have tended to involve the removal of greenspace (e.g., Figure 5b).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 5. (**a**) State government ad for expressways; (**b**) Tree removal for road-expansion project, 2018. Photo provided by the author.

These issues are of course not limited to the case of Aguascalientes, as congestion-mitigation strategies continue to dominate transportation planning in many areas of the globe, while treating issues of traffic safety, environmental costs, and the needs of under-served populations only marginally [61]. These issues have been particularly inequitable in the case of Aguascalientes, where the expansion of motor-vehicle infrastructure has served to directly challenge and fragment the city's carefully planned active-transportation network (e.g., Figure 6).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 6. (**a**) Fragmented cycling lane; (**b**) One of many anti-pedestrian bridges* in Aguascalientes. *The term "anti-pedestrian bridge" was coined by Mexico's Liga Peatonal (Pedestrian League) to refer to steep and often inaccessible pedestrian overpasses that privilege motor-vehicle traffic while creating an uninviting space for pedestrians and cyclists alike. For more information on anti-pedestrian bridges and the major accessibility challenges the pose for active commuters see: [62–66]. Photos provided by the author.

Although public involvement has been solicited to some extent by the state government as per the new mobility law, "participation" mechanisms have generally been pro forma. For example, when social movements attempted to participate in the state government's "collaborative" oversight committee on the new mobility law, they were told that they did not qualify based on a number of last-minute restrictions such as number of years as a civil society association. Given that the state government of Aguascalientes

controls decision making on major roadways, the municipal government's sustainable transportation plans and participatory initiatives have often been encumbered by the state.

These processes severely limit the potential of articles relating to "community participation" and "participatory governance" in the new mobility laws. For social movement activists, interactions with the state government have been particularly disheartening and frustrating. Local activists have invested an extraordinary amount of time in active-travel initiatives, often taking time off of work and biking extensive distances to participate on a completely voluntary basis in efforts such as cyclist counts, multi-day design workshops, and other planning meetings. In interviews, some activists noted that they felt "taken advantage of" by state authorities who have received pay and credit for social movement work.

These types of public consultation measures with significant limits of community participation are generally unlikely to affect ultimate decisions and can thus negatively impact transportation-equity objectives. Social movements in Aguascalientes continue to question and contest these forms of political exclusion. As one activist questioned: "Why do they always say, 'we want to hear your concerns' but never 'we've heard your concerns and are making systemic changes,' ... like tearing down the anti-pedestrian bridges and building safe street crossings." Activists continue to write op-eds and collaborate in other new stories to contest the transportation status quo, reporting issues such as the fragmentation of cycling facilities [67,68], cycling and pedestrian insecurities [69] and car-centrism [70,71]. Given that sustainable transportation modes (including walking, cycling, and public transit) are the majority modes of transportation in Aguascalientes [72], the continued privileging of motor-vehicle infrastructure is particularly inequitable in this context. Activists have also called for greater attention to the root causes of urban violence, stemming from rising socio-economic inequalities and a variety of other interconnected issues. These movements help to call into question the efficacy of top–down decision-making paradigms and the tokenization of community participation.

Case studies increasingly demonstrate that transportation equity cannot be achieved if institutional procedures continue to reproduce domination [73–75]. Thus, recent theorizing has underscored the need to radically shift focus in urban planning from transportation equity to also include transportation and mobility justice [34,46,76,77]. With a strong emphasis on feminist theory, this shift helps to disrupt political philosophy's top–down understanding of justice [78], showing how institutional obstacles must be dismantled that prevent comprehensive participation in decision-making processes [79]. Based on these understandings, theories of mobility justice help to emphasize broader objectives in addition to transportation equity, including those related to *procedure*— "the nature of decision making and governance, including the level of participation, inclusiveness, and influence participants can wield"—and *recognition*—"acknowledgment of and respect for the rights, needs, values, understandings, and customs of groups involved in, or affected by, decision making and governance" [47].

AC Davidson [80] observes that many recent mobility studies share a clear message that radical change is needed in transportation structures to work toward more just and sustainable futures, yet greater elaboration is needed on what radical approaches to sustainable mobility might look like. Alex Karner et al. [77] discuss society-centric approaches to justice as those that consider a broader range of actors, practices, and forms knowledge. Society-centric approaches can help to shift the focus outside of mainstream institutions to better understand the work of social movements and other residents in contesting ongoing mobility injustices [81,82] and by and initiating alternative placemaking processes [83]. In the following section, I contribute to these discussions through an analysis of the agency of social movements in Aguascalientes in provoking counter-hegemonic and imaginative ways of enabling sustainable mobilities.

4. Learning from Insurgent Mobilities

Aguascalientes is home to an especially vibrant assortment of social movements promoting sustainable transportation, including at least six bicycling associations, a number of public-transit activists, and a newly formed pedestrian rights group. The Municipal Planning Institute has highlighted the city's bicycle movements as a positive example of citizen participation, advocating for more inclusive cities, environmental justice, and human rights [32]. Aguascalientes' first cycling facilities were made possible thanks to these social movement activists, who I'm told initially pieced together their extra pesos to buy paint to create makeshift lanes in key areas of the city—a process that eventually led to greater buy-in from the municipal and state authorities. How can these movements' ongoing strategies help inform a situated understanding of struggles for mobility justice?

4.1. Reclaiming the Streets

In Aguascalientes, a series of weekly rodadas is at the heart of sustainable transportation activism (e.g., Figure 7). Much has been written on critical mass and related activism in different parts of the world, including its different meanings as an expression of collective decision making, celebration, participation, direct action, and cyclists' right to the city e.g., [84–88]. From my experience working with social movements in Aguascalientes, I can say that there is something quite special about the rodadas in the city. The ride brings together thousands of participants from across the city and surrounding towns, including strong participation from families with children. Similar to the rodada, the organizers are also quite diverse, including participation from domestic workers and food-industry workers in leadership roles. In some cases, participants have been inspired to start critical-mass activities in their own towns, with smaller rodadas popping up in surrounding agricultural areas such as San Francisco de los Romo.



(**a**) (**b**) (**c**) (**d**)

Figure 7. (**a**–**d**) Rodadas organized by Aguas con la Bici and Aguas con las Chicas. Photos provided by the author.

Participants from the city of Aguascalientes often expressed to me the importance of the rides not only as spaces of enjoyment, play, and community building but also "as a way of reclaiming the streets" in the face of urban violence and insecurity. Riding next to Ciclovía Morín one night during a rodada, a volunteer once told me, "How cool is it to be out here at night and feel totally safe with all these people!" Organizers often mention that the reception from the wider community to the rides, including car drivers, has often been quite positive—a dynamic that organizers attribute to the city's strong cycling history. The rodadas have also become spaces of lively artistic expression and creativity (e.g., Figure 7).

4.2. Remembering Cycling Fatalities and the Movement for Safe Streets

Amidst a rise in cycling fatalities [58,59], social movements have also been at the forefront of calling attention to systemic issues in road safety management. In Mexico, the management and reporting of traffic collisions, particularly those involving cyclists and pedestrians, has become quite controversial. Public health experts note that although Mexico's mortality database is considered acceptable by the World Health Organization, it possesses problems regarding the classification of deaths in certain codes, suggesting that the real magnitude of road-traffic injuries and fatalities is severely underestimated [89]. Researchers explain that the number of traffic fatalities is likely much higher than officially reported given that pedestrians and cyclists who die in ambulances and in hospitals in Mexico (rather than at the scene of the collision) often become "garbage data" in official reports and are not included in the statistics on traffic fatalities:

> "This study shows that the actual burden of road traffic mortality in Mexico as reported by nationally collected data is underestimated by 27 to 34 percent due to inappropriate and nonspecific ICD-10 coding of deaths. These differences have potential implications in terms of health planning and resource allocation for specific prevention strategies targeting the most vulnerable road user groups." [90]

The mortality and disability rates associated with traffic collisions have been devastating: "the Mexican response has focused on vehicle occupants while overlooking vulnerable road users and has prioritized strategies with limited effectiveness" [91]. Under the guidance of concerned paramedics and health workers, local organizations and social movements in Aguascalientes have been working to help planners to re-calculate and map these traffic fatalities, using local news reports and a WhatsApp messaging group. By better mapping these issues and the infrastructural problems at the sites of the collisions, advocates hope to systematically address road safety issues for vulnerable road users.

Social movements have elicited other insurgent practices around these issues (e.g., Figure 8), such as memorializing cycling fatalities with ghost bicycles and building adjacent memorials at the scene of the collision with the victim's families. For many families, building these small memorials—called capillitas—is a significant part of observing the passing of a family member. According to popular belief, the abrupt and violent nature of death by road collision evokes a specific type of haunting and requires additional attention and care. The memorial-building events that I attended were times of important connection between the families of victims and activists. The activists that I spoke to also discussed how these memorials can serve as a type of preventative measure by highlighting problematic road areas and reminding commuters to drive with caution. These memorials have at times been torn down (sometimes by authorities or local business owners), making their existence a matter of continuous negotiation and collective care.

In at least one case, a memorial-building event led to important clues about a collision. As activists went to borrow a ladder from a local business for hanging the ghost bike, they were offered surveillance video footage of the collision by office workers, being told that the police had not come to collect it, and they were worried that it would be automatically erased from the system at the end of the week. This encounter led to important evidence for the victim's family that might not have been made available otherwise.



Figure 8. Event during rodada on the day of the dead (2017), recognizing cycling fatalities. Photo provided by the author.

4.3. Mobilizing Conflict Transformation and Safe Space

While these social movements are not free of disagreement and frictions (including conflicts between and within movements), they are working to find new ways to mediate and transform these conflicts. Organizers that I worked with often talked about some of the heated conflicts they have experience with activists from other cycling associations, including disagreements about some tactics being "too confrontational", while other activists at times accusing certain movements as being "overly polite" or "too cooperative" with authorities to adequately address transportation injustices. However, most of the activists that I spoke to seemed to concur that although they significantly disagree with other groups on some topics, each movement plays a unique role in mobility-justice advocacy, with some working alongside planners and others playing more adversarial roles.

Some of the most insightful types of insurgent organizing that I witnessed revolved around issues of safe space and conflicts within specific bicycle associations. During a retreat with the national cycling network, we had extensive talks about the importance of having ongoing discussions about safe space and what this means to different participants (e.g., Figure 9). For many organizations, it has been important to reaffirm this commitment to inclusive and anti-oppressive practices by adding items such as "no one is the boss here: we are a cooperative" and "no one is more valuable because they have more money." These discussions were helpful in the months to come, as a certain amount of conflict is to be expected in such diverse organizations. In the movements I worked with, we sometimes spent an extensive amount of our meeting time to address interpersonal conflicts on issues ranging from salary differences between different organizing members at their respective jobs (although no activists receive pay for their work in the bicycle movement), or whether or not participants in the movement should have to pay a membership fee—debates that always seemed to return to a consensus that "participants should never be charged" but that provided important opportunities for people with dissenting opinions to be heard.

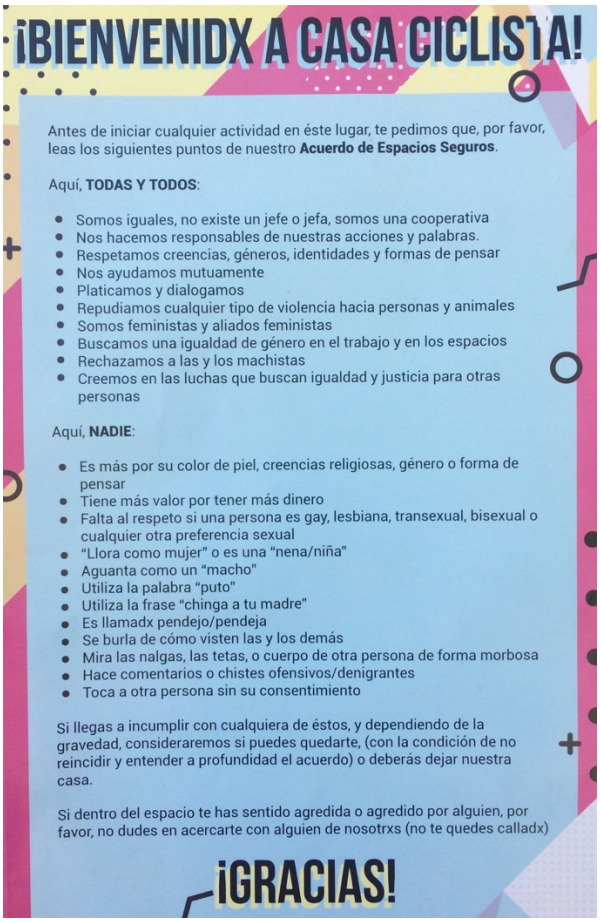


Figure 9. Safe space agreement.

These debates also led to a series of conflict-transformation workshops organized by social workers in the bicycle movement. In contrast to dominant approaches to conflict "resolution," a transformative approach acknowledges that conflicts happen for a reason, emphasizing nonviolence as way of life:

> "Conflict transformation is more than a set of specific techniques. It is about a way of looking and seeing, and it provides a set of lenses through which we make sense of social conflict. . . . First, we need a lens to see the immediate situation. Second, we need a lens to see past the immediate problems and view the deeper relationship patterns that form the context of the conflict. This goes beyond finding a quick solution to the problem at hand, and seeks to address what is happening in human relationships at a deeper level. Third, we need a lens that helps us envision a framework that holds these together and creates a platform to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship. From this platform, parties can begin to find creative responses and solutions." [92]

These trainings proved invaluable in understanding a variety of conflicts in the months to come through a transformative lens.

Some of the more intense aspects of these discussions revolved around instances of sexual harassment and threats of physical violence against some women participants of the rodadas. As the victims of this harassment expressed that they did not feel comfortable or safe going to the police about these issues, the lead organizers of the movement were asked to step in. From what I could see, organizers helped to manage such situations with great care, working with the affected parties to ensure that they could continue to feel safe while attending the group rides, meeting at length with the perpetrators to ensure that the threats would not continue and so that they could also obtain the mental-health

support they needed, taking phone calls from participants regarding issues of harassment, at times in the middle of the night, in addition to a variety of other tasks engaging with conflict-transformation and intersectional feminism in meaningful ways.

Although I never witnessed these interventions being expressed in abolitionist terms, at least not explicitly, they do speak to the need to better acknowledge and address systemic issues of policing—problems that have a led to a situation in which residents widely distrust and feel unsafe around the police. Activists are well aware that recent conflict-transformation strategies do not come near to providing comprehensive community-safety solutions needed to fill the gaps left by repressive policing. During my fieldwork, activists discussed a number of concerns that stemmed from conflict-transformation interventions, including: "how can we get more training to deal with these issues?"; "we can't keep doing this on our own"; "how [if asked] would it be possible respond to issues of domestic violence?"; and how would we deal with issues of violence or repression that directly involve the police? Social movement efforts in mobilizing conflict transformation workshops and other forms of support are undeniably partial in this context. Nevertheless, these strategies attest to a strong ethics of mutual care in the face of these issues based on recognition of diverse concerns and forms of knowledge. Here, feminist notions of safe space have taken on a vital mobile relationality, inciting nascent transformations and constellations of care.

These initiatives, among many others, speak to the power and potential of insurgent forms of citymaking. As James Holston explains, "insurgent citizenships confront the entrenched with alternative formulations of citizenship; in other words, that their conflicts are clashes of citizenship and not merely idiosyncratic or instrumental protest" [55]. The notion of insurgent citizenship also responds critically to the neoliberal agenda of dominance through tokenistic forms of inclusion, enlivening unconventional forms of placemaking that are counter-hegemonic, transgressive, and imaginative [93].

I suggest the concept of insurgent mobilities to bring theorizing on insurgent citizenship and mobility justice into deeper conversation. Mobility rights organizing can give rise to a diverse set of sustainable design practices, creating more inclusive spaces for discussion on issues of social and transportation justice. They reflect a type of prefigurative politics [94,95]—a process through which social movements express the political 'ends' of their actions through their 'means', or where they create alternative social arrangements. Such perspectives bring into view questions of social resistance to entrenched forms of political exclusion through a collective politics of outrage [96]. Mobility rights movements—including their inherent conflicts and unconventional negotiations—provide an especially crucial site for reconsidering problems in sustainable transportation development, moving past sedentary institutional politics toward transformative care practices and dialectics of mobility justice.

5. Discussion and Areas for Future Research

Sustainability has been proposed as a necessary shift for transport planning, stressing the importance of social, environmental, and economic transformations [97]. However, critical scholarship is increasingly showing how this concept requires deep rethinking to better challenge the transportation status quo and the climate catastrophe [40,44,47,98]. This article has elaborated on these debates, beginning with the paradoxical case of Ciclovía Gómez Morín—an infrastructure that has received a disproportionate amount of investment at the same times as it has experienced an uneven level of deterioration and insecurity. This case helps to unsettle some of the universal theorizing around sustainable cycling infrastructure, contributing to discussions on the need for situated understandings of mobility practices, politics, and exclusions [99–110]. Building on transportation-justice theorizing, it further highlights the work of social movements in pursuing transportation improvements through official political channels and underscores the need for a meaningful reorientation of planning practices around transportation-justice principals. Through the lens of mobility justice and insurgent citizenship, this case also brings together diverse social movement struggles and mobilities, pointing to insurgent visions for just mobility

futures. The strength of insurgent mobilities, I argue, lies as much in what they prefigure through processual and transformative connections as it does in what they help to concretize in terms of urban policy and infrastructure.

Engaging with sustainable mobility struggles from an ethnographic standpoint exposes what some authors call 'wicked' or 'messy' problems [111,112], referring to complex dilemmas in which clear-cut solutions are missing and purely technical fixes have proven inadequate [113]. Ciclovía Gómez Morín is case in point, where a high-investment cycling enclave continues to be destabilized amidst a context of growing socio-economic inequality, urban violence, and a wider privileging of motor-vehicle infrastructure. This case also accentuates some of the limits of state-centric infrastructural thinking on issues ranging from blackouts to traffic congestion. It illustrates the need for greater attention to increasing accessibility for active travelers and public-transit users, particularly for underserved population groups [33,75,114]. The climate emergency, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, have raised the stakes for questioning the ongoing impetus to build car-centric transportation systems that perpetuate inequalities and exclusions [47]. These issues indicate a need for new ways of thinking and engaging with participatory frameworks to make cities more accessible for active travelers, public-transit users, and intermodal commuters [44]. As John Stehlin explains, the massive political changes needed to "make good" on the social justice components of sustainable transportation discourse—requiring changes that reach far beyond bicycle infrastructure—have only just begun [115].

Recent theorizing on transport and mobility justice provides useful discussions on additional areas for future research. Karner el al., rightfully note that society-centric approaches to transportation justice also have limitations, such as "confrontational strategies can weaken relationship with state" and in some cases "privileges the most militant voices" [77]. Despite these challenges, the authors note that "movements for transportation justice must envision solutions and strategies that move beyond those promulgated solely by the state" [77]. Surprisingly, the unpaid and often underacknowledged work of local activists and other concerns citizens is not included in this discussion, including burdens in terms of time, resources, and travel. Similarly, Ersilia Verlinghieri and Tim Schwanen call for greater research on caring justice, understood as "an ongoing and dialogical negotiation characterized by openness, responsiveness, and commitment to multiple voices and needs" [47]. Yet, the authors only mention unpaid care work in passing reference to Marie Gilow's [116] discussion on domestic mobility work. Further research is needed to better acknowledge the unpaid and devalued labor of other actors as determinates of mobility injustice, including in relation to community work in "collaborative" planning practices. As Maria Puig explains,

> "Caring . . . is a practice that most often involves asymmetry: some get paid (or not) for doing the care so that others can forget how much they need it. To represent matters of care is an aesthetic and political move in the way of representing things that problematizes the neglect of caring relationalities in an assemblage. Here the meaning of care for knowledge producers might involve a modest attempt to share the burden of stratified worlds. This commitment is the political significance of representing matters of care." [117]

Sarah McCullough et al., provide some guidance on these concerns in cycling research, including the need for meaningful opportunities for engagement with underserved communities, the sharing of decision-making power, and notably the need to "*provide compensation for their expertise and time*" ([118], emphasis added). These points merit much wider discussion and elaboration.

Recent theorizing on critical velomobilities has also pointed to the importance of de-centering whiteness in bicycle research, explaining that transportation justice will not be possible until the systemic dynamics of racism are more fully understood and addressed [119–123]. This scholarship shows the need to better respect the importance of learning from the lived experiences and guidance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, while continuing to deeply reflect on "questions of unequal mobile power relations, and

ultimately on how to plan for cycling in ways that support and represent everyone" [123]. Rachel Olzer elucidates that *representation matters* in discussions on bicycling "because when Black, Indigenous and POC are included in imagery and stories, non-BIPOC people are able to see that we are more than just stereotypes that can be used to justify our non-existence in some spaces and our overwhelming existence in other spaces" [124].

Research on abolitionism and movements to defund the police have been increasing in research years [125–129], bringing greater awareness to systemic issues of racism, classism, and gender-based discrimination in policing [130–132], while challenging dominant ideas that traffic safety is impossible without the police [133]. For example, a significant body of literature documents how police traffic stops enforce racial profiling and disproportionately target people of color and low-income commuters [134–137], including cyclists [138,139]. Robyn Maynard explains that in Canada and the United States, "policing emerged as and remains a form of racial, gendered and economic violence shaped by the logics of slavery and settler colonialism" [128]. Maynard insightfully examines how this violence inherent to policing has been continually contested, grounded in calls to cultivate real safety:

> "Calls for defunding the police . . . do not aim simply to combat a racist and violent institution, to cut it down to size on the way to complete elimination, though this is one core element of the struggle. The call to defund, in fact, emerges from the Black radical tradition, which has not only contested racial violence in all forms but has also been a form of world-building. Abolition, as Gilmore and Davis and Kaba continue to remind, is as much about building the conditions for safety as it is about dismantling institutions of harm and captivity, and ending racial violence in all of its forms." [128]

These discussions have begun to gain some traction in different areas of Mexico [140–143], yet they remain highly under-researched.

Mexico's political institutions have been often characterized by distinct (and secreted) forms of authoritarianism [31,144–146] as well as hostility and violence against critical voices [147–150]. These issues have generated fear for many citizens about expressing dissent. For example, Beatriz Magaloni and Luis Rodriguez found that police brutality has been maintained as generalized practices in Mexico due to "weak procedural protections and the militarization of policing, which introduces strategies, equipment and mentality that treats criminal suspects as if they were enemies in wartime" [141]. In a comprehensive review of policing in Latin America, Yanilda González traces the persistence of coercive police practices well after periods of dictatorial rule, showing how meaningful police reforms have only happened sporadically [151]. Luz Cardona Acuña and Nelson Arteaga Botello [152] examine feminist movements denouncing continued reported cases of police sexual violence in Mexico, amplifying slogans such as "*no nos cuidan, nos violan*" ("they don't protect us, they rape us"), and "*atacan a una y nos atacan a todas*" ("an attack on one is an attack on us all"). Further research is greatly needed to understand issues of police brutality in Mexico, as well as movements to develop socially just alternatives. Such research requires sensitivity to particular contexts, including acknowledgement of the legacies of colonial violence, political repression, and the ways that dominant denials of racism perpetuate racial injustices [153–157]. The 2018 victory of the MORENA party (led by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador) in the national election and the 2019 constitutional amendment on universal mobility rights have generated hope for systemic changes; however, ongoing concerns and reported cases of police brutality e.g., [147,158–161] and other mobility injustices demonstrate the need for continued critical analysis.

In light of a number of recent discussions on marginalized communities in transport and mobility studies, much can be learned from Latin American scholarship on thinking with care about this type of terminology [162–167]. For example, Teresa Caldeira calls for greater attention to how residents in underserved localities articulate powerful expressions that counter dominant portrayals of marginality:

> "(They are) spaces inscribed with contradictory experiences of transformation, autoconstructed growth, class formation, status ambition, modern consumption, land conflict, residential illegality, violence, citizenship mobilization and constant recreation of their own representation. To reduce these complex processes to a condition of marginality is to miss the strength of their inventiveness and the signs of emergent articulations that take them (and us) beyond the entrapments of 'advanced marginality.'" [168]

Sustainable transportation scholarship and related democratic interventions will need to take these articulations seriously, including the political inventiveness they offer and the significant forms of unpaid labor that they often shoulder. Analyzing these urban claims should not obscure the persistence of political control apparatuses and social inequities, nor should it preclude an acknowledgement of different logics, refusals, and improvisational impulses at work [169,170]. While such movements often appear unexpectedly, they can in turn embody significant expressions of creativity and collectives of insurgent citizenship.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, an activist from the organization Aguas con la Bici sent out a short video on Ciclovía Gómez Morín. The clip was based on a chance encounter he had with a local resident who had carried jugs of water on his bike to feed some of Morín's trees during a dry spell—a task that he appeared to tend to on a regular basis. The resident, when asked by the activist for his motivation, simply replied: "the authorities aren't doing enough to keep this ciclovía alive, so we all have to do something." This video became quite popular within social movements at the time, reminding us that, behind pervasive issues of inequity and apparent deterioration, intimate (and often hidden) operations of care and claim-making persist.

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