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Migrants and Cities in the Global South: Transnational Migrants and Marginal City Space in Buenos Aires

Global Urban Research Centre Working Paper #4

By Tanja Bastia

MIGRANTS AND CITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND MARGINAL CITY SPACE IN BUENOS AIRES

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Executive summary

Internal migrants have always sat awkwardly with city authorities. They were often seen as 'peasants in cities', their presence in cities of the then 'Third World' related to negative characteristics such as high illiteracy rates or the rising percentage of population living in unsanitary conditions. However, internal migrants are generally the nation's citizens, albeit treated as second class, but they were able to claim their citizenship of the nation-state as a right of belonging. When the migrants concerned are foreigners, transnational migrants who also maintain ties with their places of origin, these negative perceptions are exacerbated. As non-citizens, they have fewer legal rights as well as symbolic grounding on which to claim their space and belonging to the city.

Buenos Aires is a city built on migration but throughout the twentieth century migrants have often been associated with shanty towns. This was particularly the case during the 1990s when many of the recently arrived migrants from the neighbouring countries of Paraguay and Bolivia settled in the shanty towns. This paper reviews internal and international migration to Argentina to analyse how different waves of migrants were differently integrated into national discourses of belonging. It also reviews the development of shanty towns with the aim of identifying the intersections of multiple forms of exclusion, those based on migration status and those based on place of residence.

1 Introduction

Internal migrants have always sat awkwardly with city authorities. They were often seen as 'peasants in cities', their presence in cities of the then 'Third World' related to negative characteristics such as high illiteracy rates or the rising percentage of population living in unsanitary conditions. However, internal migrants are generally the nation's citizens, albeit treated as second class, but they were able to claim their citizenship of the nation-state as a right of belonging. When the migrants concerned are foreigners, transnational migrants who also maintain ties with their places of origin, these negative perceptions are exacerbated. As non-citizens, they have fewer legal rights as well as symbolic grounding on which to claim their space and belonging to the city.

Large sections of the population drawn to the city as 'labour' have never fully benefited from 'urban' life during the industrial revolution in England as well as in twentieth century Latin American cities (Engels, 1987; Portes, 1989; Gilbert, 1998). And while for Lefebvre the city provides the means through which people can learn from each other and overcome their differences, it is precisely the shaping of some groups as 'different' which prevents all inhabitants of a city to fully benefit from it, be it the Irish in eighteenth century Manchester (Engels, 1987), *nordestinos* in Saõ Paulo (Caldeira, 2000), or Zimbabweans in South African informal settlements (HSRC, 2008).

This paper focuses on Buenos Aires, which by the 1890 was the largest Latin American city in terms of its population and by 1914 was not only the second largest Latin city after Paris but also the largest city of any kind south of the equator (Moya, 1998). Today it has lost its numerical primacy globally and even within the Latin American continent. Moreover, its fascinating history throughout the twentieth century has also given rise to a number of contradictory developments in which poverty increased hand in hand with luxury shopping centres and 'gated communities' and where 'ethnic others' – mainly migrants, both internal and international at different points of the twentieth century – are associated with the city's ills, such as crime, unemployment and health scares. These contradictions and the many different ways in which the 'ethnic others' have been excluded from the city is most clearly seen in the city's attitudes and policies towards shanty towns[1].

While migrants live and work in many different parts of the city, shanty towns are often the place where migrants first arrive and are strongly associated with migrants and 'ethnic others' in the popular imagination. I therefore trace the nature of national development and urban policies throughout the twentieth century in order to frame the city's attitudes towards shanty towns and develop a better understanding of the role they play within the wider processes of social change.

People living in shanty towns were clearly rejected and not seen as part of the city by the political leadership as well as better off residents for most of the twentieth century (Perón's era was an exception) (see Ratier, 1971-75 and 1985; Margulis, 1974). This continues to be the case (Margulis, 1998). Yet arguments that the shanty towns and its inhabitants are today completely severed from the city (Auyero, 1999 and 2000; Eckstein, 1990; Koonings and Kruijt, 2007; Kruijt and Koonings, 2007) denies these social actors agency and leaves no

[1] By making this comparison, I do not wish to argue that all 'ethnic others' either live or are associated with shanty towns. I do not have the statistical information to claim that a significant proportion of the migrant population continues to live in shanty towns and what information I have access to – Moya's historical analysis of Spaniards in Buenos Aires, other secondary literature and my own qualitative data – indicates that (i) segregation in the city does not follow ethnic lines (Moya, 1998); (ii) some migrants live in *barrios* rather than the shanty towns.

room for them to develop any kind of negotiation with these multiple forms of exclusion that affect their daily lives (see also Lloyd, 1979).

2 *Villas miseria* in the city's imagination

Today's *villas miseria,* or shanty towns, in Buenos Aires have mixed origins. Some were initially built by local authorities to house newly-arrived overseas migrants or relocated shanty town dwellers from other parts of the city, while others have grown spontaneously over the last few decades as people struggled to find suitable accommodation elsewhere. While different in origins, they are all associated with undesirable characteristics, such as crime, violence, social disintegration, poverty and promiscuity. As writer Bernardo Verbitsky, who allegedly coined the term *villa miseria,* described in his book *Villa miseria también es América:*

> "And so it happened. An ordinary morning Buenos Aires discovered an extraordinary show: an immense conglomerate of miserable dwellings clustered at the feet of its steep buildings of its modern architecture. You would have thought that Indian homesteads had resurrected, as they were so similar. These huts were not visible even from the highest of skyscrapers until then. Or is it that people preferred not to see them? What was certain was that their presence could not be ignored." (Verbitsky, 1967:38, author's translation)

More recent accounts echo this general image of desperation and hopelessness. Auyero, one of the few to conduct recent ethnographic work in Buenos Aires shanty towns, describes the reality of shanty town dwellers in the following terms: "a highly oppressive mix of everyday violence and humiliation, state corruption, educational failure, joblessness or extremely precarious occupation attachment, and increasing drug-consumption and trafficking. This blend fosters pervasive social and physical insecurity" (Auyero, 1999:48). And indeed these feelings are echoed by my own research in two Buenos Aires shanty towns, where a former shanty town dweller who has since moved out to a *barrio* stated that*:*

> "In a *villa de emergencia,* for example, there is an … I don't know, a high percentage of family disorder. Because in a *villa* you don't know which children belong to whom. When you visit a family, when you see a family in a *villa,* you don't know whether that child belong to the father, he belongs to the father, but you don't know … Father with daughter [father has children with his daughter], uncle with niece, they're people … [they have children] among cousins, it's a total chaos. [...] but in the *villas de emergencia* it's like in the Brazilian *favelas,* the levels of family disorder, delinquency, marginality are that high. All evil, we have to be clear, all evils come from there, those are the nests …" (Interview, 5th February 2003)

Besides the feelings of rejection and disgust towards shanty towns, Verbitsky was also right in pointing out the government's general attitude of neglect towards shanty towns. While there have been considerable changes in terms of how shanty towns were viewed by the local and national authorities, few if any have effectively intervened to improve the shanty town dwellers' quality of life, as will be discussed later on. When the authorities did intervene, it was usually to forcefully evict shanty town dwellers from the government land they were occupying, dispersing them outside the perimeters of the City of Buenos Aires, within a wider programme to cleanse the city of dirt, poverty and potentially subversive activities. However, before moving on to this part of history, it might be useful to briefly review the role of migration – both internal and international – in Argentina. The second part of the paper addresses how *villas miseria* changed over the course of the twentieth century. As will be seen,

these changes went hand in hand with the restructuring of the national economy to suit the political needs of the period.

3 Internal and transnational migration to Buenos Aires

Argentina and its capital Buenos Aires are built on migration (Benencia, 2003; Maguid, 1997; Oteiza et al., 2000). During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Argentine governing leaders promoted the idea of developing Argentina as a nation by populating its territories (see e.g. Balán, 1985b). The main policy used in this respect was that of promoting migration (Balán, 1985b; Sagrera, 1976). Sagrera (1976) argues that there are three main stages in the migration to Argentina: (i) European, (ii) internal, (iii) neighbouring. These three distinct migration stages provide the context for understanding the place of today's transnational migrants in the Buenos Aires shanty towns.

The nation-building project

The first proposal for a migration project with the aim of populating Argentina was put forward in the 1820s by the president of the republic Bernardino Rivadavia. However, the civil wars that followed prevented a successful development of this policy (Balán, 1985). The second proposal came during the second half of the 19th century from Juan Bautista Alberdi, another of the 'founding fathers' of the republic, who coined the term *'gobernar es poblar'* (to govern is to populate) (see also Sagrera, 1976; Whiteford, 1981). The project itself was very ambitious as it was based on the assumption that "the transformation and modernisation of Argentine society would have to be achieved through the europeanisation of its population" (Balán, 1985a:11). This first migration project, led by the state, therefore had as its main mission, the promotion of 'civilisation'. The bringing in of Europeans was aimed at making Argentina a civilised country (Grimson, 1999b): "Alberdi notes that there are some types, who are inadmissible, that it is not good to populate with just anyone, rather, that you have to populate with white, really white people" (Sagrera, 1974:216, my translation).

The Argentine government therefore did not promote just any type of migration. They specifically aimed to promote immigration of 'white' people from European countries and specifically, they wished to attract Anglo-Saxon immigrants in order to diminish or eliminate the negative characteristics which were at the time associated with what were considered to be 'lower races', the indigenous people and the *gauchos*, the Argentine cowboys (see e.g. Ratier, 1988; Sagrera, 1974). Racist attitudes towards the *gauchos* and the indigenous people at the same time allowed for these groups of people to be venerated as their mythical ancestors, something which is not uncommon in other parts of Latin America (see e.g. Brysk and Wise, 1997 for Mexico).

The racist undertones of this policy are clear as they make reference to the fact that Europeans were at the time considered to be the most suitable people for bringing the country forward (Sagrera, 1974 and 1976). However, the policy was only relatively successful, in that it introduced large numbers of immigrants in Argentina – to the extent that up to 70 per cent of the population in certain provinces was originally from a European country (INDEC, 1996). Also, the greatest majority of those who responded to the policy originated from Southern European countries (Stahringer de Caramuti, 1975) and engaged in transatlantic seasonal migration *(migración golondrina)* given the fact that the Southern European and the Argentine agricultural cycle complemented each other. This led some to argue that the transatlantic migration to Argentina was the outcome of very specific conditions in both countries of origin and destination rather than just the outcome of the Argentine migration policy. The availability of labour in Southern European countries, and specifically in Italy and Spain, on

the one hand and the availability of land in Argentina on the other, in conjunction provided the crucial turning points when these conditions for migration were met in 1880 (Balán, 1985a).

Transatlantic migration started to decline following World War II. At the same time migration from neighbouring countries started to increase in significance (see Table One below). This trend coincided with the process of urbanisation and increased internal migration, which started in 1930s and was legitimised by the state as being necessary for the promotion of national development (Grimson, 1999).

As was common in many other industrialising countries and in Latin America in general, starting from the 1930s but intensifying during the 1940s and 1950s, the great migration from the rural areas to major urban centres started taking place (see e.g. Benencia, 2004b). However, it is clear from Table One that migrants from the neighbouring countries as a percentage of the *total* population have remained relatively stable throughout the period in question.

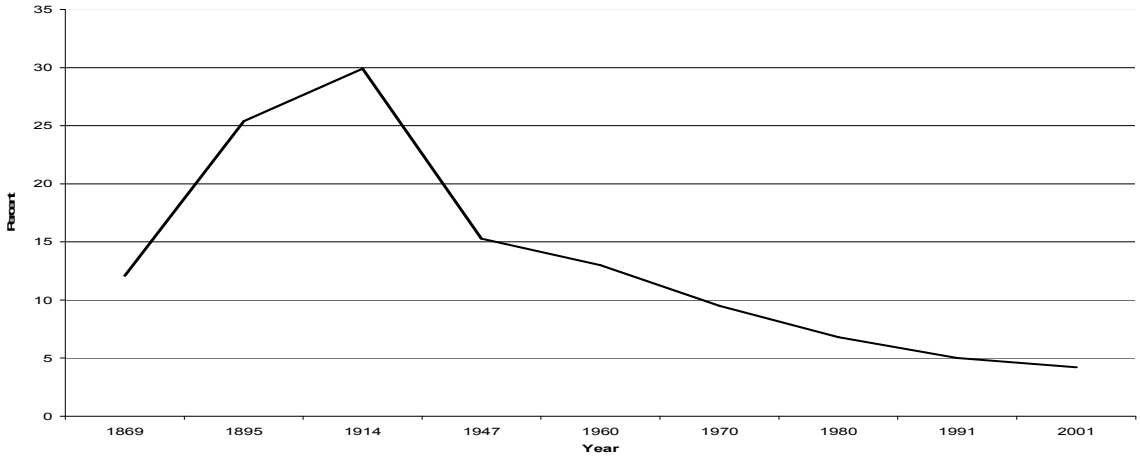
Table One: Population born in a foreign country, Census data, Argentina

Year	**% born in a foreign country out of total population (1)**	**% born in neighbouring countries out of total population (2)**	**% born in neighbouring country out of total foreign population (2)/(1)**
1869	12.1	2.4	19.7
1895	25.4	2.9	11.5
1914	29.9	2.6	8.6
1947	15.3	2.0	12.9
1960	13.0	2.3	17.9
1970	9.5	2.3	24.1
1980	6.8	2.7	39.6
1991	5.0	2.6	52.1
2001	4.2	2.6	61.9

Source: INDEC, Census 1869-2001, INDEC (1997), INDEC (2004)

The foreign population as a percentage of total population has been decreasing after reaching its peak in 1914 at the national level, as the next chart shows. A similar trend has taken place in the capital Buenos Aires. Despite an increased presence of migrants from neighbouring countries in the capital over the last few decades, the foreign population as a percentage of the total population in Buenos Aires has decreased dramatically over the course of the 20th century. In 1869 at the time of the first census, 49.3 percent of the population living in the Federal Capital was born in a foreign country. By 1991 this had decreased to 10.73 percent (INDEC, 1996).

Chart One: Population born in foreign country



These trends are important to bear in mind especially in relation to the migration discourses which have been promoted by sectors of the Argentine government during the last years of the 1990s. These have been characterised by alarmist attitudes towards the 'invasions' Argentina was being subjected to by 'massive' flows of migrants from neighbouring countries (see e.g. Giavedoni Pita, 1999), as will be explained later on in the chapter.

Alarmist attitudes and general rejection of migrants from neighbouring countries can be explained by the way these different types of migration flows have been promoted and legitimised by the state. The first difference to note is the role of the state. As previously explained, the transatlantic migration was actively promoted by the state; internal migration, while not being actively planned, did fit into wider government plans; the migration from the neighbouring countries was, in contrast to the previous two, spontaneous (Benencia and Gazzotti, 1995).

The second crucial point is that of legitimacy. European migration had a clear purpose – that of populating and civilising. Internal migration was legitimised as being necessary for the provision of cheap workers in urban centres. Migration from neighbouring countries, on the other hand, was not only spontaneous but also portrayed as being 'aimless', *sin sentido* (Grimson, 1999). The government, rather than highlighting the contributions migrants from neighbouring countries make to the national economy, culture and society, has in recent years blamed them for major and increasing social and economic problems, such as crime and unemployment (Benencia and Gazzotti, 1995; Lipszyc, 2002; Grimson, 2000a), a trend which Scarzanella links back to Italian migration at the turn of the nineteenth century (Scarzanella, 1999). Evidence suggests that these fears are unfounded; an increasing number of studies show that migrant workers do not compete with local workers, despite increasing levels of unemployment (e.g. Rapado, 1981; Maguid, 1997), although the situation following the latest Argentine crisis might be different.

According to Balán (1985), the migration to Argentina from neighbouring countries is characterised by three distinct phases. Up to 1914, this migration flow was significant but somehow overshadowed by transatlantic migration. Between 1920 and 1950 migration from the neighbouring countries increased as a result of higher demand for agricultural wage workers especially seasonal ones to work in the sugar, yerba mate and cotton production. This coincided with the intensification of the internal migration processes during which large numbers of the national labour force and specifically that of the northern regions moved toward the capital of Buenos Aires. After the 1950s, this migration too became predominantly directed towards urban areas and especially the capital of Buenos Aires and its provinces (the Gran

Buenos Aires). At the same time international migrants started diversifying places of destination, moving further south into the Patagonian regions (Sassone, 1994 a and b).

Internal migration in Argentina

Internal migration had more than purely economic and demographic consequences. It set the terms of the consequent migration from neighbouring countries especially in relation to the character of the social relations established between newly arrived migrants and resident urban populations. This can also be understood to the extent that migration from neighbouring countries, albeit to a lesser degree, accompanied this internal migration towards Buenos Aires and, to a larger degree, later followed it (Benencia, 2004b).

Many have described the way these internal migrants were initially rejected by the *porteños*, the inhabitants of Buenos Aires (Margulis, 1974). Given their different cultural heritage and very often also different physical appearance, internal migrants were often stigmatised by the urban *porteño* population. They were called pejorative names such as *cabecita negra*, making reference to the darker colour of their skin and hair (Ratier, 1971-75).

Urban services and infrastructure lagged behind the high levels of migration into urban areas, as was common in many other developing countries. This gave rise to marginalized, low-income neighbourhoods, *villas de emergencia* or *villas miseria,* as already discussed in the previous section, whose inhabitants have historically been marginalized in the city's imagination.

This connection between marginalisation, place of residence and migrant status persists to this day. Margulis (1974) in his study of internal migration from La Rioja to Buenos Aires also argues that the recently arrived migrants were marginalized and developed their own subculture in the *villa*, which to some degree reproduced rural ways of living and gave migrants security vis-à-vis the discrimination encountered on a daily basis.

Table Two: Total people and families and Bolivian families in the city of Buenos Aires: 1966 – 1980

Year	**Families**	**People**	**Bolivian families**
1966	21713	94511	4343
1976	45678	224885	9136
1978	25608	115236	5112
1979	11521	51845	2304
1980	9234	40533	1847

Source: Mugarza (1985), data taken from Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda (1980) *Erradicaciones,* Buenos Aires

Following the return to democracy, the number of people living in *villas* started to increase again but in 1991, the population living in *villas* was still less than that of the period that preceded the eradication plans (Municipalidad de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1991).

Migrants breaking the myth of homogeneity

Over the course of the twentieth century migration from the neighbouring countries started picking up its pace. Neighbouring migrants also started shifting their places of destination in preference to Buenos Aires and were inserting themselves in a context where the local popu-

lation had constructed their identity on the basis of their European ancestry – and therefore as being different and whiter from the rest of Argentina and other Latin American nations. Martínez Sarasola (1997) for example, describes the existence of a myth of a white and homogeneous Argentina and traces the more contemporary negative attitudes towards the '*cabecita negra'* back to earlier attempts to exterminate the indigenous populations who used to live in the Argentine territories. The context was also partly defined by the fact that there had already been substantial in-migration, felt by some as an 'invasion' (Giavedoni Pita, 1999), from the north, where newly-arrived migrants were identified as being 'darker' and 'inferior' (Ratier, 1988; Sagrera, 1976).

Various authors (Benencia and Karasik, 1994; Grimson, 2000a; Maguid, 1997) mention that the social visibility of migrants originating from neighbouring countries started to increase during the 1970s and this intensified during the 1980s. It is during this time that their presence in the capital and in Greater Buenos Aires started being felt by the local population. These factors set the basis for the interaction between the migrants coming from the neighbouring countries in general and specifically for those who came from Bolivia.

Recent studies report the increased incidence of xenophobic attitudes towards migrants from neighbouring countries in general and Bolivians in particular (Benencia, 2004b; Grimson, 2000a), given the fact that they are the community which is most easily identified. With regards to the migration of Bolivians to Argentina, it is worth highlighting a number of recent trends. These help explain the nature of the insertion of Bolivians into local social relations as well as the labour market.

Migration from the neighbouring countries

A review of the migration literature in Argentina shows that border migration is usually treated as a recent phenomenon. Despite appearances, however, it is generally recognised that this migration "goes back a long way" (Balán, 1985a:30). The presence of Bolivians in Argentina was in fact recorded in the first Argentine census in 1869 (INDEC, 1997). Since the 1950s however, this migration flow has been increasing in significance, both in numerical terms and in terms of the way it is perceived by the Argentine population and its government (INDEC, 1997; Grimson, 1997 and 1999b; Sassone, 1989; see also Margulis, 1998).

There are three recent trends of migrants from neighbouring countries that are worth highlighting. In the first place, these are related to the changing places of destination (Sassone, 1989). Many migrants from neighbouring countries, such as Bolivians used to migrate to the northern regions of Argentina, but since the 1970s they started changing their preferences in favour of the Capital, Buenos Aires (INDEC, 1997). The mechanisation of agricultural work as well as the shift of the economy towards the tertiary sector, which decreased the demand for seasonal agricultural workers have contributed to this change and favoured more permanent settlement (Whiteford, 1981), albeit maintaining close links with places of origin and open possibilities for return to their home country (Balán, 1995; Marshall, 1981).

Secondly, there has been a feminisation of migration (INADI, 2001; INDEC, 1997; Maguid, 1997). In the past, it was mainly men who migrated (Dandler and Medeiros, 1988). The increased labour market participation of Argentine women, their higher educational attainments as well as the aging population are all factors that lead to an increased demand for domestic services, a demand which is mainly met by migrant women. Moreover, the economic restructuring which began in the 1970s provided the conditions for an increased demand for cheap, unskilled labour as well as a growing informal sector, where many of the recently-arrived migrants found work (Maguid, 1997).

Thirdly, this international migration has become increasingly undocumented (Sassone, 1989). In the past it was relatively easy to regularise one's stay in Argentina. A number of amnesties were implemented in the past with the aim of facilitating the regularisation of foreign workers (see e.g. de Marco, 1986; Sassone, 1987). However, in the last decade, and especially since 1985 (Sassone, 1994c:122) it has become increasingly difficult for migrants to become regular residents as they could only do so if they had (i) a relative who was already a resident or (ii) a virtually-impossible-to-get work contract.

The problem of numbers

The first pressing issue is the problem of numbers. Quantity is important, especially in a context where the government is likely to inflate the number of migrants present in the country as it serves the purposes mentioned above. Various authors have for example during the last few years mentioned that the number of migrants who originate from neighbouring countries in Argentina is likely to be around one million (Mármora, 1997; Sassone, 1987, making reference for year 1980). However, as the authors themselves acknowledge, in a context where undocumented migration is often the rule rather than the exception, quantifying migration trends is not so easy (see also Skeldon, 2003).

It must be pointed out that the data presented above is mainly based on the information collected through the census and it therefore under-registers the number of migrants in Argentina (de Marco, 1986 and 1994; Lattes, 1990; Rapado, 1981), especially those who come from the neighbouring countries, for two reasons. Firstly, it leaves out some undocumented migrants to the extent that they are less likely to answer census interviewers for fear of being reported to the police (personal observation; Celade, n.d.). It also does not provide information regarding the legal condition the migrant is in (Lattes and Bertoncello, 1997). Secondly, it only registers those migrants who are in the country at the time the census takes place, and therefore leaves out seasonal migrants or those who have returned to their places of origin (Benencia, 2004b; Lattes and Bertoncello, 1997). Census data can therefore give an indication of the current 'stock' of migrants but it does not give any information on the most widely practiced forms of migration, such as circular or seasonal migration. However, while the census data cannot be taken to be very accurate, it can be relied upon for information about general trends, especially historic ones, those indicated in the previous sections[2].

Data gathered through the Encuesta Permanente de Hogares (EPH) – Ongoing household survey – also suffers from some faults with regards to the quantification of migrants. It only gathers information from private households – and it is well known that many recently arrived migrants live at their workplace, such as warehouses or workshops; its error margins are about 10 percent (Benencia and Gazzotti, 1995); migrants are likely to hide their true identity or give inaccurate information regarding their migration; discontinuity in the questions related to migration (there was no question on migration between 1986 and 1992) also poses some problems (Benencia and Gazzotti, 1995). Despite these shortcomings, quantitative data was presented above in order to provide general migration trends, from a historic perspective.

[2] A further problem with census data is that its distinctions are often arbitrary – for example, migration from Peru has very similar characteristics to that originating from Bolivia, at least in terms of the conditions migrants from these two countries find themselves in. However, not having contiguous borders, Peruvian migration does not fall into the category of 'neighbouring country' and its migrants are therefore counted in the 'other' category (Lattes and Bertoncello, 1997).

The second contemporary migration issue is that of treating migrants as scapegoats, especially in relation to blaming them for unemployment and crime. It was previously mentioned that migrants from neighbouring countries have in recent years been used by the government to gain political support. A number of authors have in fact denounced the government's anti-immigration stance, for spreading alarmist attitudes and blaming migrants for social and economic ills such as crime and unemployment (Asociación de Estudios de Cultura y Sociedad, 1999; Grimson, 1999; Oteiza and Novick, 2000).

At the end of the 1990s this trend reached critical proportions when a number of murders linked crime towards Bolivians in Buenos Aires with xenophobia and racism (Los Tiempos, 2001b and 2001c). These crimes were reported in the centre of the city of Buenos Aires as well as on the outskirts, where Bolivians generally engage in agrarian production. Bolivians, especially those involved in trade in clothes or vegetables, are prime targets for criminal assaults (Los Tiempos, 2001a). Given this context, it becomes even more critical to review the studies that present evidence against the widespread beliefs that unemployment and crime were caused by increased migration from neighbouring countries.

Lattes and Bertoncello (1997) coincide with others in their observation that attitudes towards migrants from the neighbouring countries have started to change during the 1990s (see also Benencia, 2004b; Benencia and Gazzotti, 1995; Grimson, 2000). In their study, despite the fact that it is based on census data, they argue that migration from the neighbouring countries, taken as a whole, is not as large as it is perceived to be and therefore it cannot account for an increase in unemployment levels. They conducted a detailed analysis of demographic variables that could contribute to an increase in unemployment levels by showing increases in population according to whether the person was born in Argentina, in a neighbouring or in another country. They found that the highest increase in the economically active population between 1980 and 1991 was among women over 15 years old who originated from neighbouring countries. For this sub-group, they argue, it is possible that the increased migration could contribute to increased rates of unemployment. However, the authors only took into account demographic variables and did not analyse the sectors these women are employed in; if women from neighbouring countries are employed in different sectors as compared to native women, then very little or no competition should result.

Another study covers roughly the same period (1980-1996) and takes into account the types of occupations migrants are usually employed in. It concludes that this migration has little or no impact on unemployment levels because the data suggests that the migrants' labour market insertion is segmented. This is despite the fact that the increase in the migration rates from neighbouring countries is generally accounted for by the increased participation of women in this migration flow. Rather, it blames the economic restructuring Argentina has been undergoing since the 1970s for (i) weaker demand for work, (ii) lower wages, (iii) increased labour precariousness (underemployment and employment in the informal sector) as well as (iv) increased inequality for the period 1975-1990 (Maguid, 1997).

Benencia and Gazzotti (1995) come to similar conclusions but used data from the EPH. During the two-year period covered (October 1992 to October 1994), unemployment in Greater Buenos Aires (GBA) increased from 6.7 percent to 13.1 percent and underemployment from 4.1 percent to 5.4 percent. Most of the increase in migration during that period can be explained by the feminisation trend identified above: in 1994, 58 of every 100 migrants (all nationalities) in GBA were women who worked mostly in domestic work. In relation to the sectoral impact this migration could have, they show that despite the fact that 60 percent of all migrant women work in domestic work and 45 percent of all migrant men work in con-

struction, migrant women account for only 12.5 percent of all women employed in domestic work while migrant men account for only 12.5 percent of all men employed in construction.

These figures suggest that migrant men and women do compete with Argentineans. If only recently arrived migrant women and men are taken into account, they account for only 3.72 percent of the occupations mentioned above. Even for sectors where Bolivian migrants are over-represented such as the horticultural belt of GBA, the authors argue that their insertion is due to the structural changes and the recent crisis, which opened up opportunities for workers who would rely heavily on family labour. Benencia and Gazzotti (1995) conclude that in total, the impact of migration on the urban Capital Federal (CF) and GBA unemployment is less than one percent. However, they correctly point out that it is the native workers' attitudes towards specific jobs that have probably changed. The high levels of unemployment are probably forcing some native workers to consider certain jobs as a possibility and therefore convert the migrant labour force into a competition (Benencia and Gazzotti, 1995:608).

Parallel discourses were prevalent regarding crime, as well as blaming migrants from neighbouring countries for increased levels of crime. This also reached critical proportions during the late 1990s when the head of the police issued a statement which linked increased migration from neighbouring countries with increased levels of crime (Oteiza and Aruj, 2000). Migrants' organisations, as well as those that work with human rights, were understandably outraged and a study which followed showed that migrants from neighbouring countries were actually underrepresented among those convicted of criminal activities. Their over-representation among those who were arrested on suspicion of being involved in criminal activities however clearly indicated police force prejudice against them. The following sections overview the development of shanty towns in Argentina to situate and identify the levels at which exclusion based on migration status and place of residence intersect.

4 *Villas miseria* through the twentieth century

There are three quite clearly defined periods within the recent history of Buenos Aires which related wider political and economic changes taking place at the national level to the *villas*.

1930s-60s

The first period goes from the 1930s, when the central government promoted Import-Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) by closing the doors to foreign manufactured goods with the aim of promoting the development of national industry. As agricultural production dwindled, rural migrants began their movement towards the capital. The creation of new manufacturing jobs attracted large numbers of rural migrants. As a result the population in Buenos Aires grew on average faster than the national average.

Comparing the growth rate of the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires with total urban population growth, Cerrutti and Bartoncello (2003) estimate that during the period 1915-35 these were largely similar (2.7 percent); during the subsequent decade (1935-45) the metropolitan population showed much faster growth rates (3.2 percent) than the total urban population, which grew at 2.5 percent (Cerrutti and Bartoncello, 2003: 15, based on Lattes and Recchini de Lattes, n.d.). So between 1936 and 1943 Buenos Aires received on average 72,000 new internal migrants annually; this increased to 117,000 annual migrants during 1943 and 1947 (Balán, 1969). The population of Buenos Aires grew from 1.5 million in 1914 to 3.4 million

in 1935 and 4.7 million in 1947 (Rock, 1987:235, cited in Auyero 1999:53). By 1960 Buenos Aires had a population of 7 million (Auyero 1999: 53).

According to one study published by the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires (1991), one of the first *villas* to be built was the Villa 31, located close to the railway station. It was built by the government to accommodate low-income European migrants, especially Italians, who had come to work in the railway industry (Municipalidad de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1991). However, there are few if any additional references to government-built *villas* during this period. Most shanty towns developed because recently arrived rural migrants, not finding affordable accommodation to buy or rent, began to occupy cheap and un-serviced plots of land (Gutierrez, 1999; Auyero, 1999, 2000).

The Peronist government in power during this period largely ignored the growth of informal squatter settlements because it drew a lot of support from the newly arrived rural migrants who found work in the booming urban manufacturing sector. While stigmatised by the settled urban population on the basis of the rural and therefore supposedly primitive background of the new arrivals, including racial stereotyping on the basis of their indigenous ancestry and darker skin (Ratier, 1971-1975 and 1985), some accounts also indicate the large level of solidarity and support which existed at the inception of the shanty towns (Gutierrez, 1999).

> "This situation meant that shanty town became a place where the poor, whatever his [or her] origin, can be welcomed with solidarity. Not without inconvenience, but this openness provided an answer to thousands of complaints that the city usually marginalizes or rejects: the possibility of a place, a recognition." (Gutierrez, 1999: 76)

This distinction between a supposedly safer, happier, more cohesive environment in which neighbours trusted each other and relied on each other's solidarity to survive in the tough city environment is echoed by others writing on the early period of the establishment of *villa miseria*. Auyero (1999) for example, describes how his eldest interviewees described the slum as 'a very fun place':

> "Thus, the slum is recalled as impressive, transitory, but also fun and – in contrast to the dangers of present-day life […] – communal. Innumerable testimonies highlight the familiar character that the slum had for them, a feature that is considered lost nowadays" (Auyero, 1999:55).

Without empirical evidence from that date, it is difficult to corroborate whether relations between neighbours were really more harmonious and based on trust in the past, or whether they are perceived to have been like that in relation to today's situation. What matters is that contemporary residents treat this distinction as critical. As will be discussed later on, this differentiation between a more pleasant past and a troubled present is also employed by community leaders and shanty town representatives in their creation of a worthy and legitimate shanty town dweller, with repercussions on who is deemed to have the right to the city.

During the 1950s most people living in the *villas* were Argentineans, according to a study carried out during that period by Pablo and Ezcurra (1958). In five of the seven *villas* examined, over 90 per cent of its population was made up of Argentines. Sizeable populations of 'Latin American' populations were only found in shanty towns in Belgrano in the Province of Santa Fé (about 700 km south of Buenos Aires).

1960s-80s

Until the 1970s, economic activity was concentrated in Buenos Aires (Rofman, 1985). The military governments which took over from Juan Peron's widow, Evita, in 1977, initiated a Process of National Reorganisation, centred on the Capital Buenos Aires. While re-opening the national economy to international markets, the programme also aimed at eliminating any possible threat of resistance to the military governments and their policies. Creating an orderly, clean and safe city was part and parcel of the widespread policy of eliminating 'undesirables' which led to gross human rights abuses.

> "The dictatorship regime believed that if social unrest was kept at bay, the play of free-market forces would lead Argentina to reach its "full potential"" (Libertun de Duren, 2008)

The economic policy implemented during this period involved opening up the economy to international competition as well as relocating industry outside of the city belt. Libertun de Duren argues that the diminished state intervention coupled with private industrial investment and limited union rights had "significant consequences for the metropolitan geography" (2008:126). Workers and the inhabitants of Buenos Aires had to negotiate governments' preference for concentration of industrial ownership as well as their antipathy towards large concentrations of workers. The Southern and Western municipalities of GBA had the largest concentration of small and medium size enterprises, which suffered badly from the lack of investment and the disincentives for continued operation. The most affluent households therefore left these areas, having a significant impact on the capital's geography of poverty.

As urban workers were the backbones of the Peronist movement, these were seen by the military governments as a menace and were therefore not allowed to set up new industries. For example, in 1977 the military dictatorship signed Law 21,608, prohibiting the setting up of new industries in the City of Buenos Aires (Libertun de Duren, 2008) and in 1970, the mayor of the City of Buenos Aires, Osvaldo Cacciatore, implemented a policy to relocate industrial establishments away from the metropolis, beyond the national industrial urban ring. These policies were aimed at preventing the concentration of workers in the city (Schvarzer 1987 cited in Libertun de Duren 2008, p.128) but also to create the 'right city', as will be discussed below.

At the time around 7 percent of the urban population lived in shanty towns (Libertun de Duren 2008). Libertun de Duren (2008) argues that "these new regulations aimed to transform the CBA from a disorganized and menacing industrial hub, where less affluent workers and slum-dwellers crowded in the low neighbourhoods, into a site where a "*hygienic, pleasant community life"* would prosper" (Libertun de Duren, 2008:130, italics in original).

The people associated with the chaotic, dirty and dangerous side of Buenos Aires were the internal migrants, people on low incomes, international migrants, who to date continue to be constructed as the 'other' in the urban imaginary of Buenos Aires residents. Besides restructuring the economy and industrial development in such a way as to distance low-paid workers from the urban core, the military governments also devised a plan to eradicate shanty towns, involving forced evictions, intimidations and gross human rights violations.

While slums were conveniently ignored for a couple of decades, during the mid-1950s there was a turn in national policy, as slums began to be seen as not only as a housing but also as a social problem and the Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda aimed to remove all 'emergency slums' (Auyero, 1999:55, also based on Yujnovsky, 1984: 98). However, it was not until the 1970s that the government began implementing widespread slum eradications as part of its Process of National Reorganization (PRN), which also aimed at relocating industry outside the capital of Buenos Aires and thereby creating a 'model city'.

> "They dreamt with a clean, ordered and efficient metropolis, similar to the big cities where the dictatorship's inspirational doctrines came from" (Gutierrez, 1999:80, author's translation).

In practice this meant the removal of all shanty towns from the City of Buenos Aires and their relocation to the Provinces of Buenos Aires, the Gran Buenos Aires, which lacked any terms of public provision. By doing this the military government reproduced and strengthened the border between the City of Buenos Aires and the Gran Buenos Aires, which was divided then as it is now along the Avenida General Paz (Grimson, 2008) in what is an administrative as well as a symbolic border between the city and the rest. In total, at least 208,783 people were affected by these eradication plans (Blaustein, 2006; Casabona and Guber, 1985).

Racist and stereotyping campaigns preceded eradication plans (Hermitte and Boivin, 1985). These were followed by the withdrawal of public services such as water and electricity, all trade was prohibited and people needed IDs to enter or exit the *villas*. Intimidation was also widely practiced. Given the political context within which eradications took place, any attempt to organise by the *villeros* was very risky as they were labelled as subversive. A number of social housing projects were constructed on the outskirts of Buenos Aires (mainly in its provinces) in order to re-home the evicted population. However, relocation never took place as the houses were given to other social sectors (Balustein, 2006). This was vividly recalled by a community leader of a shanty town located within the City of Buenos Aires:

> A: At that time there was an education, when the soldier [dictatorship] destroyed everything to achieve their objective of making all shanty towns disappear. They had a policy of no-transformation but to destroy and well, that's typical of the military.
>
> Q: And then they were re-localised to the provinces, isn't it?
>
> A: No, there was no relocalisation. They threw you out like dogs. There was no relocalisation.
>
> Q: And where did people go?
>
> A: Wherever God wanted you to go, with a tent, they would catch you and leave you where it was convenient for them … throw people out like dogs, wherever, out of the Federal Capital …" (Interview 17, 9th June 2008)

In addition, social support networks were destroyed and with a considerable increase in the travelling distance to the workplace, living standards suffered considerably.

There were a number of reasons why the military decided to enact these policies. In the first place, they argued that slums had to be eradicated to make way for motorways. They also invoked aesthetic and urbanist reasons for eradicating shanty towns, seeing them as eyesores rather than as temporary solutions for low-income groups' housing problems. *Villeros* were portrayed as free riders, not complying with their obligations in relation to the municipality and as being outside the law. In the words of the then Governor of the City of Buenos Aires, Intendente Osvaldo Cacciatore:

> "Nobody can doubt that it is a duty and function of the authorities to order the urban space. This is advised for healthy cohabitation, ecological reasons and even survival possibilities in cities … With all this a new hierarchy of urban space emerges. Buenos Aires, the European face of the country, cannot see its image ruined. It has to have international standard, we need to order the physical space in relation to selected criteria, that destroy poverty or at least they hide it. So that living in Buenos Aires

> becomes a privilege." (Speech published in 1981 in magazine Competencia, March, pp.30, cited in Gutierrez, 1999:80)

In a very similar vein, the Director of the Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, Guillermo del Cioppo, in 1980 made a clear distinction between those who deserve living in Buenos Aires and those who have no role in it:

> "Not anyone can live in the City of Buenos Aires. An effective effort should be made to improve the health and hygienic conditions. In fact, living in Buenos Aires is not for everybody, but only for those who deserves it, for those who accepts the regulations of a pleasant and efficient community life. We have to have a better city for the better people." (cited in Libertun de Duren 2008: 129 and also in Spanish in Blaustein, 2006: 61).

The city was therefore seen as something to be cleansed of undesirable elements of the population. Those who do not belong, those who do not deserve the city were therefore forcefully evicted. People living in *villas miseria* were the prime target of this cleansing process for two main reasons: (i) they did not belong, had no right to be in the city and part of the reason (but by no means the only one) why they were seen as undesirable was because (ii) they did not obey the law. Foreign citizens who were living in *villas* at the time were repatriated. About 2000 families were repatriated to Bolivia and Paraguay (Gutierrez, 1999). As will be argued in the next section, while to some extent this differentiation between the city and shanty town persists through daily stigmatization, lack of investment and state attention towards shanty town and its dwellers, the internal differentiation of the slum population is organized along very similar lines between those who deserve the shanty town, and therefore any state investment in its improvement, and those who do not. The latter are again portrayed as being unworthy because they do not obey the law but also on the grounds of legitimacy, as will be discussed in more details.

1980s-90s

The 1980s were marked the return to democracy, the debt crisis, the failure of Plan Austral and the transfer of responsibility for the Gran Buenos Aires service provision to the GBA municipalities (but without a parallel matching of central funding to meet the new responsibilities) (Libertun de Duren, 2008). During this period (1980-1991) the growth rate of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires was only 1 percent, or just over half the rate of total urban population growth and still lower than total population growth (1.4 percent) (Cerrutti and Bartoncello, 2003).

During the 1990s existing inequalities – social, economic, spatial – deepened as the Menem government implemented neo-liberal economic reforms, including privatisation of key public services, deregulation, the opening up of the economy to foreign capital and the Convertibility Plan, which aimed at ensuring monetary stability but in the end failed dramatically in what became known as the 2001 crisis. These policies clearly decreased the government's involvement in the running of the national economy and at the same time gave private capital an increasing role to play in how the city of Buenos Aires was shaped.

While bringing industrial investment back into the capital – Buenos Aires - RMBA concentrated 50 percent of all industrial investment during the 1970s; this decreased to 20 percent during 1980s and was again over 55 percent during 1990 (Ciccolella, 1999) – these macro/structural changes also brought about a "novel geography of social inequality" (Libertun de Duren, 2008). Gran Buenos Aires, where the majority of the 200,000 eradicated slum dwellers ended up living, housed the largest concentration of poor residents in Argentina. In

1980s, half of all households had no piped water and sewerage (Libertun de Duren, 2008) and by 1998 21 percent of the GBA population lived below the poverty line (for the City of Buenos Aires this was only 5.2 percent) (Ciccolella, 1999). If this was not bad enough, things were going to get worse as migration continued and the GBA municipalities, which now had responsibility for services, lacked funds for infrastructure and services. Their only option was therefore to look for private investment. As the central government relinquished direct control of industry (Libertun de Duren, 2008) and new migrants but also established Buenos Aires residents moved to the GBA where land was cheaper, there was a continued growth of suburban poverty. This went hand in hand with exclusive high-income developments, such as the *country clubs,* resulting in regressive income inequality during the 1990s (Auyero, 1999).

In his assessment of a decade of foreign direct investment FDI, Ciccolella (1999) concludes that the central and city government's laissez-faire attitude towards FDIs have deepened the already existing duality and contradictions of the city of Buenos Aires while at the same time worsened social exclusion. Most of the FDI (75-80 percent) went to the central and northern axis of the city of Buenos Aires and RMBA, already prosperous at the beginning of the twentieth century.

> "As the rustic cattle barons and modest local elite of the midnineteenth century turned into the world-class oligarchy that gave rise to the French expression *riche comme un argentine,* an exclusive, upper-class quarter developed in Barrio Norte" (Moya, 1998:156)

There is widespread consensus that the policies implemented during the 1990s aggravated all socio-economic indexes of wellbeing, from income distribution, real incomes, to unemployment and underemployment, which Auyero (1999:49) writing before the great collapse of 2001 termed 'hyperunemplyment'.

The new democratic governments abandoned the eradication plans and as they reorganised society and thought about different solutions to urban questions, the *villa* population started increasing again. While never totally eradicated, during the end of the military rule *villa* population within the City of Buenos Aires dwindled around 12,500 people but soon increased to 50,900 by 1991 and 86,666 by the turn of the century (Auyero, 2002; also Ciccolella, 1999). In comparison, the Province of Buenos Aires, which, as was shown, had access to far fewer resources, housed 300,000 slum dwellers in 1981 (Auyero, 2002).

Each slum has its own characteristic, its history, geographical location and different social groups. However, since the 1980s most are made up of four different groups: (i) previously displaced people, who returned to their place of residence with the return to democracy; (ii) internal migrants; (iii) international migrants, who had been migrating to Argentina for decades but they were confined to the northern regions and over the last few decades started showing a preference for Buenos Aires; (iv) Argentineans who lived elsewhere within the city of Buenos Aires but were badly hit by the structural adjustment policies implemented during the 1990s and had to search for more affordable accommodation.

2000s

The new millennium met Argentina with an explosive economic and political crisis, widespread looting and mass social mobilisation.

The crisis that hit Argentina in 2001 should have provided the basis to rethink the city and its approach to urban inequality. There have been a number of plans which have been put for-

ward over the last few years to improve the conditions of the people living in *villas.* Some of these have been developed in partnership with charitable foundations, such as the Foundation of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. These are working in conjunction with the City of Buenos Aires on upgrading schemes and upgrading projects.

However, there are still examples of eradication policies that are being proposed within the framework of 'slum upgrading schemes'. For example, the Governor of the City of Buenos Aires, Macri, proposed to eradicate part of *Villa 31,* located in the Northern part of the city and close to strategic downtown area as well as the train station of Retiro, as recently as June 2008.

The review presented in this first part of the paper showed that shanty towns have responded to the economic and political changes that Buenos Aires and Argentina were undergoing during different periods of time throughout the twentieth century. However, the analysis of the language used in the speeches and policies reviewed in this section also suggests that both local authorities as well as middle and upper-class residents saw *villas* as having no place in the city. Even the use of language in the argument that *villas* need to be urbanised suggests that shanty towns are not urban.

Cities are clearly meant to be clean, hygienic, orderly – while *villas* are seen as chaotic, dirty, dangerous, reigned by disorder and crime. They therefore need to be urbanised. I would argue that the use of this language suggests that shanty towns continue to be seen within the marginalisation logic of the 1950s and 1960s, when they were being portrayed as rural enclaves in urban areas. Within this logic, the claims to the need for urbanisation make sense.

However, the fast growth of shanty towns globally suggests rather the contrary: that they are an intrinsic part of the capitalist city, in which a substantial percentage of the population cannot achieve the 'decent' living standards afforded by middle-class, safe, clean neighbourhoods. In fact, while shanty town growth was generally associated with fast levels of urbanisation and in-migration, some have now proved that the most of the growth in shanty town population arises from natural growth (WorldWatch Institute, 2007) and inter-city movement, i.e. movement from one neighbourhood to another, rather than in-migration from rural or other urban areas (see also Lloyd Sherlock, 1997).

Shanty towns are therefore already quite urban. This is probably part of the problem, because if they are part of any large city in the South, there is little that local authorities can do to improve them within the current politico-economic system. The historiographic analysis shows that *villas* responded to wider economic and political changes that took place at both the national and the city level. However, they did not do that only as a reaction to structural changes – the people living in them also played a part in shaping the environment in which they live, including changing the city itself.

5 Conclusion

From after the WWII period shanty towns in Latin American cities have variously been described as marginal to city life or a solution to the problems recent migrants first experienced upon arriving to large urban areas. However, despite these different points of view, during most of the latter part of the twentieth century shanty towns were perceived as being a temporal problem. Urban development scholars and planners generally assumed that people living in shanty towns will be able to improve their housing – either through their individual effort or through local authority action – or that they will be able to move out to 'proper' neighbourhoods over their lifetimes. This changed towards the end of the 1990s when various analysts began to theorise shanty towns not only as a permanent feature of large cities

but also as being completely severed from the potential benefits of city life. A number of studies provided evidence that shanty towns were growing as a result of people in other neighbourhoods not being able to afford their rent or to buy their property in serviced and 'legal' accommodation. Furthermore, the social and economic conditions in many cities worsened during the 1990s and early 2000s, leading to increasing inequality, increasing joblessness and underemployment, decreasing state intervention and the privatisation of large sections of the public sector.

These trends were also evident in the City of Buenos Aires and the Gran Buenos Aires, where state privatisation and implementation of neoliberal reforms culminated in the country's economic and political collapse at the end of 2001. All socio-economic indicators worsened during the last fifteen years, including levels of poverty and inequality. However, this is not to say that people living in shanty towns are passive recipients of these broader changes. They do organise and in many different ways claim at least part of the city for themselves: through music, sport and politics, both grass-roots and more traditional forms of formal political representation.

The issue of trans-national migration clearly calls into question the limits of the city authorities, given that migration, as policy, is articulated at the national level of policy-making while shanty town improvement schemes are within the domain of city-level policy-making. However, it also questions traditional forms of political representation, given that these political representatives, as was shown in this paper, while nominally claiming to represent the interests of all those who live in the shanty town, in practice they stigmatise and disown the very real needs and interests of this large section of its 'electorate'.

As governments in middle-income developing countries continue to provide few if any institutional frameworks to protect migrants' rights, while nevertheless having economies that are benefiting from their cheap and flexible labour, trans-national, South-South regional migration will continue to grow. And many of these migrants will continue to find accommodation as well as companionship in informal settlements. As has been argued in this paper and was witnessed in such horrific violence more recently in South Africa's informal settlements, the migration issue in shanty towns requires urgent research as well as political action in order to ensure that migrants' human rights are not violated.

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