“Good Times in Buenos Aires”

Being an “Expat” in the City of Foreigners

Written by Hana Navrátilová
Yo vivo en una ciudad
donde la prisa del diario trajin
parece un film de Carlitos Chaplin
aunque sin comicidad

Yo vivo en una ciudad
que tiene un puerto en la puerta
y una expresion boquiabierta
para lo que es novedad

I live in a city
where the daily hustle and bustle
looks like one of Charlie Chaplin's films
but without the comicality

I live in a city
that has a port at the door
and a dumbfounded expression
for all that's news

Yo vivo en una ciudad
(I live in a city)
– Miguel Cantilo, 1970
“Good Times in Buenos Aires”

*Being an “Expat” in the City of Foreigners*

Hana Navrátilová

**Abstract**

The following discussion concerns the emergence of and interrelations between the concepts of expatriation, migration, and “othering” in present Buenos Aires. The arguments rest on my fieldwork in Argentina, as well as other studies from around the world. The research on expatriates is usually based in Asia or the UAE, and the region of Latin America is still quite understudied in this respect. Buenos Aires as the “city of foreigners” represents an anthropologically interesting fieldsite. Next to the mostly quantitative research on expatriates, anthropology can give us a better understanding of their practices and experiences. Furthermore, it challenges our ideas of these concepts we use to describe different groups of people (e. g. expatriate, immigrant), and allows us to understand how they are socially constructed. Hence, my study offers a new view on expatriation in a broader context of post-colonialism and current trends in globalization. The city's historical context must be considered as well in order to understand the complexities of terms such as foreigner or immigrant.

**Keywords**: expats, immigrants, the “other”, expat-scape, Buenos Aires, Argentina
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1. Introduction

“En todo estás vos.”

When my mother visited me in Buenos Aires I took her to La Boca, the barrio full of tourists near the city's old port. After walking through the Caminito full of tango performers and Italian restaurants, we wanted to visit an exhibition in one of the galleries. It was a few blocks away but not too far. As we were walking, we heard a man shouting something towards us. At first I did not pay much attention to him but when I heard the word peligroso, “dangerous”, I stopped and returned to talk to him. He wanted to warn us not to go further that way because it could have been dangerous for us, and sent us another way. He recognized us as tourists, as people who do not belong into the city, or at least not into this certain area. We looked different. I realized that even though I lived in the city and thought that I knew it by then quite well, it was not my city and I was still immediately perceived by its inhabitants as a stranger. Even though a foreigner in a city of foreigners, I was visible all the time; but in some parts of the city I was more visible than in others. Who is the foreigner in Buenos Aires and how is this image constructed? How do the foreigners claim the city?

Argentina is an “immigrant country” built by immigrants. It used to be a Spanish colony from the first half of the 16th century until the May Revolution in 1810; but a formal declaration of independence was issued only in 1816. In order to maintain the power of the Spanish Crown during the colonial times, the Spaniards introduced to their colonial societies an elaborate caste system based on a person's degree of Spanish descent. Spaniards by birth or descent were the highest castes (the absolute highest rank had those born in Spain), followed by people of mixed ancestry, indigenous people and black African slaves. The colonial system did not favour the colony in any way; Spain needed Argentina only to extract its wealth in order to maintain the Empire and its power. Hence, there was no sense of creating an Argentine nation. The discriminatory policies of the Crown favouring the Spanish-born Spaniards finally led the other castes to a fight for independence and the creation of a number of independent republics.

After a series of civil wars during the next fifty years after gaining independence,

[1] En todo estás vos (meaning “You are a part of everything we do”) is a network of social protection launched by the Government of the City of Buenos Aires in June 2013. It is an initiative aimed at ensuring residents the access to benefit programmes and policies that are implemented by the city. [http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/redentodoestasvos](http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/redentodoestasvos), [http://vimeo.com/40151314](http://vimeo.com/40151314)
Argentina had become one of the world's most prosperous nations at the turn of the 20th century, known as “the barn of the world” or “a generous country” due to its abundant natural resources (Ullberg, 2013: 38). The great immigration promoted by the federal governments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (1870–1930) brought to Argentina countless Europeans which has resulted in the fact that over two-thirds of the population of Argentina have European ancestors. The migration project was led by the state and aimed at transformation and modernization of Argentina – the bringing in of Europeans was supposed to “civilize” the country (Bastia, 2010: 8; Ullberg, 2013: 38). Hence, the project was racialized and the immigrants categorized into less or more desired ones. The ideal immigrants were white Anglo-Saxons who were to eliminate the negative characteristics of the “lower races”, i.e. the indigenous people and the gauchos, Argentine cowboys (Bastia, 2010: 8).

Buenos Aires as the capital was constructed as a “wannabe city” (Kanna, 2011: 7) that was supposed to represent Europe in Latin America. The wide spacious Avenida de Mayo resembled Paris, with its cafés and streets lined with trees, the narrow streets of Microcentro reminded of London, the parks of Palermo resembled the Bois de Boulogne, the borough of La Boca resembled Genoa in Italy, and so on (Gorelik, 2005: 152f). The people of Buenos Aires, porteños (“the people of the port”), had constructed their identity on the basis of their European ancestry, and being “different” and “whiter” than the rest of the nation (ibid.: 11f). On the other hand, immigrants from the neighbouring countries have been often stigmatized by porteños due to their darker skin and hair, and also blamed for social and economic problems, crime and unemployment (ibid.: 10). But it was not only foreign immigrants; even the internal migrants from the rural parts of the Province of Buenos Aires and other provinces who were mostly farm-hands and day-labourers, descendants of colonial Spaniards and indigenous people were labeled “cabecitas negras (little black heads), a racist term implying the superiority of the European-descended population” (Schneider, 2006: 9).

The derogatory expressions like “cabecita negra (little black head), negro, villero (slum-dweller) bolita (pejorative for boliviano: Bolivian), contributed to collapsing a variety of class, race and national/ethnic classifications into a large category that marked poor, dark-skinned individuals as 'not belonging' in white Buenos Aires” (Guano, 2004: 75). Those “others” have been also blamed for any of Argentina's predicaments, stealing jobs, Argentina's poverty, its corruption, “and its disconnect from modernity” (ibid.). Here, the
old dichotomy of civilización y barbarie (civilization and barbarism) proclaimed by Argentina's most celebrated founding father Domingo Fausto Sarmiento (1811–1888) were recontextualized (Guano, 2003: 149). Sarmiento's goal was to correct the barbarism of Argentina through the relocation of superior racial stock from Europe, and to lay ground for a modern, “European” Argentina (ibid.). He saw Europe and the United States as “epitoms of a civilization rooted in race” (ibid.) and he adopted the slogan Gobernar es poblar, “To govern is to populate”.

In the past six years I have lived in four different countries: Czech Republic, Germany, India and Sweden, moving there and back. I studied and worked in those countries, I was not just a tourist, but I was never directly described by others or have never seen myself as an immigrant. Mostly I just used to say: “I live here”, “I am studying here” or “I am doing an internship here”, defining myself rather as an expatriate or a “world traveller”. Travelling, moving around, migrating has become once again a big part of many people's lives due to the increasing globalization of the world, and “[i]ndeed there are many people who do not experience their international movement either as a form of cultural dislocation or as migration” (Hage, 2005: 469). Coming to Argentina was for my interview partners a part of living an adventure and trying out “something different”. Hence, according to Ghassan Hage, me and my informants are part of the “international cosmopolitan class”, moving freely across national borders without much of a problem (ibid.: 470).

Obviously, this involves complex power relations and politics. The terms “immigrant” and “expatriate” are highly politicized in common speech as well as in academic literature. For example, Neha Vora explains this in the context of Dubai – she stresses the classed and raced meanings behind the word “expat” which privileges “Western-educated, middle-class, English-speaking people, and decidedly not the scores of South Asian 'migrants' who are the subject of Human Rights Watch reports and government and private-sector efforts to 'clean up' neighbourhoods and malls in Dubai” (Vora, 2012: 790). In my research, I wanted to explore the lifestyle and habitat of those Western newcomers who are often called expatriates – in everyday interaction, travel blogs, newspaper articles, or academic literature. Expatriates are also often times defined as highly skilled professionals but it is important to realize that the category of expats is not as homogenous. Expatriates are not possible to define by any level of education, qualification, nor specific skills. The term is extremely fluid but nevertheless this description is implying their higher social status than
that of immigrants who are perceived as people coming from Argentina's poor neighbouring countries such as Bolivia or Paraguay, and working mostly manually or in domestic services. This distinction is highly racialized and contains a paradox since both those communities – expatriates and labour migrants – come to Argentina often times for the same reasons. The difference is that Western expatriates or “expats”, as they are often called, have whiter skin and preferred country of origin, and are thus the “more desired kind of foreigners” which is a phenomenon present in most postcolonial societies. Throughout my thesis, I am referring to the widespread image of a Western expatriate as a white prosperous person, hence excluding African Americans or other people from the West with darker skin, also because this group seems to be only very small in Buenos Aires and I did not get the chance to include them in my research.

Jeffrey M. Peck (1995) argues that the distinction of different foreigners primarily based on skin colour is present also in Germany and other West European countries where white Europeans, e. g. Poles, who are not ethnic Germans, “may have an easier time, since they are not marked as 'other' by their color” (Peck, 1995: 104). To avoid this distinction I used to formulate my research subject as the more general “foreigners” in Buenos Aires, regardless of their country of origin. But my aim was to explore the different kinds of foreigners and what those different concepts imply, how are they narrated and performed. Also, studies on expatriates usually take place in Asia (such as China and South Korea), or recently also in the United Arab Emirates. Latin America is not a typical place for researchers “studying up” (Nader, 1969), most of the research done in this region is about studying down and is directed at the urban poor, or the relations with the indigenous people. Hence, with my research I seek to develop a new field in this region. I would like to turn the present focus on poverty and urban marginality “from the bottom up” perspective (Auyero, 2000: 99) onto the Western migrants and their experience in Buenos Aires. They might have the same reasons to migrate to Argentina as Bolivians or Peruvians but they enjoy a better social status – or do they? Are they still welcome as “distant relatives” or do they experience being the “other” in a foreign country? It seems like “expat” has become a synonym for “foreigner” – but all foreigners or just a selected group of them? Is it possible to speak about an “expat-community”?

Buenos Aires can be seen as a world city. Ulf Hannerz defines a world city through four social categories of people who are in one way or other transnational; “the people involved
are physically present in the world cities for some larger or smaller parts of their lives, but they also have strong ties to some other place in the world” (Hannerz, 1996: 129). Those categories are the transnational business class – highly educated, highly professionally skilled, and highly mobile individuals often called “expats”; Third World populations in low-skilled, low-income occupations, hence the “immigrants”; people concerned with culture in a narrower sense like various kinds of artists, authors, chefs etc.; and finally tourists who are not officially included in the population but are always present in considerable numbers (ibid.: 129ff). All of these people are engaged in the transnational flow of culture by being mobile which has been much facilitated through processes of globalization.

The presence of expatriates “feeds to the competitiveness of cities and regions” and the ability to attract and retain global talent is seen as a measurement of the success of a world city in the network society (Beaverstock, 2012). Hence, there seems to be a need for a certain kind of foreigners in world cities in order to stay among the powerful ones who direct world-economy. This effort is reflected in the city's image and visual appearance shaped by urban planners, “starchitects” (Kanna, 2011), and political interests, and of course it has a tremendous influence on all inhabitants of such a city. Cities are contested spaces and especially nowadays in the globalization era it is important to ask “what gets built and for whom” (Kanna, 2011: 6). Many cities worldwide have been built in order to create tabula rasa, a “clean slate”, for a new modernity and a new identity (e. g. Dubai, the UAE; or Chandigarh, India) that is evacuated of history, politics, and culture.

Thus, I am interested in the places and areas in the city which are associated with expat lifestyle and where a performance of certain “expat-identity” is expected. Following Appadurai (1990) and his theory of “scapes”, I call those spaces “expat-scapes” – “deeply perspectival constructs” and landscapes with “fluid, irregular shapes” (ibid.: 7). They might be seen as a more specific type of ethnoscapes, “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers” etc. (ibid.). Even though fluid in their borders, it seems that expat-scapes require a certain kind of expat-identity or expat-lifestyle in order to belong into these spaces. How do people move around the city depending on their social status? How are the identities of a porteño or a foreigner constructed in a city of foreigners?

This study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how globalization, internationalism and mobility influence our lives and ourselves, as well as the “others”.

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Hence, the purpose of the text is to investigate the social structures and differences in social statuses of non-Argentines living in Buenos Aires and their ways of networking in the context of a city which was established by the descendants of Europeans in order to bring “civilization” to South America. This racial aspect is still present and influences the lives of old inhabitants as well as newcomers. I argue for a view on expatriates as a category developed by Westerners to distinguish themselves from the negatively perceived immigrants, as well as tourists. At first, I will give an account of the methodology and methods I used during my fieldwork and I will shortly introduce my interview partners. Along with the literature review this section of my thesis explains the theoretical framework and background of the present study. The following chapters present the ethnographic data collected in the field: How, when and where are the categories of immigrant and expat performed? How are the meanings of those concepts constructed? In the final chapter I present the concluding discussion of what has been demonstrated.

Argentina has been portrayed in quite a negative light and its inhabitants as shrouded in nostalgia and depression. It is believed that the country has the highest concentration of psychologists anywhere in the world, and even Jorge Luis Borges, Argentine writer and poet, once said: “I come from a sad country.” Hence, playing on the title of Miranda France’s travel book *Bad Times in Buenos Aires*, I have titled this paper “Good Times in Buenos Aires” with which I am referring not only to my own experience but mainly to the hopes and dreams of the newly arrived foreigners.

2. Methodology and Methods

The idea of this project was born about three years ago when I was doing an internship for seven months in New Delhi, India. I went to India once before for two months just to travel around and it charmed me that much that I decided to go back after finishing my first degree. This time it was different; I had to stay at one place, I lived and worked there. I had a room in a shared flat in South Delhi which was described to me as a nicer and safer area
where many foreigners stay and which is also more expensive. Immediately it got me thinking about the social divisions in the city and about the life of those foreigners. I lived with three other Europeans who were studying or doing their internships in Delhi, and could observe and talk to them about their habits and behaviour, as well as the differences to their home countries. I was also in contact with the “traditional” expatriates who move around every few years due to their work, such as embassadors. Tutoring a girl from such a family, I could observe how incredibly different was her life and growing up from mine. She was born in Jamaica, and by the age of six has lived in Germany, South Africa and India. I did not pursue a fieldwork in India because only after coming back to Europe I realized how difficult it was for me as a white woman to live there. But the interest in these “communities” of foreigners, as well as postcolonial societies stayed with me and followed me to Buenos Aires. Hence, I chose Argentina because of its colonial history – I wanted to see if there were any similarities to India, and also because I simply wanted to see something new. Also, I already had friends and other contacts in Argentina which made it easier to go there instead of e. g. Brazil.

Before I left for Argentina I was trying to read as much as possible about the country and more in dept about its capital where I was going to do my fieldwork. I was reading articles in academic journals and informing myself on the Internet through online newspapers and magazines, various touristic, travel or other specific blogs. I was also in touch with my friend from Buenos Aires whom I met in Stockholm and with whom I was developing and discussing my thoughts and ideas. He could give me a good reflection on the plan of my research, as well as on the daily life in Buenos Aires, the joys and problems Argentines face and deal with. This was useful to get an emic perspective and to contextualize my research, as well as to develop a framework for my fieldstudy. The starting point was to find the foreigners, see how/where/if they gather, what kinds of communication they use, and secondly how they perceive themselves and others, if they use words such as tourist, expat and immigrant, and what kind of meanings those concepts have for them. In the present study I define a foreigner as a person who does not come from Argentina. Furthermore, I follow Vora’s (2012) distinction of expat being a migrant coming from the West, and immigrant being a person coming mostly from a “Third World” country. In the case of Argentina, as immigrants are described people migrating from other South American countries which are usually seen as poorer and less developed – the very opposite of Western countries. These imagined characteristics are then transmitted onto the
people and create an image of a rich expat and a poor immigrant. I did not focus on a specific gender, I wanted to get to know both men and women, but I do not account on gender differences that might be present as well. At first I did not focus on a specific nationality either but due to my limited knowledge of Spanish in the beginning I decided to interview mostly Europeans or North Americans or people who spoke English well. This was also an advantage for the later writing process since I did not have to translate all my interviews first. I did not limit the age group either but it proved to be easier to get in touch with people of my own age since they are usually more “out there”, they are more social, eager to meet new people, and they are also more visible since they write blogs or engage in other social media.

My fieldwork took place between the beginning of November 2013 until the end of January 2014. I was always carrying around with me a small notebook that I used to note down things that happened around me and that I found interesting, parts of conversations I had with my flatmates and friends when we went out, or different slogans I saw in the city on posters or that were a part of graffiti. In the beginning I was writing down a lot more than later on. I found many things very interesting, everything was new, perhaps even “exotic” and “different” at first. But as days passed and I had become more and more familiar with the place and its inhabitants I found that there were not so many “new” things happening anymore, I got used to the other ways of thinking or different lifestyles that have become “normal” for me. I used to walk a lot around on foot or take buses instead of the subway in order to see the city and to “explore it most fruitfully” (Lee & Ingold, 2006: 68). Buenos Aires is a planned city with a square grid and so the orientation is quite easy. Furthermore, I used the Internet to check the city government's activities and policies, to learn more about various campaigns and also to organize my research and look for events I could join and where I could meet my potential interview partners.

Ethnography as a method is substantial to the discipline of anthropology (Davies, 2002). It is a research process based on fieldwork and using mainly qualitative methods as well as “including engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time” (ibid.: 5). It is well suited to “describe and explain the articulation of macro structures with members’ lived experience, micro-interactions, and a deep appreciation of members’ meanings” (Fitzgerald, 2006: 12). The fieldwork is the main source for the final written product – an ethnography as a literature genre. Doing ethnography is a very personal affair,
since the researcher's standpoint affects the choice of methods and sites of study (Mitra, 2010: 2). The purpose of research is mediating between different constructions of reality “and doing research means increasing understanding of these varying constructions” (Davies, 2002: 6). According to Borneman and Hammoudi, “fieldwork is the registering of sensory impressions […], an engagement with persons, groups, and scenes that takes into account the dynamics of our interactions as well as the differences between our locations and those of our interlocutors” (Borneman & Hammoudi, 2009: 19). Hence, the involvement with other people and different cultures requires from the ethnographer reflexivity. This means being aware of one's own cultural, social, political background and prejudices, and how those can affect and influence the research. Reflexivity also ensures more objective research and more authority for the final result since the researcher addresses the occurring difficulties and can better control or reduce the effects of the researcher on the research situation (Davies, 2002: 4). It concerns all the phases of a research process from selecting the topic to reporting final results (ibid.).

In my case, I did not influence the lives of my informants in any extensive way but I had to be careful while conducting interviews that I do not put words into my informants' mouths. I did not want to use terms like expat, immigrant or tourist from the beginning and usually I would wait until my interview partner used any of those words first. Then I would ask about his or her understanding of the term, and for example if mentioning “expat” what the difference to an immigrant is. I did not want to start using those terms immediately without creating a common understanding of these. Some of my informants felt a little puzzled or surprised when I asked them for a definition. They came across somewhat shy if they were not certain and did not want to say something wrong. In that case I assured them that there is no right or wrong answer and that I simply wanted to know their opinion.

I studied one geographic site and its own complexities, how social relations are embedded and emerge in this specific city and how it influences people's lives. I could not explore all the factors but I tried to comprehend at least the most important ones. Hence, my field of study was not the city itself but rather the networks of foreigners located within it. I did not conduct a multisited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) in that sense that I did not follow my informants across national borders, from their home countries to Argentina or back. But I did move through the different sites of the city, through various material as well as virtual spaces. Thus, the field itself is not a geographical site but rather “a conceptual space whose
boundaries are constantly negotiated and constructed by the ethnographer and members” (Fitzgerald, 2006: 3).

Regarding my group of focus I was studying sideways and up (Nader, 1969; Hannerz, 2006). Even though I was a foreign in Buenos Aires myself and could be seen as a part of my target group, my thesis is not an autoethnography. I use some of my experiences to be able to demonstrate some events in a better way but my analysis is based on the experiences of my informants and the research I conducted. There is probably always an autoethnographic element in every qualitative research (Anderson, 2006: 375), but my study was too short to rely only or mostly on my own experience, which could also lead to a more literary text than an academic one. I use a combination of both inductive (“bottom-up”, culture-specific) and deductive (“top-down”, problem oriented) reasoning for analysing the data. Coming to the field I did have some assumptions or hypothesis, such as that there is a certain hierarchy of foreigners depending on their skin colour and nationality, with white people being on the top. But I also used culture-specific reasoning while learning about Argentina and Argentines in general. I believe it is important to use both approaches in order to understand the complex social processes in the field.

In the following pages I describe the methods I used the most – participant observation and interviews, I give a general description of my informants and reflect on the challenges and difficulties I encountered during my fieldwork. The data collection involves in-depth interviews and conversations with people living in Buenos Aires, my own experience during my stay in Argentina, and Internet research about various campaigns and policies in Buenos Aires, including newspaper and magazine articles.

2.1 Participant observation

I spent in Buenos Aires two months doing my research and one month travelling through the whole of Argentina from Patagonia in the south up to the northern province of Jujuy neighbouring Bolivia. During this trip I wanted to get to know Argentina as a country better and to see the differences between its capital and the rest. The emic perspective of a local gives “some depth to [the] rather flat picture” (Davies, 2002: 171) that one acquires from mere observation, e. g. following only the news in the media, or in my case talking
only to foreigners in the capital. All together I spent in Argentina three months or thirteen weeks. Conducting an ethnographic research, the method I used the most was participant observation which is also the most symbolic method of anthropology nowadays. It is a “method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010: 1). As a foreigner myself I was a part of the target group I was studying. The advantage of this was that I had a similar experience as the people I talked to and that established for us a common ground. I had to go through a similar process of moving to a new country and had to face more or less the same difficulties on the way.

It did not take me long to realize how divided the city and its inhabitants are. The first two nights I stayed at my friend's place in Microcentro which is the central financial, corporate and business hub of Buenos Aires. This very clean part of the city is full of pretty buildings, big banks and good-looking men in suits who often times speak English. It is almost impossible to find a grocery shop and if you are lucky to find one you pay at least double the price than elsewhere. The third day I finally moved to my new home in Balvanera, between the Congress and Plaza Once which – as my flatmates immediately informed me – I was to avoid especially in the night but preferably all the time. Though only about fifteen blocks, ca. 1.5 km, away from Microcentro, the change of the character of the area is vast. Prices are much lower, there are more people from other South American countries and less from Western countries, it is dirtier but also more alive and colourful. During my time in Buenos Aires, it amazed me over and over again how many different faces this city has.

I joined some of the events organized by online platforms for foreigners and I also became a member in a couple of Facebook groups such as “EXPATS living in Buenos Aires”. Just a few days after my arrival I joined the event “La Noche de los Museos” (“The Night of the Museums”) with a group of CouchSurfers2. Many of them were Argentines but also some North Americans and Europeans were there, and so I could make my first contacts. With some of those people I stayed in touch the whole time I was in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, I joined the language exchange “Mundo Lingo” a few times which is also

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2 Members of CouchSurfing, an online platform for travellers and sharing their experience. More information on p. 55 and www.couchsurfing.org.
promoted by CouchSurfing and on Facebook; I went to the InterNations\textsuperscript{3} monthly gathering and while going on small trips or just walking around the city I also met and spoke to various foreigners. In these organized events I could observe expats in practice, as well as talk to them and make contacts.

Through my flatmates who had been in Buenos Aires from a couple of months to a few years before my arrival I got to know the night life and also some of their friends. Mostly I was hanging out with the two German girls who were studying at different universities in the city. Hence, their friends' circles were mostly other students – mostly other Germans. There were only very few other nationalities among their friends. So instead of improving my Spanish I usually ended up speaking only German – at home as well as when we went out. I found it interesting that even though these groups of people were mostly North and West European, they adopted the Argentinian way of greeting each other – one kiss on the right cheek, as well as other customs. Once when I came to a previa, a pre-party, and did not greet everyone with a kiss, a young German told me in a serious voice: “You better get used to it. It's polite here.” Also, when meeting my interview partners for the first time they always greeted me with a kiss on the cheek.

\textbf{2.2 Interviews}

I conducted twelve official interviews and a countless number of informal conversations with my flatmates and foreign as well as Argentine friends. I interviewed people from seven different countries – five women and seven men, including students, freelancers, people having a stable full-time job in various fields or searching for one. Mostly I interviewed Europeans but also a couple of Americans, one young woman from Bolivia and one from Venezuela. Mostly they were in their twenties or thirties, and one man was 56 years old. I gathered their individual trajectories which helped me direct the focus of my study, as well as my research questions. Everyone I met knew that I was doing my fieldwork about foreigners in Buenos Aires which usually caused amused reactions and jokingly suspicious looks on the faces of foreigners I met in my leisure time or during nights-out. Since I did not follow “process consent”, meaning that I did not “check at each stage that participants still want to be part of [the] project” (Ellis, 2007: 24), I decided to

\textsuperscript{3}InterNations is another online platform directed specifically towards expatriates, exchange of knowledge and networking. More information on p. 55 and www.internations.org.
use pseudonyms throughout my thesis to keep my informants' anonymity. I did not have one clear question that I wanted to answer, I was rather waiting where the research would take me, and so I usually asked my interview partner about his or her story: how and why they came to Buenos Aires, how they liked it, what were the difficulties they had to face, and according to their involvement in the local life I asked about the borders, divisions and structures they could observe in the city. While participant observation gave me a better understanding of the wider context and its visible factors, through the method of interviewing I was able to investigate the issues more in-depth, ask follow-up and more detailed questions, as well as clarify my questions or my respondents' answers right away. The more open forms of ethnographic research, such as semi-structured interviews that I was using, allow to develop “in-depth descriptive accounts of [the informants’] interactions, seen as on-going creative processes that construct social realities through the meanings they develop” (Davies, 2002: 42).

While organizing an interview I always told the informant to suggest a place to meet, hence I let it be completely their choice. This was a good way to get to know the city better, see new places and learn how to move around the city by public transport and on foot. The places my informants chose could also tell something about their character and preferences; for instance I interviewed two French women and both chose a vegetarian restaurant as a meeting point during their lunch break, a Bolivian girl who was very much into speaking English and seemed to be a lot into American culture chose a Starbucks, while others more socially engaged and “hippie-like” informants chose a park or a small coffee place in their neighbourhood. Also, according to and depending on their social inclusion and participation in the local or expat-life and regardless of time spent in Argentina, they offered different points of view on life here which were more or less deep and complex. Those immersed in expat-circles did not mention any social or political issues, they mostly talked about economic problems such as inflation that effected them directly.

I do not own a recorder and so I was writing down all the interviews – or conversations as I rather call them – that I conducted. That was a bit of a challenge especially when I met with my informant for lunch and had to focus on our conversation, write down what my informant says, and eat. Before starting the conversation I always asked my informant if it was ok with him or her if I take notes and no one was bothered by this. I tried to look up at
my informant as much as I could to assure them I was listening to and following what they were saying. Even though I told everyone that our conversation would take about thirty minutes or according to their availability, we usually ended up talking for one to two hours. I realized that everyone loved to share their story with me and that made me feel honoured and even more excited about my research. Also, they showed me a genuine interest in my research and some kind of solidarity wanting to help me with it.

Aull Davies points out that “[t]he problem of comprehensibility may be increased with cultural distance – not to be confused with geographic distance” (Aull Davies, 2002: 47). But since my interview partners were mostly from Europe or the United States we had a similar background and understanding of the world which made it easier for me to conduct interviews and not just to talk pass each other. My interview partners showed interest in my research and seemed to understand its aim as well. They were always very helpful, some of them gave me contacts of their friends or acquaintances who could be interesting for me to make an interview with, or tried really hard to give me the most interesting information. Nevertheless, the most interesting information came out when I just let them talk and they forgot that I was there to ask questions which usually happened after the first thirty minutes. The atmosphere of an informal friendly get-together made them feel more comfortable, they gave me more trust and stopped thinking about giving me only “the best” answer.

It was always very easy to struck a conversation because as I soon found out most of the people I met were passionate travellers just like myself and our common interests and diverse stories from various parts of the world helped us to get along and understand each other better. But of course I do not assume that all the foreigners in Buenos Aires are of the same nature. I met a lot of them through CouchSurfing, an online platform of sharing experiences while travelling and thus gathers like-minded people from all over the world. Hence, it was quite easy to find foreigners in the city – I used various online platforms and everyone I talked to was very supportive to me and gave me contacts of their friends or people who could be of any interest to me. Also, I lived with four other foreigners – two young German women in their early twenties, one French woman in her late twenties and one young man from Cuba in his early thirties. I never conducted any official interviews with my flatmates but we had many conversations about our experiences. I felt like me interviewing them could put them in a strange position if something they did not really want to talk about would come up during an interview. Of course they knew about my
research, but I decided to let our relationships develop in a natural way, become friends or not, and maintain our conversations on an informal basis.

Just as simple it was to meet a foreigner, it was also the biggest challenge for myself. I had to overcome my dislike of meeting foreigners abroad since I usually try to stick with the locals. I did not think of this before that I could find it uncomfortable or difficult. Hence, it was a new experience in this sense too. I usually try to avoid touristic places; I am more of a backpacker, travelling independently. But through CouchSurfing and while travelling through Argentina the last month of my stay there I met many Argentines who let me get their point of view while sharing their lives and experiences, as well.

This was my first fieldwork experience where I was basically left on my own. My main problem was with analysing the data and finding a specific focus in my writing. I want to present in this study an overview of the different conceptualizations of foreigners in Buenos Aires, such as expats or immigrants, in the context of “othering” in Argentina. A longer fieldwork would be necessary to be able to present a more complex understanding of the issue, as well as all the factors influencing the categorization of expats and immigrants, and their experience in Buenos Aires.

3. Theoretical Approach

International migration has never been as pervasive, or as socio-economically and politically significant, as it is today. [...] Never before has [it] seemed so pertinent to national security and so connected to conflict and disorder on a global scale. The hallmark of the age of migration is the global character of international migration: the way it affects more and more countries and regions, and its linkages with complex processes affecting the entire world.

Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *Age of Migration*

This study makes a contribution to global anthropology and the field of migration studies, as well as urban anthropology. The research is put in a specific historical and cultural context, but the findings are not restricted only to Argentina and its capital. Focusing on
non-Argentines and the so called “expats” in Buenos Aires I got empirical data of a “priviliged” category of mobile migrants touring around the world. I seek to supplement the mobility studies of these “skilled professionals” featured mostly in journals of international management and human resources (Altman & Baruch, 2012; Farh & Bartol et al., 2010; Jintae Froese, 2012) with an anthropological perspective. My data stock speaks to transnational migration studies as well as to mobility studies and perhaps urban studies, and deals with social and political structures in a city that is shaped by the neoliberal forces of the world.

3.1 Migration

Migration means crossing the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period (Castles, 2000: 269). But not all border crossings necessarily imply migration – tourists or business visitors have usually no intention of staying long and taking up residence. There is no one objective definition of migration, the variations are “the result of state policies, introduced in response to political and economic goals and public attitudes” (ibid.: 270). Migration tends to be regarded as problematic, because “remaining in the country of birth is still seen as a norm and moving to another country as a deviation” (ibid.). One way in which states seek to control migration is the division of international migrants in various categories, such as temporary labour migrants or guest-workers who migrate for a limited period usually in order to send money home; highly skilled and business migrants who move within the internal labour markets of transnational corporations, nowadays they are often called expatriates and encouraged by many countries to come; irregular migrants (also known as illegal or undocumented migrants) who enter a country without the necessary documents and permits; family migrants following other family members; forced migrants such as refugees or asylum seekers; return migrants etc. (ibid.).

Traditionally, immigrants were understood as the “uprooted”, as persons who leave their home country behind and face the painful integration process in a new society and culture (Glick Schiller et. al., 1995: 48). But in the context of globalisation a new concept emerged – the transmigrant. “Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are
configured in relationship to more than one nation state” (ibid.). This phenomenon of crossing borders and maintaining ties to more than one country and society is not new, but the interconnections and networks are nowadays more visible and easier to follow due to modern communication and transportation technologies. Transmigrants might migrate and settle in the new country in which case they might become diasporic, they may return to their country of origin or migrate further to another country for whatever reason. Nonetheless, the growth of the flows of people, ideas and economic processes in this global world “is accompanied by a resurgence in the politics of differentiation” (ibid.: 50). Immigrants often find themselves racialized as “Black”, “Hispanic” or “Asian”, and discriminated throughout their life activities (ibid.). For example, in Southern Carolina only Latinamerican immigrants are perceived to be and categorized as undocumented, and “the term illegal alien is used as a hidden racial code for Mexican, Central American, and Hispanic” (Bonacich et al., 2008: 347; emphasis in original). They are seen as illegal and uncivilized, not worthy of the same treatment, e.g. wage, as white people (ibid.). On the other hand, the so called “skilled workers” or “expatriates” who are also a kind of transmigrants but come from a Western, “civilized” country usually enjoy a privileged status in the host country. In the following chapters I shall explore those differentiations and their effects on the life in Buenos Aires.

3.2 The Local vs. The Global

Most global anthropologists adopt the idea of diversity (Tsing, 2000: 352). Many scholars argue that globalization, especially of labour, capital, and communication, tends to neutralize the importance of place and even renders it as irrelevant (Holston & Appadurai, 2003: 297). For example, Low argues that transnational forces tend to deterritorialize group identity and that the local is constantly being redefined by the global (Low, 1996: 393). But according to Holston and Appadurai this assumption is false, since “place remains fundamental to the problems of membership in society” and cities are “the place where the business of modern society gets done, including that of transnationalization” (Holston & Appadurai, 2003: 297). Larco also sees places as processes that “can change based on the mix of individuals inhabiting and experiencing them” (Larco, 2010: 202), and hence globalisation is no longer a threat to place and identity but instead simply broadens
the scale of influences, bringing together the local and global ones (ibid.: 197). Anna Tsing also argues for redefinition of some of the tools and frames used in global anthropology, such as the redefinition of the “global” and the “local” – similarly like Larco she points out that “the cultural processes of all 'place' making and all 'force' making are both local and global” (Tsing, 2000: 352; emphasis in original). “The multiple possibilities of combining ‘here’ and ‘there’, absence and presence, ascription and disavowal, in everyday life – astride boundaries and across ever-widening distances and spaces – is central to understandings of social life in a globalizing world” (Yeoh, Willis & Fakhri, 2003: 208). It has been increasingly argued that research on migration should be “grounded” and attention should be given to the complex and interdependent processes that are locally lived and produced (Walsh, 2006a: 124).

When migrating, people tend to congregate in cities since there is demand for their labour. Cities are sites of business and commerce. They are plastic and their social structures indeterminate and amorphous (Rapport, 2006: 184f). The diversity of a city depends on its inhabitants who can shape it according to their choices and thus give it an identity (ibid.: 185). The city is “the focus of cultural and sociopolitical manifestations of urban lives and everyday practices” (Low, 1996: 384). But this “urban softness” can be alienating for those without a creative vision or those without resources, and can make them “all but invisible to the well-to-do” (ibid.). Focusing on labour-migrants in Buenos Aires, Bastia notes that it is the categorizing of certain groups of people as “different” that prevents inhabitants of a city to fully use it and benefit from it (Bastia, 2010: 6). Also Schneider states that the immigrants from neighbouring countries like Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay or Chile, have not been fully accepted as porteños (the inhabitants of Buenos Aires) yet (Schneider, 2006: 8). This is most visible on the city's attitudes and policies towards shanty towns (Bastia, 2010: 6). According to Auyero “both the military and the democratic governments of Argentina constructed the slum population as an object to be removed, as an out-of-place population, as the obnoxious and repugnant other, always undeserving and tainted” (Auyero, 1999: 65). On the base of still-emerging literature on raciality in Latin America, Kaifa Roland argues that the “complex classifications of color are linked with expectations regarding education, social status, and value” (Roland, 2013: 397). Hence, colour is still one of the factors determining social status in this region but of course not the only one, it goes hand in hand with several others. The racial stratification of South America is complex and
varies even from country to country.

"[T]he politics of immigration is closely tied to the politics of cities" and is also most implosive in cities since it “cannot be abstractly conducted evenly across all national space” (Holston & Appadurai, 2003: 301). Migrants, tourists, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, as well as expats, all are engaged in a mobility that is defining the contemporary world, affecting “the politics of (and between) nations” (Appadurai, 1990: 7), being examples of flows (Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1987). The complexity of these moves has led to a change in vocabulary from the simple “immigration/emigration” to “step migration”, “return migration”, “multiple migration”, “sojourning”, “circulation” and multidirectional “(hyper)mobilities” among others (Yeoh & Huang, 2011: 683). Migration rather than immigration or emigration describes the actual process of flow and movement between two or more countries, since migrants always come from somewhere. In the past, migration studies used to focus especially on the movements from “South” to “North” and the relating “brain drain” or “brain gain” (role of a diasporas in the country of origin) (Gaillard & Gaillard, 1998; Mahroum, 2000; Salt, 1992). The focus of my research is not really on a specific group of transmigrants or skilled professionals but rather on the differences, e.g. in social status, between the various kinds of human flows, and how these are constructed, what their self-ascriptions are, and who is the “other”.

### 3.3 The “Other”

According to Johnson et al. (2004), the concept of the “Other” was developed in feminist theory and dates back to early 1950s with Simone de Beauvoir's (1952) work on the nature of men and women (Johnson et al., 2004: 254). Othering is a process that identifies those who are thought to be different from oneself, it “defines and secures one’s own identity by distancing and stigmatising (an)other” (Grove & Zwi, 2005: 1933). It is supposed to establish our own “normality”, and the difference of others as a point of deviance, reinforcing and reproducing positions of domination and subordination (Johnson et al., 2004: 253). “The person or group being ‘othered’ experiences this as a process of

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4 Brain drain is a term coined by Ayn Rand in 1957 and adopted by the Royal Society to describe the British scientists and individuals who migrated to the US. At that time it meant “losing trained minds to the pull of a foreign market”. Nowadays it rather defines a “phenomenon that occurs through migration, and connotes a country's real or potential loss of professional skills at all levels” and gain for the host country (Gaillard & Gaillard, 1998: 20, 22).
marginalisation, disempowerment and social exclusion. This effectively creates a separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Grove & Zwi, 2005: 1933). Those “others” are represented as not belonging and as a “threat to notions of community and sovereignty, forcing questions of 'who is in' and 'who is out'” (ibid.: 1934). In contemporary research, the notion of othering has been used to examine the issues of racism, identity, and difference, as well as unequal relations in society (Johnson et al., 2004: 254). In the present text I will explore how is the “other” in Buenos Aires conceptualized, what are the historical, social, cultural and political factors of this process, and when it is used. Just as in all other nation formations, in the process of the construction of the Argentine nation othering has always been very present.

3.4 Expatriates

In the late twentieth century there were two dominant approaches to migration: first, “the settler model”, according to which immigrants became gradually more integrated and finally fully assimilated in the host society, sometimes over two or three generations; and secondly, “the temporary migration model”, according to which migration workers stayed in the host country for a limited period of time and maintained their connections to their country of origin (Castles, 2002: 1143). But globalization has changed the context for migration – new technologies of communication and transport, as well as the erosion of national borders facilitate the flows of people, ideas, capital and cultural symbols (ibid.). New forms of mobility arise and the boundaries between different categories of migrants become blurry (ibid.).

Most of the literature on expatriates comes from economics and business-related quantitative research. Those studies usually distinguish self-initiated expatriates who decided to leave their home country by their own choice, and company-assigned expatriates who were relocated by their employer; further they engage with the expats' motivations and reasons to leave their homes, or evaluate their success and their adjustment in the new country. The success of expats “is heavily tied to their ability to adjust to various work and nonwork conditions in the host country” (Farh et al., 2010: 434). In the business-related research, expatriation is defined as a form of labour mobility that crosses international borders within and between firms, and “a crucial organisational
strategy for the spatial mobility of knowledge in the world economy” (Beaverstock, 2012). Corporate expatriates are a part of a business strategy – multinational corporations aim to achieve through international assignments transfer of knowledge and know-how to their subsidiaries, to develop personnel, or introduce a unified organisational policy (Altman & Baruch, 2012: 233). Expatriates embody the “delivery of knowledge, bespoke solutions and values” (Beaverstock, 2012). Hence, much of the research on expats works in favour of those corporations in order to find out the problems and difficulties expats might face while adjusting in a new country, since their failure would cost the company a lot of money. But those studies usually lack an anthropological perspective since they do not present expatriates in a wider context – in the new society and a whole network of international political and economic relations. Also, they use mostly quantitative research methods and statistics. The benefit of an anthropological approach lies in getting an insider perspective and in-depth knowledge that avoids bare generalizing, and intends to understand human life and practice.

Recently, the phenomenon of expatriation has become more popular also in anthropology; even though the focus has been traditionally rather on transnational migrant labour-workers. Hitherto, anthropologists have focused on those disadvantaged travellers (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers) when addressing human mobility (Redfield, 2012: 358). Nevertheless, Neha Vora is one of the few interested in expats. Among other things, she writes about forms of citizenship and belonging among Indian communities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and especially in Dubai. She stresses the classed and raced meanings behind the word “expat” which privileges “Western-educated, middle-class, English-speaking people, and decidedly not the scores of South Asian 'migrants' who are the subject of Human Rights Watch reports and government and private-sector efforts to 'clean up' neighbourhoods and malls in Dubai” (Vora, 2012: 790; emphasis in original). Hence, the preferred type of foreigner – the upper- and middle-class Western/white expat – is enjoying benefits from the racial and class stratification in the UAE unlike the migrant labourers from South Asia (ibid.). Vora thus problematizes the distinctions between “expat”, “local”, and “migrant” which I adopt in my study as well. Also Walsh, studying British expats in the UAE, notes that skilled migration results in racialized hierarchy of multiple transnational communities and nationals (Walsh, 2006b: 274f). Thus, just like in the UAE, also in Argentina one's origin and ethnicity might lead to a higher social position and a better life in the host-country.
As Gupta and Ferguson argue, “cultural difference is produced and maintained in a field of power relations in a world always already spatially interconnected” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992: 17), and migration and its control must be seen in this context of power. According to Rosaldo “[d]egrees of mobility differentiate people ’with’ and ’without' culture” (Rosaldo, 1988: 80). “People with culture”, those civilised and better-off people, “appear sedentary and rooted in their particular niches”, whereas migrants – “people without culture” (in Rosaldo's case the Negritos in the Philippines who are the lowest on the people-scale), are seen as “nomadic, rootless, and absolutely mobile” (ibid.). Nowadays, mobility is seen as both positive and negative. In the case of the so called “(labour) migrants” or “immigrants”, mobility is not very welcome – people of the host country usually accuse those newcomers of stealing their jobs and the popular host countries introduce new restrictions on the mobility of foreigners. But if the talk is about skilled professionals from the West going to live abroad, they are not called migrants, and mobility and total flexibility is perceived as a requirement of the postmodern man.

3.5 Racialization of labour

In this sense, Bonacich et al. introduce a concept of the “racialization of labor” (Bonacich et al., 2008) and explore the role of race in today's global labour system. In their research they found out that “[d]ominant racialized labor groups (mainly White/European workers) are in general afforded more privileges than subordinate racialized labor groups (workers of color), who face the denial of basic citizenship rights and higher degrees of exploitation and inferior working conditions” (ibid.: 342). Racialization is a modern phenomenon and goes back to the colonial times and the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe when “Europeans constructed colonized people as 'uncivilized' and 'heathen'”, which justified their oppression (ibid.: 343). Racialized labour systems are also gendered and women of colour stand usually on the bottom of the system, working in the worst conditions (ibid.: 344). An interesting view of this issue offers Catrin Lundström (2012) whose focus is on Swedish women travelling to Singapore as “expatriate wives” who become employers of migrant women working for them in domestic services. Lundström found out that through the construction of difference, domestic workers are located “as other(ed) migrant women, outside a normative frame of gender and social equality” (Lundström, 2012: 154). They
were expected to have “different needs for leisure, living conditions, intimate relations, etc. – They are not like us” (ibid.; emphasis in original). This hierarchical neo-colonial relationship takes shape from the “unequal preconditions between industrialized and developing countries” (ibid.). In Buenos Aires, this racialized labour system is shaped by the porteño middle-class and their “imagined world” (Appadurai, 1990) of being white Europeans captured in Latin America. Appadurai established this term following Benedict Anderson and his concept of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983), and defined it as “the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai, 1990: 7). In the following chapter I will present the context of the city of Buenos Aires on this theoretical background as a city full of borders and divisions, which I believe is important in order to understand how the locals⁵ and foreigners claim the city, and in what kind of environment they navigate. I do not account on the city in total but rather as a context for expat performance.

4. The City as a Context

“Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears.”⁶

Most of the research and literature on Argentina and Latin America has been anchored in poverty studies and negative effects of neoliberalism, focusing on the urban poor and the marginalised people living in slums and shanty towns (see e.g. Auyero 1999/2000/2012, Bastia 2010, Gordillo 2002/2011, Ullberg 2013). Argentina was a part of a neoliberal experiment since the dictatorship in the late 1970s for over a quarter century; the turn towards neoliberalism was supported by the Argentine elite as well as the IMF. The new economic programme as well as the deindustrialization and agriculturization led to huge inflation, doubling of Argentina's debt and a massive reduction of the middle class (Smith,

⁵ By “locals” I mean porteños, the Argentines coming from Buenos Aires. I do not include other categories of the population presented in this thesis.

1991; Cooney, 2007). It “has enriched the few, both foreign and domestic elites, at the expense of the majority of Argentinians” (Cooney, 2007: 34).

Since then the country has experienced growth of wealth and poverty right alongside each other. These growing extremes “are paralleled only by the gaping inequalities between increasingly larger metropolises, smaller cities, and rural towns” (Auyero: 2000: 94). The presence of the privileged upper-middle class gives Buenos Aires the appearance of other global cities (ibid.). The wide *avenidas* remind of Paris, as well as do the expensive boutiques, gourmet shops and restaurants in Palermo or the opulent shopping malls around the city's well-off barrios, luxurious housing in Recoleta, and the newly rebuilt area of Puerto Madero which is full of skyscrapers like Lower Manhattan. But next to all this there is a different, poor and rather invisible Buenos Aires of slum-dwellers, mestizos and the indigenous. In 2009 there were estimated four million people living in poverty in metropolitan Buenos Aires.7 In this chapter I want to introduce the city of Buenos Aires as a context for my study. I want to show how the city is divided and structured, and how the invisible borders affect its inhabitants' lives.

![Figure 1: Left: Avenida de Mayo. Right: Parks in Palermo. Photographs by the author.](image)

**4.1 Global city vs. Megacity**

Buenos Aires usually counts as a “global city” – an urban node and a “command and control [point] of the world economy” (Roy, 2011: 224). In 2012 the city was ranked by the Globalization and World Cities Research Nework (GaWC) as an Alpha- city.8 Those are cities that link major economic regions into the world economy. Hence, they rank city

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economics more heavily than political or cultural factors. Concerning those other factors, the huge cities of the global South tossed by poverty, environmental issues and disease – the problems of underdevelopment, are defined by difference from global cities as “megacities”. The megacity is “the 'constitutive outside' of contemporary urban studies” (ibid.). The global reach and economic authority of world citites is attractive for the high-value, knowledge-rich labour force, and “expatriation and other forms of mobilities, like business travel, are key organisational strategies to deliver skills and expertise” (Beaverstock, 2012). Thus, “world cities are the global melting pots for highly-talented labour, of all nationalities, both internal and international, who fill vacancies, labour market demand, in the high-value added, knowledge-intensive complexes of the city” (ibid.). Securing talent is important for world cities in order to create economic growth, and so they compete and try to out bid each other with metrics like high rankings in quality of life, remuneration or sustainability (ibid.). World cities want expats.

The reality of globalization has strong effects on the physical development of cities, as well (Larco, 2010: 195). In Buenos Aires, the newly built area of Puerto Madero, former industrial port, was specifically designed for and is aimed at attracting global capital and labour. These globally financed developments lead to “commodification of location”, while marketing and promoting the local for purposes of tourism, residence and commerce to an “elite, mobile and transient global citizen” (ibid.: 196). Hence, this physical development is “a localized manifestation of the global”, and shapes the identity of cities through meanings and narratives (ibid.). The city is being redesigned in order to be appealing rather to the desired foreigners, expats, who might just pass through than to its local inhabitants.

Figure 2: Puerto Madero. Photographs by the author.
4.2 The geographical borders and divisions

Buenos Aires is divided into 48 barrios (districts) or according to a newer system into 15 comunas (communes). The barrio was a “social and cultural creation that transformed urban expansion into a new public space incorporating popular sectors” (Gorelik, 2005: 153). The barrio is also the birthplace of the tango, “offering the foundational myths needed for cultural identity” (ibid.). At first, barrios were part of the suburbs but during the 1920s they became “the new centers that made Buenos Aires alive” (ibid.: 154). Following the ideology of social stratification of the Spanish conquistadors, working class population used to dwell in the peripheries of cities (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013: 92). There was a debate about incorporating the growing suburbs into the metropolitan area but this debate was closed in the 1930s by the conservative coalition that was in power after the military coup of 1930. Hence, “the Avenida General Paz became the limit between the modern and European city and the new suburbs that would multiply from then on without any system of integration” (ibid.: 157).

Figure 3: The barrios of Buenos Aires. Image courtesy of: http://www.visittangobuenosaires.com/Barrios-en.htm

With its ca. three million inhabitants (or up to 15 mil. during working days), Buenos Aires is the largest city in Argentina and second-largest metropolitan area in South America. The barrios differ very much on many levels – in monthly income of the inhabitants, their
education level, their ethnicity, social inclusion/exclusion, security, access to services etc. According to Groisman and Lourdes Suárez (2009), there is a general consensus that the urban segregation in Latin America is influenced by the implemented neoliberal policies in the region (Groisman & Lourdes Suárez, 2009: 39). In Argentina, the focus of the research on urban segregation has been on the gated communities of those with the highest income (Torres, 2001; Thuillier, 2005). Residential segregation is defined as “the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment” (Massey & Denton, 1988: 282). Levels of income disparity in Buenos Aires have grown steadily, along with a 35 percent jump in poverty in the Greater Buenos Aires area over a 16 year period. Poverty rates rose from 12.7 percent in 1986 to 49.7 percent of the population in 2002, just after Argentina’s economic crisis, according to the government statistics. According to the United Nations, the city is “among the most unequal in the world” (UN-Habitat, 2008: 73). As many as 10 percent of the city’s residents live in informal and improvised housing, lack access to public services, and live in crime-riddled communities (Auyero, 2010).

In the last few decades, a new model of spatial segregation and urban landscape has emerged – the so called fortified enclaves (Caldeira, 1996: 303). Those are “privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work” (ibid.). Building of those enclaves is justified mainly by the fear of violence, and their use designated to those who want to escape the traditional public space of the streets, the poor, the “marginal”, and the homeless (ibid.). In the northern areas of the city and in the Microcentro buildings usually have guards and porters who monitor the movements to and from a building. Also, in more recent years, gated communities and privately planned “cities”, barrios privados, (such as Nordelta) have been built outside of the city for the high- and middle-income population. They have public spaces with sport and recreational facilities, shopping centres, schools, and kindergartens. The social inequality in Buenos Aires is obvious but the processes of spatial segregation are not as visible as in São Paulo or even New Delhi where armed guards and security controls are a part of daily life. Nevertheless, the contrasts of luxury and wealth and extreme poverty are present. Also, the development of these new modern areas and gated communities has been changing the traditional segregation patterns and the physical distances between socioeconomic groups, bringing the improved public spaces and luxury.

10 http://www.diercke.com/kartenansicht.xtp?artId=978-3-14-100790-9&seite=151&id=17640&kartennr=4
housing closer to the poor.\textsuperscript{11} For example, when I was walking around Recoleta (probably the most luxurious of all \textit{barrios}) with my friend Mariano he told me that there was a big \textit{villa}, a slum or shanty town, only a couple of blocks away after crossing a wide high-way. Looking at the beautiful houses and their modern design using precious materials I could not imagine there was a completely different world only a few minutes walk away.

### 4.3 The social borders and divisions

“The social division here is crazy! People have totally different, opposite opinions. We are enemies from kindergarten to the bar, always fighting against each other. The problem is, people think that because they have been through so much in the last decades, they don't have to do anything. They don't see Argentina as a poor, developing country. We don't compare ourselves to Bolivia or Peru but to Europe.” (Mariano)

Cities are “material spaces with relative stability and rigidity that shape and bound people's lives and determine the types of encounters possible in public space” (Caldeira, 1996: 323f). In Argentina, class structure is the most pertinent divisor, hence the society is divided by socioeconomic status (Groisman & Lourdes Suárez, 2009: 39f). The well-off Argentines, as well as Western foreigners are to be found in the more expensive neighbourhoods in the North of the city such as Recoleta, Palermo and Belgrano, or the central San Telmo which is attractive especially for students and more art and culture oriented types. People I talked to lived mostly in these neighbourhoods and one of the main reasons they had chosen those places was safety. Nevertheless, this is rather a paradox because just as Marc told me:

“I used to live in Plaza Once. It's dodgy in the sense that you see drug dealers, gangs, transvestites, prostitutes, kids on drugs. But it's also a safe area because no one comes here to rob. Nearly every time something happens it's in San Telmo or in Palermo because that's where the rich people are, where the foreigners are.”

He continued: “The city is extremely divided and very clearly as well. Every time you pass an avenue things change. People know how it works, how you move upwards in the city, so if you move to Palermo you've really made it. But the \textit{yanquis}\textsuperscript{12} just come and move there, they have money to burn. Palermo is not a real barrio as they say, it's a \textit{yanqui} barrio.”


\textsuperscript{12} The word \textit{yanqui} is used by Argentines to refer to foreigners in general. Marc explained to me: “Here, \textit{yanqui} means foreigner, an ignorant person with a lot of money, who doesn't know anything about the world and lives of his daddy's credit card.”
My informants who have lived in the city for some time and who are also used to move around through the different *barrios*, emphasized the big differences between the neighbourhoods and the social inequality. As the dividing line they saw the Avenida Rivadavia which goes through the whole city, from the East to the West, far behind the borders of the capital, dividing it into the North and the South. And its function is not only symbolic, it also changes the names of the streets that cut through it – e.g. I lived at Pres. José E. Uriburu but crossing Rivadavia it became Pasco. “In the North there is a different vibe than in the South”, David told me. Going from the North to the South the people change, and so do their clothes and accessories, houses, cars, the prices in the shops and restaurants. As the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges says, below Rivadavia “the South begins”. Hence, the city of Buenos Aires represents a small version of today’s socio-economic and political divide of the world into the “North” that represents the more developed and industrialized countries, and the “South” describing usually “those formerly colonised countries that are affected by international aid agendas” (Preece, 2009: 585).

Grimson explores the fact that there are numerous borders in the city that turn a native into a foreigner (Grimson, 2008: 505). This regards especially the urban poor but there are areas which are symbolically prohibited even for the middle class, e.g. Palermo Chico (ibid.). Grimson further mentions the *cartoneros*, “the recyclers”, who collect, sort and sell the garbage of the urban elite and thus “disturb the homogeneity of the urban landscape and cast doubt on the official elite habitudes of the capital” (ibid.: 506). This leads to the racialization of the *cartoneros* as a darker race, as *negros*, invoking a superior whiteness (ibid.). This racial discourse seconds the idea that the capital “represents a piece of Europe in a darker Latin America” (ibid.). The work of *cartoneros* used to be illegal only until 2002 when the City of Buenos Aires passed a law legalizing this occupation. The number of *cartoneros* grew significantly after the 2001/2002 crisis when thousands of people ended up on the streets, without a roof over their head nor a job to go to. Hence, the faces of *cartoneros* became the faces of the crisis and made it physically visible. They became “a ubiquitous, hyper-public expression of individual need, community survival, and national crisis” (Whitson, 2011: 1405). Their visibility was a manifestation of the “latinamericanisation” of Argentina – the major fear of the urban elite. I saw *cartoneros* only when coming back home late, they would sleep on the pavements covered with blankets over their heads next to big piles of paper and cardboard.
On the other hand, my short experience I described in the beginning of the introduction to my thesis when I was advised to leave a certain untouristic part of La Boca because of my safety shows that different areas are prohibited to different categories of people (immigrants vs. tourists and expats) for various reasons (aesthetics vs. safety).

4.4 The infrastructure and urban planning

Marc made an interesting comparison: “Buenos Aires is like Gotham City and the question is: Does it need a Batman or a Joker? Does it need to be saved or destroyed?” And he had no doubts about the answer:

“It has to be destroyed, yes. I think Buenos Aires is very different to any other places in the country. It needs to be destroyed and rebuilt. And evacuated first, of course [he said this in a sarcastic tone]. There is a lot of inequality, different neighbourhoods, corruption in every level of the society... Of course, there is always worse, but the Argentines compare themselves to Europeans not to Bolivians or Peruvians.”

Hopefully there is another solution than destruction but it is obvious that Buenos Aires would suit some changes. Concerning infrastructure the metro system is a little odd. The metro itself is quite modern and comfortable, though usually very overcrowded. The biggest difference to European standards is that one never knows when the train is coming and there might be electric power cuts. Also, it stops running around 10:30pm every day, then there are only buses or taxis. There are five different lines distinguished by colours and letters. But the network is not very thick, hence the stops are usually far away from the place one wants to go to, and the lines run from East to West and do not cross – only in the very centre in the far East. Nevertheless, the yellow line runs from Caseros in the very South up North but it crosses only the two lines still in the Southern part of the city and does not cross over to the “better” parts, even though it would be just one or two more stops to the red or green line in the North. Hence, it is almost impossible and very time-consuming if one wants to go by metro to the North since it is a huge detour. Was it a conscious strategy of spatial segregation or just bad planning? Marc living in Caseros in the South told me that because of the bad connection he almost never goes to Palermo since it is difficult to get back home at night and he does not want to pay for taxi. If it was a strategy or not it has the effect of keeping the poor away from not only expensive shops
and bars but also beautiful parks and museums which are free.

The developments in the city almost scream gentrification. This phenomenon has been explored primarily in North American and European cities but in the last decades (or maybe already since the 1960s) it has been taking place in Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires, as well (Inzulza-Contardo, 2012). But it has not been addressed as a real issue, instead “terms such as 'regeneración urbana' (urban regeneration), 'renovación urbana' (urban renewal) or 'mejoramiento de barrio' (neighbourhood improvement) are used by national and local governments in official urban policies, masterplans and urban briefs to improve semi-derelict historic areas and neighbourhoods in general” (ibid.: 2103). Since the 1990s many places like the completely newly built Puerto Madero or the new “hip” areas in Palermo have changed the face of the city and generated displacement for the original inhabitants of these neighbourhoods. This “Latin gentrification” (Inzulza-Contardo, 2012) is visible especially on the physical changes of the cities and building types – old Victorian houses are being replaced by high-rise building, mostly in the form of the above mentioned gated communities (ibid.: 2103). The “improved look” is supposed to attract international clientele and capital, and in consequence improve the city's status. A typical example is the former port of Puerto Madero with many over-priced bars and restaurants. It is very difficult to reach by public transportation – there is no subway stop and buses pass only on the inner side of the area. Hence, one has to either walk for quite some time, cycle, or as most people do – come with his or her own car or take a taxi.

After almost sixty years of neglect, in 1989 President Carlos Menem decided to reconstruct Puerto Madero as a new landing point for international investment and development (Larco, 2010: 199). Even though the development of the area was localized – e. g. the names of the streets and parks carry the names of internationally known Argentine women, the locals come here mostly only because of work or to visit the huge ecological reservation and the promenade with a row of snack stands on the weekends that are the only exception among the otherwise high-end eating and drinking options. Also, the project was funded mainly by foreign investors. Overall the characterless area radiates a global narrative of a place that could be anywhere and gathers mainly (foreign) well-off tourists and employees of transnational corporations.

Another area that went through an immense change is the Almagro barrio. During one decade, this neighbourhood completely changed “from a blue-collar working class borough

fraught with street crime to a growing attraction that receives almost 10,000 tourists per day” (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013: 95) since it hosts the house of Carlos Gardel, Argentina's most famous tango singer, and a huge modern shopping-mall. Some of the streets have been decorated to represent Buenos Aires in the 1930s, and many of the buildings have been painted with over-sized pictures of Gardel. But this neighbourhood used to be the home of the urban poor and many undocumented migrants from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru, and through the reconstruction of the neighbourhood those people were forced by the state to leave (ibid.: 96). Once when I was walking around this neighbourhood taking pictures of the Gardel murals, I passed a building from whose roof was hanging a black canvas with white letters: “NO al desalojo de 80 familias” (“NO to the eviction of 80 families”). There was a chaotic movement of persons, a big car waiting, and a small petition going on.

Almagro and Puerto Madero are just two examples of many more areas in the city that have been specifically re-designed according to the logic of capitalism and consumption. “In other words, spaces as fetishized commodities have become the contemporary medium of practicing the foundational racial and national fictions of Argentina” (Dolph, 2011: 42). The modern design and facilities want to create a new landscape for a new trendy life-style already existing in other cosmopolitan cities around the world. When I asked Karla, who works in the villas for the ministry of habitat and social inclusion of the city government, if there were processes of gentrification going on, she said: “No. We are trying to transform villas into neighbourhoods, into barrios, organize those places through a democratic process. We have round tables. We are trying to make the grassroots organizations stronger, to give them voice.” This kind of approach would be surely appreciated also in other
boroughs of the city where the need to “upgrade” the inhabitants seems to be persistent. In this chapter I wanted to present the context of the city of Buenos Aires, how its inhabitants move and navigate around the city and what kind of borders they have to deal with. On the coming pages I turn the focus on the inhabitants themselves.

5. Life in Buenos Aires

“Houses make a town, but citizens make a city.”
Jean Jacques Rousseau

The city of Buenos Aires is a big city with a stressful big city life. It is a city that literally never sleeps regardless of the day of the week. There are always people to be seen out on the streets, be it tipsy youths returning home early in the morning after a long night-out, people burning tyres and demonstrating against power-cuts, or the busy-working cartoneros collecting and sorting out garbage. On the following pages I will give an account of some of the different life-styles people lead in Buenos Aires, as well as what it means to be a porteño, a foreigner, and an expat in this bustling city once built by foreigners – what are the social, legal and political impacts of those ascriptions on the individuals?

5.1 Being a porteño

There is a saying that Argentines – and especially those from Buenos Aires – are like “Italians who speak Spanish and think they are Englishmen”. This “cultural schizofrenia” (Khosravi, 2008: 9) mirrors the complicated Argentine identity and their feeling of being “lost” which was expressed by my Argentine friends many times. Such fragmented identity was recognized by Geertz in various postcolonial societies; he notes that “the new states were going through a period of ’disorientation’” and the “transition from colonial to post-
colonial [meant] a ‘sort of social changing of the mind’” (Spencer, 1997: 6). During colonial times “[t]he colonial authorities represented the natives” through rather feminine characteristics “as passive, ignorant, irrational, [...] sexually unrestrained and emotionally demanding” (Luhrmann, 1994: 333) in opposition to the self-inscribed progressiveness, rationality, and masculinity. This connects to a “new mode of structuring inequality in human societies” (Smedley, 1998: 694) that emerged in the eighteenth century in the American colonies. The concept of race was used in the colonial context to exaggerate human differences and as a means to rationalize and legitimize the process of colonization itself (ibid.). The colonized were presented as “savages” in opposition to the “civilized” colonizers which led to the self-perception of the colonized as low-status groups in society (ibid.). Race became equivalent to human identity, superseding all other aspects of identity (ibid.: 695). Thus, decolonization meant a huge shift again and the “natives” may have experienced “a crisis of identity” (Luhrmann, 1994: 334) after withdrawal of the colonizer. For example, Luhrmann explored this on the case of the Parsis in Mumbai, India, who used to identify themselves with the British before India gained independence in 1947.

The case of Argentina is somewhat different. The country has been a colony but the people who actually created it fled from wars, hunger, ideological or religious persecution and left behind relatives, language, and land[^14]. The first research on Argentine identity excluded ethnicity and applied the “melting-pot” paradigm. The scholars had argued that the immigrants and their descendants had given up their original identities and had formed “a new people: Argentines of European descent” (Schneider, 2000: 27). Apparently, there was no dominant Argentine identity to which the European immigrants could assimilate since the migration occurred on such a massive scale. Hence, the immigrants of different origins created a new identity and a new society through their intermingling. But from the 1970s a new approach of “cultural pluralism” won more attention and credibility in Argentina (ibid). The scholars then argued that ethnic identities were persistent much longer than had been assumed initially. But they did not investigate the relations between different ethnic communities, and what was the problem of both those paradigms – ethnicity was seen as something stable, unchanging and inborn.

This primordialist view of “a race = a culture = a language” (Barth, 1969: 11) and cultural determinism was influentially criticized by Fredrik Barth in 1969 (ibid.: 128). According to Barth, ethnic identity is constructed at the metaphorical social boundaries where one is

identified as a member of the group or as “the Other”, as a stranger (ibid.: 15). This is a Western construct since Western knowledge was organized through binary oppositions which were denigrating the “other” – like master/slave, civilized/uncivilized, modern/primitive (Young, 2009: 15). Barth emphasized ethnicity as an organizational device while the cultural content could vary significantly across contexts. More recent studies have also revealed the elasticity and continuous redefinition of ethnic boundaries (Schneider, 2000: 32). Nowadays, the postmodern view describes identity as “fluid” in transnational contexts (Bradatan et. al., 2010), and (re)negotiated in daily life (Janson, 2011). Also, postcolonial studies aim to perceive identities as “no longer starkly oppositional or exclusively singular but defined by their intricate and mutual relations with others” (Young, 2009: 15).

The notion of social inclusion and exclusion is a part of national identity as well – “[b]eing considered 'one of us' usually means 'not being one of them’” (Bradatan et. al., 2010: 175). It is interesting that in Argentina the immigrants had become the “locals” and the bearers of national identity, and by target removed the indigenous population. The newcomers were supposed to create the new Argentine identity based on their white race and the proclaimed “civilization”; they forced out the old inhabitants from the visible parts of their cities and took their rights. The Argentine national identity was replaced by the ethnic white identity of the newcomers, and the indigenous inhabitants had become “the others”. Following Faist (1999), the Argentine population could be compared to a diaspora which he distinguishes as a different type of transnational community. He argues that, in diaspora, “there is a vision and remembrance of a lost or an imagined homeland still to be established, often accompanied by a refusal of the receiving society to fully recognize the cultural distinctiveness of community members who are dispersed to many diverse regions of the world” (Faist, 1999: 46). Even though not dispersed in many parts of the world but in one locality, porteños often do have a feeling of this lost and imagined homeland of their forefathers in Europe, and their ancestors did refuse the existing Argentine population when they arrived to Argentina. They might be seen as not only having a postcolonial fragmented identity, but also a migrant identity which has been described through “notions of the border, 'in-betweeness', third space and liminality” (Walsh, 2006a: 124). Some scholars argue that migrant, transnational, and diasporic groups, “understood to live not completely inside or outside one nation state, experience their subjectivity as hyphenated, or 'caught between two worlds'” (ibid.: 125).
It seemed curious to me that most of the Argentines I met were on one hand very proud of their country and would argue with anyone that the Argentine wine, steak, milk or simply anything from Argentina is better than anything else; but on the other hand they always seemed very puzzled by Westerners who had come to live in Argentina, and were dreaming of going to Europe. Hence, some of them seem to be caught up in this “imagined world” created by “mediascapes” (Appadurai, 1990) which form scripts of imagined lives. These scripts “help to constitute narratives of the Other and proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement” (ibid.: 9). The constant reminder of the lost homeland is thus increasing the notion of the “other” towards those who do not share the same opinion – other South Americans. In the following I will explore what it means to be a “foreigner” and an “expat” in the city of foreigners.

5.2 Being a foreigner in a country built by foreigners

Buenos Aires is and has always been a city of foreigners. It is estimated that Argentina received over seven millions immigrants, predominantly from Italy and Spain, between 1870 and 1930. In 2013 immigrants constituted 4.5 % of the population. But ever since the colonial times there has been a strong racist view of the inhabitants. The colonial population statistics included strict distinctions between blancos (white people) and de color (coloured). I have tried to describe the complex notions of what it means to be a porteño who evince obvious traits of a diasporic identity, since “their distinctive sense of themselves is oriented toward a lost or alienated home” (Clifford, 1994: 309) in Europe. So how is it to be a foreigner in a city where (almost) everyone is a foreigner?

5.2.1 The legal framework of migration to Argentina

I had no actual problem regarding access to the fieldsite as a locality. For the most of foreigners it is allowed to come to Argentina without any visa or other official document for ninety days as tourists. Only citizens of the US, Canada and Australia have to pay a fee
of ca. $160 USD to enter the country. This regulation is a “vengeance” for the difficulties Argentines have to face when they want to enter any of those countries. Nevertheless, many foreigners staying in Argentina on a ninety-day tourist visa have actually lived there for much longer time – working illegally. To avoid legal issues in terms of staying in the country, they just have to leave Argentina every three months in order to renew their tourist visa. Hence, many people go across the river to Uruguay, go to see the waterfalls in Iguazú or if they have more time travel to Bolivia, Peru or Chile and combine the trip with visiting some interesting places.

I also went to Uruguay for three days – not because I needed a new visa but I just wanted to see a little bit of the country since it is so close. The easiest way is to take a ferry from Buenos Aires to Colonia del Sacramento, the trip takes only one hour. I had to go through customs on the way there as well as coming back and got a new stamp in my passport and thus a new Argentine tourist visa. It was no problem to leave Argentina, no one asked me anything, but while coming back I had to go through a short interview in Spanish. When the officer asked me what I do in Buenos Aires I accidentally said “I live there” and I could see his surprised and somewhat disturbed expression. Immediately I realized my mistake since to be able to actually live in Buenos Aires in official terms I would need to have some official papers and a different kind of visa. I played it on my bad knowledge of Spanish and explained that I study there but only until the end of January – hence, less then two more months and for that I did not need any other document. They let me go.

The legal framework of migration policy in Argentina, the Migration Law of the Argentine Republic from 2004, is very migration-friendly. It includes high standards for protection of migrant rights and among other measures it states that all foreigners have rights to health and education, regardless of their migration situation. Also, the constitution of the Argentine Republic from 1994 says in its preamble that its aim is to “guarantee justice”, “promote the general welfare”, and “secure liberty” among others for all the people of the world who want to settle on the Argentine soil. The 25th article also says that the Federal Government is to “encourage European immigration and may not restrict, limit or burden with any taxes the entry into the Argentine territory to foreigners who arrive with the purpose of tilling the soil, improving the industries, and introducing and teaching sciences
and the arts. In 2006, the Government launched the National Programme of Migrant Regularization, “Patria Grande” (meaning “Great Homeland”), which facilitates to every citizen from a member of Mercado Comun del Sur (MERCOSUR, Common Market of the South) or associated country to obtain the regular residence in Argentina, through a procedure based solely on the nationality of the applicant and their lack of a criminal record. This programme was passed after a public outcry following a fire in an illegal textile sweatshop in which died a family of six Bolivians including four children locked inside.

5.2.2 The diasporas

The population of Buenos Aires is very diverse, encompassing many different nationalities and different migrant groups. The first statistical record about Africans is from the 17th century; in 1680 there were around 23,000 black people in Argentina held as slaves. They were considered to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In the beginning of the 19th century almost 30% of the total population of Buenos Aires of 40,000 were Negros y Mulatos (blacks and mulattos). But it was probably even more than the official numbers show; in the middle of the 19th century there existed a political movement Democracia Negra (Black Democracy) and even various newspapers were including the interests of the black community. But then the yellow fever came and killed a huge part of the black population who were not even allowed to leave their homes and escape the epidemic. Nowadays there is no trace in contemporary Argentina of the African Argentines who lived in Buenos Aires during the 18th and 19th centuries which is a result of mestizaje and “extintion” (Guano, 2003: 164, Note 1). Black people in today's Buenos Aires are mostly seen selling cheap sunglasses, jewellery or handbags on the streets. Their social status has not improved as describes one of my informants, Michael:

“Here, black people are men selling jewellery on the streets and women are prostitutes. Many of them [porteños] are racist. They have adopted our language, like the word ‘nigger’. In English it's used for African Americans and here they are using it for Bolivians or Peruvians.”

16 Artículo 25º: El Gobierno Federal fomentará la inmigración europea y no podrá restringir, limitar ni gravar con impuesto alguno la entrada en el territorio argentino de los extranjeros que traigan por objeto labrar la tierra, mejorar las industrias, e introducir y enseñar las ciencias y las artes.
The first Asian community that settled in Argentina were the Japanese, arriving during the early twentieth century. During the 1960s arrived primarily Korean entrepreneurs and the third wave consisted mostly of Chinese coming in the 1990s and setting up grocery shops and supermarkets. Those Chinese-owned shops have become a common feature of Buenos Aires. In 2010 there were estimated 120 mil. Chinese people living in Argentina, 80% of them in Greater Buenos Aires. With this number they constitute the forth largest immigrant community. Mostly they have come through “chain migration”, following someone from their family or town. They have been also attracted by the Argentine climate and possibilities of entrepreneurism. Usually they keep low profile and many of them have been fully integrated into the Argentine society.

There is also the second largest Jewish community in Buenos Aires after the US outside of Israel, and people from the Middle East as well, including Syria and Lebanon. They are usually known as turcos, “Turks”, which can also be used in a derogatory manner. It seemed to me that all those communities live quite separate lives from porteños, even though they might meet and interact every day, for instance in a supermarket. But their private spheres do not seem to intersect that much which was agreed upon by my interview partners as well as my Argentine friends. For example, I cannot recall seeing any Asians or black Argentines (I do not mean African Americans coming to Buenos Aires from the US as students or on work assignments) in the cafés or restaurants where I had my interview appointments. They are usually not taking part in the expat events either.

These groups of foreigners – the black Africans, Asians, those from the Middle East (even though most of them have returned to their home countries), and especially the Jews, might be seen as diasporic communities. The term “diaspora” used to describe the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersions, but the discourse is being widely appropriated due to decolonization, increased immigration, global communication, and transport, which encourage multi-locale attachments, and travelling within and across nations (Clifford, 1994: 306). They employ “practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms” (ibid.: 307). Because diaspora is not temporary it differs from travel; it involves maintaining communities and having collective homes away from home, and it involves “political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in

historical contexts of displacement” (ibid: 308). Hence, these diasporic communities in Argentina are often defined through (forced) displacement, and they live in separate communities and barrios in the city. The indigenous population in Argentina has some common traits with diasporas such as “claims of ’firstness’ on the land”, deploying “diasporist visions of return to an original place” (ibid.: 309). Nonetheless, they are usually seen as minorities in a hegemonic state. Their rights have been recognized and empowered only recently. But diasporas are not exactly immigrant communities either, even though they do show similar traits many times, such as their seclusion from the locals. The latter could be seen as temporary, engaged in the process of assimilation, and they are more likely to commute between their country of origin and their new host country. On the other hand, they are often “kept in subordinate positions by established structures of racial exclusion” (ibid.: 311) as I have already described above in the previous chapters. There are different descriptions and understandings of diasporas and some might even overlap with other categories such as expats or immigrants. I do not include expats in this category of diasporas mainly because they come to Argentina out of free will and choice, they usually do not stay in secluded communities of their ethnic nationalities, and they usually stay only for a limited period of time. The next section explores more deeply the lives of “immigrants” in Buenos Aires.

5.2.3 The immigrants

The city of Buenos Aires has about three million inhabitants, the whole province over 15 million. Approximately one million of those are people who were born in other country than Argentina\(^2\). Most of them (668,000) come from the neighbouring countries Paraguay, Bolivia and Uruguay, followed by Peru (70,000), and Europe where the majority comes from Italy (102,000) and Spain (48,000)\(^2\). Nonetheless, even in today's Buenos Aires, a dark-skinned Argentine citizen can be arrested at any time under suspicion of being an extranjero indocumentado (an illegal immigrant from another Latin American country) (Guano, 2003: 160). The self-perception


\(^2\) ibid.: Cuadro P6-P. Provincia de Buenos Aires. Población total nacida en el extranjero por lugar de nacimiento, según sexo y grupo de edad. Año 2010.
of porteños as white and European still persists, as well as their disturbance by the dark-skinned immigrants who disrupt the homogenous image of Buenos Aires as a “white, middle-class, and ‘European’ city” (Guano, 2004: 76). They have a clear image about how a South American immigrant looks like – it is a construction worker or a woman working in domestic services. Karla, a young woman from Bolivia who came to Buenos Aires to study, told me about her confusing experience:

“A lot of Bolivians came here to work, to sell fruits. They do those jobs that Argentines wouldn't do. In the beginning they [porteños] never believe me that I'm from Bolivia. They say all the countries but Bolivia, they have different picture about Bolivians. What bothers me... if someone from Europe says that, but we are neighbours and how can they not know? They don't even know what the capital of Bolivia is! They think like: Buenos Aires, Brazil and the rest.”

In Karla's account, the construction of difference is clearly visible. Here, the assumption that Bolivians are simply different from Argentines works as what Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman (1968) define as accounts of justification, “where one accepts responsibility for a certain act but denies the eventual unethical qualities associated with it” (Lundström, 2012: 153; emphasis in original). Hence, as Michael expressed, some Argentines might not see such behaviour as racist.

It has been acknowledged that the most discriminated groups in Argentina are Bolivians, Paraguayans, and Peruvians who represent also the majority of the inhabitants of the villas, the slums. Bolivians are often described as trabajadores, hard-workers, because they often times work at construction sites where heavy manual labour is requiered, but more commonly they are defined as inmigrante extractivo, “extractive immigrants”, who steal work from Argentines, send their money back to Bolivia and (ab)use the Argentine welfare such as healthcare and education (Caggiano, 2006: 81). Hence, they are contraposed to the former immigrants from Europe who came to offer their labour to a country that needed them, as ones who come to search for our work (ibid.: 81f). Colombians or Venezuelans seem to be accepted more because they often come to study to Argentina since education here is free and of better quality. Colombian and Venezuelan students also join the expat events, I met some during the Night of the Museums and the language exchange evenings, or they hang out with other international students. There are not that many Brazilians, Uruguayans and Chileans living in Buenos Aires but those who have moved here opened their traditional restaurants and bars, or are immersed in the cultural scene. But it was mentioned to me by some of my Argentines friends that Chileans are still sometimes
looked down on because of their treachery during the war over the Falklands. Luz from Venezuela who used to be the traditional kind of expat moving around the world with her husband, is now working for the Government of the City of Buenos Aires for the ministry of habitat and social inclusion, and she is especially engaging in projects in the villas. Since most of the slum-dwellers come from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru, she feels like they have something in common: “we are foreigners”. Luz is proud to be an immigrant, she is proud of her culture and her distinct accent and enjoys using it to intentionally mark her “otherness”. But she was very confused by the behaviour of one of her colleagues, an Argentine woman who had a clearly racist remark aimed at her:

“We are two girls from Venezuela at work and when we were talking once, another woman was passing us and she said: 'Another foreigner?! They're invading us!' That was not correct but I didn't know how to react. I mean, if she sees me like that, what does she think about the people in the villas? And she is supposed to work for social inclusion of those people! And she lived abroad for twelve years!”

This comment shows how widespread is the myth of the inmigrantes extractivos if even a lady who is supposed to be working for social inclusion of all inhabitants of the city appropriates it. I could hear Argentines accusing other South Americans of coming to Argentina only because of welfare benefits several times, but they never used it as a comment on Westerners. Nevertheless, illegal immigrants are of course not only those with darker skin, coming from South America. One of my interview partners also described himself as an “illegal immigrant”, but he explained:

“It's a pretty good life as an illegal immigrant. I use a fake DNI number. They never check it so you can get away with it. I don't need a bank account. If you don't have a visa you just have to pay 400 pesos when you're leaving the country but they don't tell you, don't do it again, they welcome you again when you come back.” (Michael)

I realized that there is not one category of illegal or irregular immigrants either. Even though they might have the same legal status, they are still treated differently. I would argue that because of his better economical situation, preferred country of origin, as well as his coming and staying being a choice, Michael could still enjoy more freedom and rights than other irregular immigrants in the villas. Some others have it better than other others. Look seems to be the first indicator of one's social category. My light skin-tone combined with my naturally blond hair always got me a lot of attention and everyone immediately recognized me as a foreigner. “Rubia, rubia” (“Blondie”), I could hear men calling at me.

23 DNI = Documento Nacional de Identidad; it is the Argentine identification document (ID).
everytime I walked around the city. Along with gender, phenotype is the first physical characteristic that we notice (Price, 2012: 579). Price argues that race and ethnicity arise through bodily encounters in places, and skin being our most visible organ constitutes “the locus of social differentiation” (Ahmed, 2002: 564). Among the light-skinned porteños what usually gave me away was my above-average height and especially my short blond hair which is a very uncommon styling in Argentina. Hence, in encounters with Argentines, I was immediately recognized as a foreigner, as the “other” – the “good other” as opposite to the darker immigrants. Nonetheless, due to my different look – the combination of the fairness of my skin, the colour of my hair, clothing style etc. – my body had become “hyper-visible”, (Price, 2012: 582) just as the dark bodies of Africans or other South Americans.

Porteños usually assumed I was a tourist from Europe or the US. Once I went with my friend Mariano (who is quite dark for a porteño and his friends also call him “Negro”, “Black”) to Barrio Chino (China Town), and while deciding what street food we get, I was approached by two elderly women. They were from Buenos Aires but apparently it was the first time they were in this area, also feeling like tourists. One of them asked me in English where we were from, and while she was quite pleased and excited about hearing I was from Czech Republic, she seemed to be very disappointed and almost disturbed about Mariano being from Buenos Aires. Then she asked me about the food and totally ignored Mariano.

Many of my informants have realized that they gain certain advantages or benefits only because they are Western foreigners. Pauline noticed this while searching for an apartment:

“When you're French people trust you just because you're French. They're more confident with French than with Argentines. For example, we always pay rent on time because the contract says we have to pay on the 1st of each month. But our landlord said it's the first time that happened – with us, before never.”

Hence, a dark-skinned citizen with a legal permit still remains more suspicious than a white illegal immigrant. The colour of one's skin has a direct impact on the person's life, his or her possibilities and access to certain places. White foreigners in Argentina generally feel like living an adventure, like nothing can happen to them while enjoying it, like there is no one to stop them.
5.2.4 The state and the immigrants

In October 2013 the Federal Administration of Public Revenue (AFIP) launched an advertising awareness campaign *Dale derechos!*[^24] (Give them rights!) in which they urge people to register their employees in domestic services and hence give them legal rights. Nevertheless, the commercials promoting this campaign were very naïve and strange. They did not show the faces of neither the domestic worker nor the employer, visible were usually only hands in gloves washing dishes or doing gardening. The point was that even after years of service, the employer did not remember her or his employee's name. But the employee just laughed and reminded the employer of her or his real name. Happy end.

Knippenberg argues that state territory hardly ever covers homogenous population, but through the policy of nation-building, i.e. the construction of the “imagined community of the nation” (Anderson, 1991), it claims to represent one (Knippenberg, 2002: 192). Hence, the state has three options in dealing with the cultural diversity on its territory: elimination, marginalisation and institutionalisation (ibid.). Elimination means that the state is trying to suppress the cultural diversity by violence or a policy of assimilation. This process was used in the first Argentine state that wanted to eliminate the indigenous cultures and replace them with a new European-based Argentine culture. During the big immigration to Argentina, a process of internal colonization and conquest, especially the 1878–1880 Conquest of the Desert led by Julio Roca (who was later president from 1880–1886), was aimed at exterminating the indigenous populations (mainly the Mapuche people in the region of Patagonia) of the interior (Dolph, 2011: 34). Argentina established its “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) of race and nation as a “reterritorialized Europe” (Dolph, 2011: 34). Hence, the idea of a lost home in Europe still prevails. “Marginalisation implies a policy in which certain cultural properties such as language or religion are not totally suppressed, but banned from the public to the private sphere” (Knippenberg, 2002: 192). As marginalised could be seen probably those distinct cultures that survived the elimination attempts of the Argentine state or that were a part of the later immigration wave during the 20th century such as the Asian immigrants. They maintain their cultural practices and their language as a “home language” in their private sphere but seem to be fully integrated in the public sphere. The institutionalisation is the most desired option by the minorities since it gives them certain rights and even political or cultural autonomy can

be the result (ibid.). The Jewish diaspora might be seen as partly institutionalised since it enjoys more acknowledgment and support from the state, such as in creating Jewish associations and building synagogues or Jewish cemeteries. It seems that the Argentine state is trying to make up for its mistakes in the past, and has started to follow the policy of institutionalisation more carefully. The campaign of Dale derechos! is an example of such an effort. Furthermore, in the beginning of 2014, the Argentine government changed its strategy and direction of its official communication by changing its slogan from “Un país con buena gente” (“A country with good people”, picturing Argentina as a solidary country) to “Argentina nos incluye” (“Argentina includes us”, a more personal message promoting Argentina as a united and encompassing country). According to some analysts, the fact that this change happens only shortly before the elections in 2015 is a clear pre-election strategy to improve the government's image, and to show more tolerance and less “tension”, to position the government as “a spokesman for inclusion”. It is apparently a part of communication tactics that aim at transmitting a message linked to greater tolerance and acceptance of differences, trying to promote the idea of an Argentina without any privileged (una Argentina sin privilegios). It might also be connected to the allegations of corruption in the government that had led to ridiculing the old slogan on social networks such as Twitter.25

5.3 Being an “expat”

International migration and the significance of crossing borders is a very subjective experience and thus is not possible to define objectively “regardless of who is crossing the borders” (Hage, 2005: 470). Above, I have described the concept of the “less desired migrant”, the one coming from a poor South American country, and those living in more diasporic communities that are quite secluded. But there also the “other others”, white migrants, called “expats”. I follow the common usage of these terms in daily practice, information media and academic literature, and thus I use expat as a category of foreigners different from immigrants and diasporas. This labelling seems to be a question of class, race and/or ethnicity, and by using a different term a distance to the “other” is established

and reinforced. According to David, how one as a foreigner is perceived by the locals is not really a question of time spent in Buenos Aires but rather it is about the life-style: “it doesn't matter how long, but how you live here”.

Nowadays, expatriates are usually divided into assigned expatriates, moving abroad on a work contract, and self-initiated expatriates, moving abroad by their own choice. In the following I would like to introduce three of my interview partners, their stories and their different definitions and understandings of the word “expat”. The word “expat” comes from the Latin prefix ex (out of) and the noun patria (country, fatherland). Hence, it describes a person who has left his or her country of origin. But the concept is very blurry in common speech as well as in academic literature, and I always had to ask myself: Who are those expats? What does the word actually mean?

5.3.1 The serial expat: Marlene

The first type of expat I encountered is what I call the serial expat. It is a person who is always in motion, not staying too long at one place, moving between countries and continents. S/he has the privilege and luxury of being able to choose where to go and when, usually following her or his dreams or desires to travel and see the world, either doing internships, studying or freelancing. S/he is not yet ready to settle down and is enjoying the freedom to move around. It is the typical self-initiated expatriate. Formerly described as being in their early career phase and having mainly recreational and social motives, self-initiated expats have been later on acknowledged as more experienced people who chose an international career (Biemann & Andresen, 2010: 431). This type of expat could be identified with cosmopolitanism “as a perspective, a state of mind, or a mode of managing meaning” (Hannerz, 1996: 102). Cosmopolitans are willing to engage with the “other”, they are open toward difference and search for contrasts rather than uniformity (ibid.: 103); they want to be participants in other cultures, “or at least do not want to be too readily identifiable within a crowd of participants, that is, of locals” (ibid.: 105). They use their transnational mobility mostly to bridge different cultures they are involved in, and so incorporate different meanings and experiences into their personal perspective (ibid.: 108).

Marlene is 28 and she comes from the Netherlands. She studied tourism management and now she works in a tourism agency but she is trying to establish herself as a blogger and
make money with her passion – writing. She arrived in Buenos Aires in September 2013: “It was so cold. I didn't have anything, I just booked a hostel for one night. I was well prepared”, she pointed out in a sarcastic tone. After volunteering eight months in Uganda she decided to finally follow her dream and move to Buenos Aires. As a small girl she used to watch a travel programme and immediately fell in love with the Argentine capital. She arrived totally unprepared and knowing almost nothing about the city nor the language. At first she was disappointed – the weather was cold, she could not communicate properly, she made only foreign friends who all left later on, and she could not find a job. But as soon as she found her first Argentine friend, things got better and she got to love the city in the end. I contacted Marlene through her blog and via Facebook. I wanted to talk to her because she described herself on her blog as an “expat” so I was really interested to hear her understanding of this concept. She told me:

“For me it's a foreign person who lives in another country doing whatever. Actually, the first year you live somewhere abroad you're still a tourist, that's the official definition. But no one uses it in that way. I lived eight months in Uganda, so I was actually still a tourist, but I used to say 'I'm living here'. Your life is there, your friends... Tourists come, look at the attractions and leave again.”

I had noticed that people who had come to a foreign country to live there for some time are very negative towards other people calling them “tourists”. Right at the first event I joined, The Night of the Museums, an American girl was called by an Argentine a tourist. Immediately she got upset and explained herself as “living” or “studying” there, not just passing by. She wanted to be seen by the locals rather as one of them; she tried to distinguish herself from tourists who come and go, only seeing the new place without really experiencing it, by anchoring her life and livelihood in the new country. I also used to get very offensive in India where I was constantly perceived as a tourist who does not know the prices or her way around. Hence, while haggling with rikshaw drivers I always ended up defending myself: “I'm not a tourist, I know the prices!” The main difference between a tourist and a cosmopolitan who seeks to immerse him- or herself in the other culture, is thus that tourists are not participants but only spectators (Hannerz, 1996: 105). Nonetheless, locals apply the tourist-label to foreigners increasingly routinely which may “ruin many of the pleasures of cosmopolitanism, as well as pose a threat to the cosmopolitan sense of self” (ibid.). Hence, listening to Marlene's understanding of an “expat” I asked her what the difference to an “immigrant” is:
“Immigrant has to stay longer, and has to have papers. I don't have those papers, I still have to leave every three months. I'm also working illegally... I like the word expat or the 'serial expat' – I've lived in four different countries. The expat just moves to another country and stays there for many years. I don't like the word immigrant – it's almost always negative, at least in the Netherlands. Expat in the blogging world is just someone living abroad, it's used in a fun way.”

In the beginning she used CouchSurfing a lot, to meet new people and to get to know the city better. She found her first job in another travel agency and her room in a shared apartment through Craigslist. As a blogger she used CouchSurfing and Facebook groups to meet people who would do “something really local” with her and then she would write about it in her blog-section “Going Native”. Because Argentines are very active on the Internet this method worked just fine. Since her first arrival in Buenos Aires she started practicing Spanish, found good friends and got a good job but she does not want to stay in Argentina forever. There are still many places for her to explore and live in. Following up on her, I found out that she came back to the Netherlands in late April 2014 for two weeks and afterwards she was going to move to England where she got a job as a beekeeper where she would make much more money than in Buenos Aires. The economic situation had become a big obstacle for her but also porteños “really started to annoy her”.

Hence, Marlene is an example of a life-style generating from curiosity for other cultures and seeing the world. She came to Buenos Aires out of her own decision – because she wanted to see and experience something else, improve her language skills or just live an adventure for a while. The self-initiated foreign work experience contributes to self-managed global career development (Biemann & Andresen, 2010: 431). The difference to assigned expatriates is that self-initiated expats are themselves the initiators behind the decision to work internationally, not a company; they are hired as locals in the foreign country, and decide themselves if or when they want to return to their home country or move to a different country (ibid.: 432). Expats in this category that I met often times decided for a trial period before arriving which means they would come and see for a couple of months if they like it and want to stay longer, go back to their home country or somewhere else. This is very different from the “typical” immigrants from Bolivia or Peru who cannot afford spending a few months on discovering and exploring and if things do not work out go somewhere else. Moreover, self-initiated expats “individually plan, design

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26 Craigslist is an advertisements website with various sections including jobs, housing, for sale, services etc. Established in the US, currently it covers over 70 countries. For more information: [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)
and evaluate their own career instead of relying on organizations to define it” for them, “their identity is less based their job or organization they work for [...] but is developed around skills and competencies”, and thus “they are more prepared to make inter-organizational moves” (ibid.).

Since they are very social and keen on getting to know the local culture, I met many serial expats at CouchSurfing events where locals and foreigners get together in order to exchange and share experience, and also to get to know the city. According to their financial possibilities, they might live anywhere in the city. Another young woman I met lived somewhere on the border between Palermo and Recoleta and as she told me, she almost never left the area because everything she needed was there, including most of the CouchSurfing events. Other serial expats avoid this area as described further down. I also find that most serial expats have rather flexible jobs, they work from home, write blogs, they might be volunteering for an NGO, or being exchange students. Hence, they usually do not have fixed schedules which allows them to be more spontaneous and creative with their free time, and take part in the many cultural activities in the city.

5.3.2 Expat turns immigrant: David

Through my second interview partner I got in touch with David, a quite well known Englishman who wrote a book in Spanish about the buses in Buenos Aires and who runs a Stand-Up comedy show twice a week, as well. After sending him an email I got a positive reply right away the same day. We arranged a meeting at his home on a Saturday afternoon. When I came to his house his wife was cleaning and so we went to a café close by.

David has been living in Buenos Aires since fifteen years. He arrived when he was 22 years old. He studied languages and Spanish brought him to Brazil, Uruguay and then to Argentina where he met his first wife on his second day in Buenos Aires. He went back to the UK, finished his studies and came back to Buenos Aires because of his wife. This proved to be a common reason; most of my informants came to Buenos Aires because they met and fell in love with an Argentine woman or man. Even if the relationship did not work out they decided to stay for at least some more time because they were not happy with the situation in their home countries either. Hence, people in this category are also self-initiated expatriates for whom coming to Argentina was their own decision. But unlike
the serial expats, “expats turn immigrants” move and stay because of other people and their personal relationship, they are less interested in gaining international working experience or the nomadic lifestyle.

When I asked David how he see himself, he answered:

D: About eight years ago I started defining myself as an immigrant, when I said to myself I'm probably going to stay here for the rest of my life.
H: And who is an expat?
D: Expat is rather a wealthy white person. They are kind of pretentious – 'no, I'm not an immigrant, I'm an expat'. The white European or American expat has a pretty good life-style here. I don't know when you cross the line between expat and immigrant. They live quite different life-styles. They tend to live in different parts of the city, there is a physical, geographical separation.

Those of my interview partners who have really settled down and built a family in Argentina, define themselves as immigrants and even though they are aware of the negative connotations of the word, they are comfortable using it as a self-ascription. For them, “immigrant” represents a sense of settling down and staying in a country without making plans of going elsewhere. They have found their home and do not want to change. Also, they see expats as rather wealthy people from the West, and as one of the distinctions they emphasize their different life-style marked by their better economical status. They speak the language fluently, have Argentine family-ties, and even though they might have mostly foreign friends, they are immersed in the Argentina social life and have a good knowledge about the affairs and developments in Argentina. But even though they might perceive themselves as immigrants, for the locals they remain extranjeros, “foreigners”, or turistas, “tourists”. They are neither diasporics – in the sense these are perceived in the local context – as they mostly come as travellers, long-term tourists, or employees, individually and for personal reasons, not following their ethnic community.

For another foreigner just like myself they might be little more difficult to find without connections or an official appointment, simply because to a foreigner they might seem Argentine. I got in touch with some “expats-turn-immigrants” only through a different contact. They are often times entrepreneurs having their own business or they work for companies that have some kind of connection to foreigners (e. g. the publication The Argentina Independent aimed at English speakers in Argentina). But they usually do not join any of the mentioned expat events or Internet platforms.
5.3.3 The “expat-hater”: Luz

I met Luz through a common friend whom I met on the monthly gathering of InterNations. I told him about my research and that I was looking for some other South Americans for interviews. Himself a Venezuelan he suggested I talk to his friend Luz who has a rich experience of moving around the world with her husband. She is in her late thirties and comes from Venezuela just as her husband. We met in a park on a hot, incredibly humid day. She was very open and really eager to speak, I almost did not get a chance to say anything. She immediately started to share with me her opinions and experiences.

Luz has been moving around the world a lot when she was following her husband working for an oil company. They used to live as the “real” expats: “You have no bills, you don't pay the rent, school fees, in some countries you get a car and a driver, you get an allowance to go back home, you have an amazing health insurance, and on the top of it an amazing salary.” An expat is for her “an extremely lucky wealthy pampered spoiled person, who can best complain about the place where he lives. That's really amazing. Plus all the expats feel like they only understand each other.” But it was not all that rosy. Luz was suffering during the twelve years living as an expat. She wanted to have her own life but it was difficult, she could not find a job easily, she did not have a real circle of friends – mostly just the expat wives who were only concerned with cooking and taking care of their children and households. Luz, definitely not a housewife, was trying to get involved in the local communities and be active. But it was not easy because of their constant moving: “I think you need two years to start a life, to connect with locals, that's the key. And we were always moving after two, three years.” But coming to Argentina three and a half years ago Luz got her life back:

L: Again we were surrounded by expats but I speak the language so I was confused in the beginning. We had this amazing flat that only expats can pay for... Here I work in villas. And to except that people live in those conditions, that's hard. I used to work for an NGO and now I work for the city government. In the villas there are mostly people from Paraguay, Peru and Bolivia.

H: So do you still see yourself as an expat?

L: No, no, no, thank god no. For many years I had all those privileges, I was a taker, I didn't make any contributions to the society... Of course I'm an immigrant here. And I'm proud of it. I use my accent, my words. I want to show them we are the same, they have to recognize now that they're more latinos. Now there are no Europeans but other latinos.
Because of the similarities in culture and customs between Argentina and Venezuela Luz wanted to hang out only with locals. She has tried to go some of the CouchSurfing and InterNations events but was not happy about those: “I went to this language exchange\textsuperscript{27} I felt he [her husband] was taking me into an expat world again. There are Argentines there but not the type of Argentines I want to meet.” Probably also because of her negative experience, she was very negative towards expat-communities or people who would come to “help” as volunteers for a short period of time, not knowing the language and leave feeling as saviours of the world since she worked in such an NGO. They closed it later on because it worked only as a “travel agency for spoiled kids” without any interest in the culture or the whole context.

Luz and those of my informants who really distanced themselves from expats, saw expats as invaders, takers, who are not interested in the society they live in and prefer to stay in their expat-circles. They saw expats as the “others”, as someone to avoid and keep their distance from. Hence, the word was for them loaded with very negative meanings. They believed that expats lived completely different lives from their own because of the fact that expats have more money. The advantage of the traditional expats on company assignments is not only that they get higher wage but also that they get it in foreign currency. In Argentina, it is not allowed to open a bank account in other currency than Argentine pesos, and it is not possible to exchange pesos legally without being a resident with an Argentine bank account, earning a certain amount a month, and going through other complications. Fortunately – for foreigners coming with euros, American dollars or Brazilian reals – there is the black market for exchanging money. And due to the restrictions of the Argentine government, there is actually no other possibility for getting pesos. The busy shopping street Florida in the Microcentro is literally full of unofficial exchange “shops” (often it is news stands in the middle of the street), and people who shout the whole day \textit{“cambio, cambio, cambio”} (“exchange, exchange, exchange”) approaching foreign looking people. The foreigners passing Florida street are mainly tourists; expats living in the city avoid this street as much as they can because they know they are going to be recognized as foreigners and do not want to be annoyed. Hence, they distance themselves from tourists also by avoiding some places that are known as touristic. Florida street or the area of \textit{Caminito} in La Boca are examples of such places.

\textsuperscript{27}There is a language exchange called “Mundo Lingo” three times a week at different places in Buenos Aires. They advertise those events also on CouchSurfing. It was established by a young English man whom I also interviewed. Now he is trying to open new Mundo Lingo in London and later on in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Even though they do not see themselves as expats, they are described like that by other expats since they fall under the category of white prosperous individuals. They might feel more like immigrants and also follow that life-style – hence avoiding touristic places and areas or events associated with expats, e. g. Palermo. On the other hand, for example Pauline really did not like expats but was one of the InterNations' Ambassadors for Buenos Aires, dealing with expats almost daily. It seems that “expat-haters” and their practices are very much influenced by their own prejudices and individual preferences.

5.3.4 Is there an expat community?

There are certainly things that “expats” share and do in the same way but is it really possible to talk about an “expat community” in a huge city such as Buenos Aires? To certain extent it is since those people do share certain traits. But a community would imply the existence of a shared identity, as well as values and beliefs, and above I demonstrated that the term “expat” itself is very flexible and blurry, and its usage depends on individual preferences and prejudices. Some people who would be described by others as expats are rather enemies of this concept and distance themselves from this ascription as well as the “expat community”. Pauline sees expats as people who live a completely different life which is because of their far better economical status: “I live like a normal Argentine. Expats have much more money. They are very separated from the locals. Other foreigners can't do as many things as expats. It's another life if you get your wage in euros, dollars or pounds.” Others do not see themselves as expats but nevertheless as a part of the expat community, e. g. those working with/for expats. But interestingly enough, the word “expat” is usually not used by the locals, it works rather as a self-ascription or an ascription of foreigners for other foreigners, for the “others”. Argentines usually use the terms turista (“tourist) or extranjero (“foreigner”) for white foreigners which distinguish them from the less desired immigrants and which imply their different social status. When I tried to use the Spanish translation of “expat”, “expatriado”, it did not meet with much understanding and so we usually agreed on extranjero. It seems like people from the global North appropriated “expat” in order to distinguish themselves from the poorer and less educated immigrants from the global South, or even from tourists when one does not want to be seen as a tourist. This might be rather the case in Latin America, since Westerners do not get
mixed up with other South American foreigners, but I assume it comes also from the events of maltreatment of immigrants in Europe, as well as the negative perception of those which is verbalised in their labelling (e. g. immigrants in English, or Ausländer in German). Hence, a European who moves only in the European region prefers to call him-/herself an expat instead of an immigrant which carries negative connotations, as well. I believe that if this person moves to Argentina, he or she is likely to follow the same logics.
The prevailing opinion among my informants was that white immigrants are usually treated better than darker ones, and that it is generally excepted to denigrate the less-desired immigrants and to make fun of them. South American immigrants are perceived as alien invaders wanting to rob Argentina of its imagined purity. But white immigrants are welcome as carriers of advanced civilization and wealth. Hence, “others are welcome, but some others are more welcome than other others” (Houtum & Naerssen, 2002: 129). David mentioned the way his book about buses was promoted:

“They [Argentines] have this idea about Englishmen that they are cultured, westernized, polite, and they contrasted it with the idea of the buses – dirty, dangerous – and you know it's not true, it wasn't a big deal for me, but it was a big deal for the press.”

Even though the topic on the Falkland Islands under British rule, or the Malvinas as Argentines call this territory, is still quite “hot” after more then thirty years since the war, my British interview partners did not have serious negative experience because of their nationality, usually they just got negative comments from taxi drivers. Also, David mentioned the educational aspect and difference between social classes – the middle and upper-middle classes usually do not hold anything against English people since they realize that today's migrants in Argentina do not have anything to do with the war. But the lower classes are more opinionated and hostile when it comes to Malvinas. For instance, David got many times shouted at because of his origin by his employer when he was working in a low-class neighbourhood.

Hence, even though “expat” is a concept with very fluid borders, changing meaning according to different contexts and personal preferences, there are some common traits to it. The word is not used in Spanish; the common equivalent would be probably extranjero or the more disdainful yanqui. The different labelling suggests a difference to “immigrant” and the reason seems to be a more desired nationality which corresponds with the europeanized image of the Argentine nation. Expat can be thus seen rather as a structural category of white foreigners who are more welcome in Argentina, than as an identity
concept. But Buenos Aires is a big city and so we must ask: Where is this expat community and how is it expressed? These questions lead us to the emergence of an “expat-scape”, a space where expats are to be found and where the imagined expat-identity gets materialised, even commodified.

6. The “expat-scape”

6.1 The entry: the search for expats

To get in touch with expats I used mainly two websites: CouchSurfing and InterNations. The CouchSurfing website says: “Couchsurfers share their lives with the people they encounter, fostering cultural exchange and mutual respect.”

With people from this community I mostly “clicked” instantly due to our common interests and lifestyle. I also met some people through InterNations which is another online platform directed especially at expatriates. The website says that InterNations is “the first international online community for people who live and work abroad”. I went to one of their monthly gatherings and immediately I felt a different atmosphere than at CouchSurfing events. As Marlene put it: “CS is less about networking [like InterNations] but more about meeting future friends. You chat a bit online, you see the profiles. Even the websites are so different, InterNations has this white website, it's more business-style.” But some of the people I met were members of both sites, enjoying the different milieus and perspectives. As a member of a couple of such groups, I could observe that expats often times use these various Internet platforms or also the many different Facebook groups to get advise from other expats. I joined the group “EXPATS living in Buenos Aires, Argentina” that has currently 1.800 members, and even thoug the description says it is supposed to gather only Americans living in Argentina or Argentines willing to communicate with Americans, the members have many different nationalities. The group is usually used to share experience in Buenos Aires and Argentina regarding housing, jobs or visa, as well as to organize

28 https://www.couchsurfing.org/n/about
29 http://www.internations.org/about/internations?ref=fo_ab
language exchange or sport events. Also many bloggers use this space to advertise their blogs and articles, and recently there have been many posts about international parties. There are also several groups for some of the barrios, but these gather mostly Argentines living in those neighbourhoods.

Hence, these Facebook groups are often used to advertise language exchange, to search for accommodation or to ask for advice concerning living in Argentina. But the events where people actually get together with the aim of cultural exchange or meeting new friends have also other purpose. Many Argentine men, the so called chamuyeros (‘‘sly flatterers’’ using lies and made-up stories to pick-up women) come to those events to search for a foreign girlfriend. Quite some of my interview partners – both men and women – stopped going to such events precisely because of being the target or having to watch the “work” of chamuyeros. An organizer of one of the language-exchange-evenings told me in an interview that those men have been a real issue and that they have been trying to avoid such an audience. Nevertheless, being a member of those groups enabled me to see what they are used for, as well as to get some contacts and to know about the upcoming events.

Here it becomes clearer that expats is a category with different traits and interests than tourists, immigrants, or diasporas. For example, they must probably all search for housing when they arrive in Buenos Aires but the advertisements in the above mentioned social media groups were about housing in areas that would be too expensive for immigrants and probably not desirable for diasporas since they tend to live in secluded communities and neighbourhoods. Also, expats tend to put themselves “out there”, they are interested in meeting new people, but immigrants and diasporas tend to stay and engage in their ethnic communities, often times living with their families and friends from their home country. Expats search for events and happenings in the city because they mainly want to have fun and enjoy their time abroad, they do not care much about the state affairs or Argentina's politics, unlike immigrants who have come mainly to improve their livelihood. People from these different categories might meet each other on daily basis but their lives remain separated by invisible as well as physical borders.

Various bars and pubs that are owned by foreigners or have a foreign concept are also very popular among expats – e. g. the American bar “Sugar” in Palermo or “The Temple Bar” in San Telmo. Hence, expats renegotiate the space and create here their own social space offering some kind of safety or “home away from home”. The bars are decorated with
pictures of foreign bands or sayings in English, the cafés with pictures of international celebrities, the restaurants have minimalistic design, light colours and are often vegetarian or offer at least some vegetarian dishes, they play international music and the staff speaks at least some English (which is not common in Argentina). The huge shopping malls gather international clothes brands, as well as international coffee houses and fast food chains. Those places are popular with foreigners for their familiarity and with locals for their “exoticity”, and offer a space of freedom for various expressions of identity.

Foreign bars or clubs, as well as Western-style shopping malls\(^3\) represent in different cultures spaces for defiance. For example in Mumbai, India, the “Leopold Cafe” is a famous spot to hang out with foreigners. Designed as a French café and playing Western music it offers a piece of home abroad, as well as a piece of foreign land at home for locals. They enjoy here the kind of behaviour which is prohibited in public space (drinking beer, dance passionately with the opposite sex, touch or even kiss), they behave in a “Western” way. Here, the restrictions seem to temporarily fade away. In Buenos Aires, the foreign bars offer a familiar environment for foreigners, and a fun exotic site, a piece of the imagined world, for Argentines. The English names and foreign designs, but most importantly the address give to those places as well as their visitors more status and prestige, and evoke the sense of “the place to be”. Mostly they are located in the hippest parts of Palermo such as Palermo Soho or Palermo Hollywood. There is usually an unwritten dress-code of stylish chic clothes and no flip-flops, as well as prices requiring a full wallet. Women usually get in for free but men often have to pay an entrance fee which is supposed to attract more women to come but may also lead to men patronizing the place. Here, the goal is not to be seen as a local but to emphasize one's otherness and foreignness, one's difference from the locals. Hence, these places are popular rather with less cosmopolitan expats who do not seek to get immersed in the local culture but want to distinguish themselves from the locals, and Argentines who embrace Western culture.

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\(^3\) Accounts on shopping malls as spaces of freedom for other forms of identity or defiance are to be found e.g. in: Wilson, Ara: *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok. Tomboys, Tycoons and Avon Ladies in the Global City*, Berkeley 2004; or Khosravi, Shahram: *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. University of Pennsylvania Press 2008.
6.2 Being a participant: getting local?

For some expats it is more important to share their life with locals, for some less, depending on their level of cosmopolitanism and willingness to share the local culture. But as I have already mentioned most of the expats try to encompass local culture in their repertoire, even without really engaging in local life, by adopting some local habits and customs, such as greeting each other with a kiss on the cheek. Especially those expats who come to stay only for a limited period of time stick with other foreigners, mostly of the same nationality, because they find it easier to get along and understand, as well as support each other. They might be seen rather as long-time tourists. As Pauline expressed it: “They [porteños] have their own friends and they are not interested in the city the same way as you are. With French people you have the same ideas to explore the city, you want to see everything, to do everything.” They may also share tips and advise regarding cultural differences and the ways things work in Argentina. David also told me he “somehow naturally gravitates” towards English people, because they have similar tastes: “it's the football, the language.” Expats might not want to specifically meet their fellow country(wo)men but many of those I talked to ended up with people of the same nationality anyway. Sharing the same culture made it easier to understand each other and build a friendship.

When I was talking to my interview partners about this topic, some of them got little upset or expressed shame because they realized they did not spend any or enough time with Argentines. David said he was feeling like “committing the expat crime” because he was not spending time with Argentines but mostly with English people. One of my informants from the UK confided to me that he has a psychoanalyst because he sometimes feels helpless and angry with porteños: “the lack of contact with foreigners really gets back to you”. He got also unstoppable in complaining about porteños and Argentina while he was talking to me, since he “never gets the chance to do it in English”. Things improved for him when his brother came and since then has been working with him, as well as has been taking care of his newborn baby.

Marlene, who came to Argentina after spending eight months in Uganda volunteering, had an interesting and surprising experience:

“Ugandans are extremely warm, they are just waiting for you with open arms. But then you come here [to Buenos Aires] and people are warm, but still somehow reserved. That was quite a shock. It wasn't a culture shock to go from the Netherlands to Uganda, but from Uganda here.”
The research on tourism as well as on expatriates that usually takes place in Asia investigates expatriate adjustment since this is important and relevant to their work performance (Selmer, 2006: 1210). Also Hannerz notes that the development of competences in alien cultures has become an important factor of working life, and thus there has been a rapid growth of relocation industry (Hannerz, 1996: 108). When I started the conversations with my informants, most of them seemed at first very positive about Buenos Aires and their life there in general, but after some time talking they became more and more negative and started to complain about different things that annoyed them in particular. I did not manage to get an interview in a relocation agency in Buenos Aires and I did not meet anyone who used this kind of services, but from their website it seems that they help out only with the material practicalities such as finding housing or opening a bank account\(^{31}\). But what my informants found most difficult was building friendships with Argentines which pushed them back into the “expat-bubble” and the expat-scape. It proved to be rather difficult for most of my informants to leave this space and to socialize outside of it. Following this argument, expats remain in the expat-scape because they are simply not able to enter the “local-scape”. Thus, the locals can be seen as reinforcing or at least maintaining this distinction through their socializing practices.

### 6.3 There is no escape: the expat-bubble and crossing borders

As much as I tried not to I did find myself in the “expat-bubble” as well. I wanted to study all foreigners in Buenos Aires regardless their nationality but I soon realized that I was meeting only Europeans or Americans. One of the reasons was my insufficient knowledge of Spanish because if I wanted to interview Bolivians or Peruvians I would have to do it in Spanish. The importance of knowing the local language was emphasized by many of my interview partners, as well. It was often seen as a distinction marker of being an expat or being a “different kind of foreigner” who is more immersed in the local life. People who did not define themselves as expats saw those as wealthy white people who came only to party and who do not care about the local life; who basically “live the same life no matter where they are”, as Pauline put it. For those “others” among expats, knowing the local

language was a very important marker of one's openness to the new culture, ability to adapt and become one of the locals – or at least try to.

When I expressed my worries about not being able to talk to the foreigners from other South American countries to an Argentine friend of mine, he told me:

“It's difficult to study Bolivians. Why? Because of the different culture. You will be here in different circles, so it's difficult to get in touch with them. You know, most of the vegetable grocery stores are Bolivian but it's difficult to talk to them. They are not so talkative and open.”

Hence, my friend was right – I had been immersed in different circles in Buenos Aires – due to my nationality, background, and my look. I was not hanging out with any of the “less desired” immigrants and our daily paths crossed at the most in a supermarket. But this does not apply only for Western foreigners in Buenos Aires, porteños do not socialize with this group of immigrants either. Another Argentine friend told me:

“We are famous for being racists since we are the whitest country in South America. Argentines are proud. We don't like the rest of South America, natives, indigenous people, for years we hated Bolivians, Peruvians, Paraguayans, Chileans. People think they are lazy and dumb. This government has changed it a bit, it's more open-minded, gave them some rights.”

For me, the distance from other South Americans was not really a choice as it is often times for porteños, it was rather a matter of our different lifestyles, as well as the various structures and borders in the city I described above – the different ethnoscapes. I would not be able to enter the “immigrant-scapes” because I did not have the appropriate knowledge and skills: the language, codes of behaviour, look (ethnicity, clothes), world-view etc. This applies also the other way around – the so called immigrants cannot really access the expat-scape. The different scapes thus require a certain type of identity and performance which is narrated through the environment. One never sees poor families in the vast parks of Palermo or Recoleta, nor walking along Santa Fé Avenue, the well-known shopping street. These areas are prohibited to a part of the city's population not legally but symbolically (Grimon, 2008: 505). “Throughout these liminal spaces, the daily practices of 'border' behavior are easy to observe as people make obvious preparations to cross to the other side of a street or a river” (ibid.). Before crossing the line into elite Buenos Aires, even the middle class visitors take precautions in the form of proper identification, clothing, money, or even adjustment of ways of walking, in order to avoid drawing attention to their “foreignness” (ibid.). Above I have already mentioned the cartoneros who collect and recycle garbage from the streets. They are an example of “recognition of the necessity of sharing territory” and acceptance of border crossing (ibid.: 507). Even though
the differences between poor and middle class people imply discomfort, through the presence of cartoneros the latter learn that poor people in the neighbourhood do not necessarily put them at risk (ibid.).

A middle class person or an expat can go months, or even years, without coming across a villa miseria. Expats consciously control their movements around the city. The vast majority, if not all of the posts offering and especially those searching for housing in the above mentioned Facebook group as well as in CouchSurfing group for housing are for apartments in Palermo, Belgrano or San Telmo; the expat-neighbourhoods. Many expats I met who live in those parts of the city do not feel the need to even leave these places – they have everything one needs, shops, restaurants, bars, clubs, these places are simply “cool”. As I have already mentioned, the presence of this kind of foreigners, the white expats, is increasing the status of the world city as a whole, and exactly through their foreignness expats are put automatically on the top of the social ladder. The (upper-)middle class porteños then have to keep up with them if they want to feel accepted in the expat-scapes.

7. Forever a foreigner?

I lived in Buenos Aires. I paid my rent, cooked my own food, I learned to use the local buses, I learned to communicate in Spanish. But still I was seen as a tourist – my look was distinguishing me from immigrants – as someone who does not truly belong, who lives in a different reality. Moufakkir (2013) introduces a concept of “culture unrest” which he defines as “the context where two cultures live together, but at a level of acceptance that has developed from a state of euphoria, apathy, to annoyance, or even antagonism, sometimes expressed verbally or even physically”, “it underlines the tension that exists between mainstream culture and the culture of a visible ethnic minority group” (Moufakkir, 2013: 324; emphasis in original). As described above there is a lot of such tension in Buenos Aires, especially between Argentines and immigrants from other South American countries. It is astonishing but not rare in an immigrant country that even though they have been living in Argentina for generations, they are still seen as foreigners, as the “others”.

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This fact that those people are “not that much of immigrants anymore” was acknowledged only by one of my interview partners, Michael. So what does it take to become Argentine? Is it even possible to become accepted by Argentines, by the locals? My interview partners had the same opinion on this matter: you always stay a foreigner:

“Here you can't ever get away from being treated as a foreigner. It's like wearing a chicken costume. It's something exotic. I'm constantly being reminded that I'm a foreigner. But in many ways I feel integrated. I'm not living in a bubble anymore. I feel accepted in the circles in which I'm moving, among my Argentine friends.” (David)

Also Matthew, who has lived in Buenos Aires since more than six years and has an Argentine girlfriend, is still being reminded of his origins. Even though he has been away from the UK since so long and knows now probably more about the situation in Argentina than back home, he is often asked to compare these two countries and give examples of their differences: “Once they know you are a foreigner they're interested what things are different in your country, they want you to compare, but I have been gone for so long, I don't know anymore.” Argentines are very proud of being Argentines and for them “being an Argentine” really means “to be born in Argentina to Argentine parents”.

Those of my informants who have lived in Argentina for a few years, have an Argentine partner and an Argentine job, told me that they “feel like home”, that they “feel porteño but not Argentine” because they are not patriotic about the country. Also some of those expats, who had been in Argentina for only a short time felt in a similar way. For example, Marlene told me regarding the upcoming World Cup that she is not going to be for Argentina at any time, “maybe only when the Netherlands is out”. Hence, what I observed is that when foreigners say they feel porteño, they usually mean that they have adopted the new lifestyle – they have mastered the language, they have café con leche y medialunas for breakfast, would never go to Caminito since it is just a “touristic trap”, and eat asado at least once a week with their Argentine friends. But they still hold on to their origins, they maintain some habits and of course ties to their home countries.

When I asked if it was possible to be seen by the locals as one of them, David explained:

“No. You would have to never speak to English people ever again, change your name, get a plastic surgery, sunbathe.. we English people have our accent forever.. and so always those three questions come – where are you from, what are you doing here, why did you come..”

Jeffrey M. Peck studied foreigners, primarily guest workers, refugees and asylum seekers, in Germany – he was interested in how they are treated and perceived by Germans. He
argues that the decision of becoming one of the locals and to belong “does not rest with the foreigner but with the Germans, the refugee may do what she or he can to assimilate but can do nothing to become German” (Peck, 1995: 106f). Even learning the local language does not guarantee a success and acceptance as many of my informants realized: “They judge you because of your pronunciation – if you say you have lived here since fifteen years they are like 'but your accent should be better!'” Nonetheless, some people manage to “get lost in the Buenos Aires soup, they don't hold on anymore to other foreigners but just get loose and get lost”, as Matthew put it. Those foreigners do not spend their free time with other foreigners, and do not speak their mother tongue but use lunfardo, the slang of Buenos Aires. I met one such young man who was originally French but it took me a really long time to realize he was actually not Argentine.

Hence, even though some foreigners manage to “become Argentine”, the border between foreigners and locals seems to be only difficult to cross. I have demonstrated that expats are usually seen by the locals as tourists who might stick around a bit longer. On one hand, they are welcome in the city as elevating its status, improving its global image and bringing capital, and they are also “granted” certain spaces in the city, the expat-scapes that bring to the locals a piece of foreign land and allow them to renegotiate their identity. On the other hand, expats are constantly reminded of their foreignness and kept in their space, so that they do not intrude into the local life and culture too much. Thus, with this practice porteños reinforce the social segregation and the emergence of different categories of migrants since it is them who decides who may cross the border.
Buenos Aires – the type of global city described by Saskia Sassen (2005) – is the eleventh largest urban agglomeration in the world according to the United Nations (2009), the third largest metropolitan area in Latin America (behind Mexico City and São Paulo), and one of the major worldwide destinations for South American migrants. Argentina and especially its capital are built on migration. Despite the current unstable economic and political situation in Argentina (e. g. the big inflation), the country still remains a popular destination for people from the West who re-discovered Argentina after the financial crisis in 2001 when prices and living costs dropped ridiculously low, and Buenos Aires had become “a playground for Europeans and Americans looking to relax or reinvent” – “the chance to start over”32. As I could hear many times from my informants, Westerners feel often attracted to Buenos Aires because of its familiar European look and apparent cultural similarity, the architecture, food, and fashion. Also, due to the colonial history and the persistent self-identification of porteños with the countries of their forefathers, “the nostalgia without memory” (Appadurai, 1990: 3), Europeans are welcome and enjoy a better social status than other migrants. Being a white European myself, it made it easier for me to enter the expat-scapes in the city and get in touch with expats. On the other hand, my whiteness and cultural difference limited my access to the communities of the less desired immigrants.

Created as a colonial country, Argentina has been obviously affected by its history and by the mindset of its colonizers. The idea of white Argentine identity still persists, especially in the city of Buenos Aires whose advertised image is still that of a white European city in Latin America. Since its establishment as the capital city, the architecture of Buenos Aires was supposed to remind its inhabitants of various European cities. Nowadays, the city is following the latest international trends in design and architecture mainly to attract cosmopolitan elites and Western foreigners who elevate its status among other world cities. Hence, as a world city Buenos Aires concregates various categories of transnationals. The city-space is shared by

“cosmopolitan elites, national decision-makers, transnational workers, rural migrants and long-term inhabitants. Their activities form roots for global capitalism and forge structures for accommodating the global within the

32 http://nymag.com/guides/changeyourlife/16047/
framework of the national, while shaping local lives. The making of multi-scalar urban cultures is linked to a violent re-inscription of social boundaries.” (Rao, 2010: 403f)

Even though there have been some attempts of the city's government to include all the inhabitants and to encourage diversity (e.g. new policies and campaigns), the city and its inhabitants remain highly structured and divided. The commodification of spaces, i.e. the transformation of certain neighbourhoods into more upscale areas which has been accompanied by processes of gentrification and thus by “upgrading” the inhabitants, has become a means to communicate the foundational racial and national fictions of Argentina. What Ursula Rao argues about Delhi, holds true also about Buenos Aires: “Urban social negotiations are shaped both by exclusionary impulses of dreams for ethnic purity and class homogeneity and demands for inclusive cities that mobilise human rights discourses and notions of social justice” (Rao, 2010: 404). The spatial segregation is associated to a large extent with people's ethnicity and socioeconomic factors. It is difficult to say if one is the reason for the other; it seems rather that the inhabitants of Buenos Aires – mainly the urban poor – are caught up in a complex vicious circle of their origin and bad economic situation which may be reinforced by their illegal status. The transformation of low-class neighbourhoods into modern areas of business and commerce naturally leads to higher prices of housing and so to poor people leaving to other parts of the city. Another ongoing phenomenon is the voluntary segregation – building of gated communities and barrios privados for (upper-)middle classes outside of the city. The consequences of these segregation processes for the poor are substandard living conditions, as well as segregation in uses and access – to urban spaces, transportation, services, etc.

Furthermore, I described different spaces in the city that are used by different kinds of foreigners. I introduced “expat-scapes” which I defined as virtual and physical spaces that gather people with a certain type of life-style and imagined identity. Expat-scapes are to be found mainly in the northern parts of the city that are characterized by higher incomes, higher prices, higher levels of education, social and economic stability, and are in general more developed than the South of the city. The expat-identity is imagined because as I have demonstrated, the expat category is very heterogenous, with blurry boundaries. There are several kinds of expats, some of them even distancing themselves from the others. Since this identity is often seen as superior by the locals, it might be easily abused – often it guarantees entry to the “hottest” bars and clubs, or it gives one more credibility while
searching for a place to live because Argentines associate with it certain qualities and positive characteristics. Just as expats sometimes imitate locals in their customs, in expat-scapes locals do imitate expats; they adopt their style of clothing and different behaviours which are expected in these environments and are signs of higher social status. Hence, these spaces are also lined by symbolical borders. It seems like everyone knows where he or she belongs, and what measures are to be taken when crossing the borders.

It has been noticed by my interview partners that even though many Europeans or Americans come to Argentina with just as empty pockets as Bolivians or Paraguayans, they are treated differently and have a different, better social status. As if automatically they have access to expat-scapes and gain other social benefits. The distinction in labelling – immigrant vs. tourist vs. expat – thus comes down to one's socioeconomic status and the relative wealth of one's native country, regardless of one's residency plans or legal status. The usage then depends on the context and individual prejudices and preferences. As immigrants are usually described minority ethnic groups from other South American countries, as expats preferably white individuals coming from wealthier Western countries. The difference seems to be that immigrants “travel because they are poor and desperate and 'expatriates' travel because they are curious, self-actualizing cosmopolites”33. I have argued that the reason this distinction is established is related to the colonial history of Buenos Aires and Argentina.

In the increasingly globalized world it is desired to be an expat, to be mobile, to be part of “the new class” with “decontextualized cultural capital” (Hannerz, 1996: 108). Nonetheless, the concept of “expat” itself is extremely fluid and blurry. I presented three of many more understandings of “being an expat” which are common among the foreigners I talked to. Those were the “serial expat” – a true cosmopolitan, who stays only temporarily and has the luxury and freedom of choice when and where s/he wants to leave, but during the time staying is open to the new culture and tries to imitate the ways of the locals to become a participant of their culture. The second category is the “expat turns immigrant” which involves transnationals who become increasingly absorbed by the new culture and loose most of their ties to their home country and its culture. Even though not fully accepted by the locals but still seen by them as foreigners, they do perceive themselves as locals and feel like at home; they feel more rooted in their new country and maintain only

Retrieved May 03, 2014.
the most important ties to their countries of origin. The third category I presented were the “expat-haters”, the “others” among expats who define expats as spoiled wealthy white persons who do not care about the local culture, and so they try to distance themselves from these. Rather then being a completely separate group, they may be found in both of the other categories. Also, while the first two categories depend mainly on the time spent in the new country, the last one depends mostly on one's own believes and values.

Interestingly enough, the word “expat” works rather as a self-ascription of white foreigners than an identification used by the locals. Porteños usually see expats as tourists who just might stay longer around. As expressed by my interview partners, it is almost impossible to get fully accepted by the locals and get immersed in the local life; one stays forever a foreigner. But that did not seem to disturb any of my informants too much. Through their Argentine partners and friends they feel accepted in their circles and milieus but use to maintain friendships with other foreigners, mostly of the same nationality, as well. Those foreign friends represent a kind of support and “soul mate” in the new country, someone with the same tastes and interests, someone who understands.

In the present text I explored the various structures and borders of spatial segregation in Buenos Aires, how are these constructed – what are their historical roots and their implications, as well as how the inhabitants navigate and move through the different spaces and places. I also described the inhabitants of the Argentine capital with the focus on the transnational categories of those people – I was asking who are the foreigners in this city of foreigners and what are the differences among them. Due to the short time of my stay this study surely is incomplete but I hope I have managed to bring the “Paris of the South” closer to the reader, and present its complex context of colonial history and globalized presence.

I believe that my study offers a new view on the concept of “expat”, presenting this category's blurry boundaries and the countless possibilities of its usage. Working mostly as a self-ascription of certain individuals abroad, it seems that expat stands on ethnicity without ethnics and imagined shared racial and cultural heritage. In the local context, expat is supposed to perform as a construction of tourists without tourists, or immigrants without immigrants. Expat may be thus seen as a category of undefined visitors in times of a mobile and globalized world.
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