

Neighborhood and Nation in Neoliberal Times: Urban Upheaval, Resistance, and National Identity in Buenos Aires, Argentina

University of Washington Honors Thesis in International Studies
Submitted May 2010



**By:
Garrett Shishido Strain**

Abstract

In the wake of the devastating Argentine economic crisis of 2001, Buenos Aires has undergone one of the largest real estate booms in the city's history – a boom that is fundamentally reconfiguring the urban landscape. In the midst of a whirlwind of urban development, several self-identified middle-class neighborhood activist groups have emerged to contest the effects of the boom on the identity of their neighborhoods and city. One of these activist groups, *Palermo Despierta*, began a campaign in the Palermo district to prevent the construction of residential mega-towers – an icon of urban development since the crisis. This middle-class activism largely contradicts scholarship that categorizes middle-class urban dwellers as agents of “globalization-oriented urban development.” I argue that underlying this resistance is a desire to defend a historically imagined, national narrative of middle-class European identity inscribed in the urban space of Buenos Aires. In a city recovering from economic crisis, *porteños* (Buenos Aires residents) are contesting the globalizing of their city in order to re-emplace national narratives that remain at the heart of their urban identity. This nascent activism is deeply contradictory and problematic, however, as the narratives animating *Palermo Despierta* operate on the basis of historic racial and class hierarchies that exclude the racialized urban poor from the right to the city.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the compassion, intelligence, and support of several individuals. Many thanks to the Gaviña family for an utterly hospitable homestay in the city; Clara Gaviña for her encouragement and her wisdom; Juan Ramon and Silvia Garea for always opening the AIE office to me; and Pablo Pozzi for his advice during a particular low point in my fieldwork. Of course, this project would not have been possible without all the Palermo residents and various *porteños* whom I conversed with in cafés, shopping malls, plazas, parks, and trains.

From the beginning of the thesis process, Professor Deborah Porter was a mentor who pushed me to observe, think and write creatively. My thesis adviser Professor Matthew Sparke provided both insightful comments and crucial life advice that I will carry with me through the next stages of my academic career. I also benefited from the helpful suggestions of Professor Vicky Lawson, Monica Farías, Heather Pool and my honors seminar peers.

Throughout the ups-and-downs of researching and writing, several individuals served as much needed sources of levity and love. Many thanks go to my family for continued long-distance support throughout the writing process. From an early age, my mother Rebecca Strain encouraged me have faith in myself and others; in many ways, this thesis is for her. I also owe a great deal to Priyam Thind, Luke Mckinley, Andrew Schwartz, and many others for their unwavering friendship. April Nishimura's creativity, compassion, and love of ideas served as one of this project's biggest sources of inspiration. Andrew Calkins has been my best friend since grade school and I would not be where I am today if it were not for having fostered a love of learning alongside him in the classroom over the past decade.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Mary Gates Research Endowment for providing me with the financial resources necessary to dedicate myself to this project.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Map of Buenos Aires and Palermo.....	iii
List of Figures and Maps.....	iv
Introduction: A Synoptic View of the City	1
Chapter One: Critical Scaffolding - The Literature and The Methodology.....	8
Chapter Two: An Abridged Journey Through Buenos Aires Urban History.....	31
Chapter Three: Socioeconomic Geography of Post-Crisis Buenos Aires.....	43
Chapter Four: Contesting <i>Los Torres</i>	57
Conclusion: The View From a Mega-Tower.....	91
Bibliography.....	96
Glossary of Spanish Terms.....	104
Appendix.....	105

Map of Buenos Aires and Palermo



Palermo is Shown in Green.

List of Figures and Maps

Figure One: Inauguration of The Buenos Aires Obelisk, Symbol of a Nation, 1936

Figure Two: Middle-Class Activists Contesting the Construction of Towers in Palermo

Figure Three: The Buenos Aires Port Through Which European Immigrants Arrived, 1931

Figure Four: President Roque Saenz Pena Avenue, 1936

Figure Five: Dusk. A View of the City From the River, 1936

Figure Six: A Typical Casa Baja in the Suburbs

Figure Seven: Gini Coefficient, Distribution of Equivalent Household Income in Greater Buenos Aires, 1980-2002

Figure Eight: Inter-year Variation in the Construction Index.

Figure Nine: Value Added Rates of the Private Construction Subsector in the City of Buenos Aires and the Balance of Mortgage Credits of the Banking System in Argentina.

Figure Ten: Le Parc Tower

Figure Eleven: The Olivetti Building, One of Buenos Aires' First Skyscrapers

Figures Twelve and Thirteen: *Palermo Despierta* Protests

Figure Fourteen: "We Save the Houses. We Save the *Barrio*."

Figure Fifteen: "Fuck You, Buenos Aires"

Map One: Buenos Aires *Barrios* and Comunas

Map Two: Households with Insufficient Income for Basic Necessities by Comuna

Map Three: Construction Area Per *Barrio* in Square Meters. Second Trimester of 2008

Introduction: A Synoptic View of the City

From atop the commanding position of the obelisk (*obelisco*) located in the *Plaza de La República* at the center of Buenos Aires, any observer can see that urban change is afoot in the city known in popular tourist parlance as the “Paris of South America” and the “Queen of the River Plate.” To the south, shantytowns (*villas miserias*) and other precarious living quarters dot the urban landscape in the wake of the city’s implosion during the catastrophic economic crisis of 2001-2002. Looking to the downtown urban skyline, we see the names of the same transnational corporations that helped precipitate the economic crisis and perpetuate the city’s ongoing financialization. To the east lies the Puerto Madero district that the Menem administration “modernized” in the 1990s. Transformed from a traditional port area into the city’s most elite promenade, this district highlights how business efforts to position Buenos Aires as a competitive global city have led to enormous urban upheavals and exclusionary redevelopment dynamics.

Figure One: The Buenos Aires Obelisk, Symbol of a Nation



But these urban transformations have not gone uncontested. If we now direct our attention away from the obelisk, symbol of the Argentine nation, and look north to Palermo, the city’s largest

neighborhood, we can observe an urban struggle over the processes of redevelopment. Middle-class Buenos Aires residents known as *porteños* have mobilized to resist the invasion of residential megatowers into their neighborhood. According to residents, these towers symbolize how political and economic elites are appropriating the urban landscape of Buenos Aires for profit in the most comprehensive real estate boom the city has ever seen. For the few *porteños* who have lived long enough to observe the successive phases of the city's urban development, the obelisk is nearly unrecognizable. If, as Michel de Certeau muses, every city is an urban palimpsest – a composite environment derived from the co-presence of urban layers superimposed on top of one another through successive phases of urban development – the distinctively European, early 20th century urban layer that so many *porteños* nostalgically remember is being carved up, covered up, and potentially buried forever beneath the current real estate boom.¹

* * * *

This thesis explores resistance to the neoliberalization of the Buenos Aires cityscape, focusing in particular on how middle-class *porteños* rearticulate Argentine national narratives to contest the market-led transformation of the city. In 2001, Argentina plummeted headfirst into economic crisis after a decade of neoliberal economic governance led by the Menem administration. This crisis culminated in the largest sovereign debt default in world history and the near elimination of the country's middle-class who lost substantial portions of their personal savings during the infamous *corralito* bank closures in 2001.² In the wake of the economic crisis, both local and global investors seized upon the Argentine peso's devaluation to buy up real estate property at fire-sale

¹ Michel De. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-110.

² The Corralito is the informal name given to the Argentine government's infamous decision to freeze all bank accounts and forbid U.S. dollar withdrawals in 2001. While the measure was intended to prevent bank runs, the action backfired as thousands of protestors took to the streets to demand access to their bank accounts.

prices. As a result, Buenos Aires experienced the largest real estate boom in the city's history. By 2005, urban construction grew at twice the rate of the city's economy.³

In the midst of this whirlwind of urban redevelopment, several neighborhood activist groups emerged to contest the effects of the real estate boom on both their neighborhoods and city. These neighborhood activist groups continue argue that the boom and the proliferation of hypermodern urban structures in Buenos Aires are destroying the identity of their neighborhood and city. In particular, the city has witnessed the birth of a broad-based coalition called *Queremos Buenos Aires* (We Want Buenos Aires) that addresses what it calls the "urban/environmental/social and heritage emergency in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires."⁴ A central goal of this coalition is the protection of Buenos Aires urban history and the construction of a more egalitarian, sustainable city.

Among the many neighborhood groups in *Queremos Buenos Aires*, one group called *Palermo Despierta* has begun a grassroots campaign in the Palermo neighborhood to prevent the construction of residential mega-towers. These residents claim that the building of these enormous towers ruins the neighborhood, interrupting the delivery of public utilities to their homes and destroying the historic *casas bajas* (literally, short houses) that characterize the district's traditional urban landscape. My fieldwork in Buenos Aires began with a broad-based survey of urban change, but came to focus on interviewing Palermo residents who affiliated themselves with this *Palermo Despierta* coalition, coupled with examining the group's official documents, statements, and multimedia.⁵

During five weeks of fieldwork conducted in the Palermo District in September 2009, I found that many of my interviewees identified themselves, their neighborhood, and *Palermo Despierta's* activism as distinctively middle-class in nature. For these residents, *Palermo Despierta*

³ Ezequiel Burgo, "Las Razones Del Nuevo Boom Del Negocio Inmobiliario," *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), September 11, 2005, <http://www.clarin.com/suplementos/economico/2005/09/11/n-00311.htm> (accessed April 02, 2010).

⁴ Queremos Buenos Aires, "Queremos Buenos Aires - Adhieren y Participan," Queremos Buenos Aires: alternativa para el Área Metropolitana en emergencia, web log entry posted June 1, 2008, <http://queremosbsas.blogspot.com/> (accessed April 10, 2010). Original Spanish: "Emergencia urbana / ambiental / social y patrimonial del Área Metropolitana Buenos Aires"

⁵ Most of these documents are taken from the group's blog located at <http://palermodespierita.blogspot.com/>.

represented a rejection of the elitist collusion between private real estate businessmen and corrupt politicians who were destroying their neighborhood. The resulting scenes of protest (e.g. Figure Two) surprised me because, at least in the context of the U.S., it is relatively rare that one sees white, middle-class urban dwellers take to the streets to defend their neighborhood and their city from private business interests.

Figure Two: Middle-Class Activists Contesting the Construction of Towers in Palermo⁶



To the contrary, several scholars have characterized the urban middle class as exclusively conservative agents of urban exclusion and segregation.⁷ Neil Smith, for instance, uses the term “revanchist city” to describe the “race/class/gender terror felt by middle and ruling-class whites who [strike a] vicious reaction against, the working class, homeless people, the unemployed, women, gays and lesbians, [and] immigrants.”⁸ In the context of the Global South, several authors note that middle-class actors actively take over select areas in city centers in ways that emulate Western

⁶ *Palermo Online*. "Vecinos de Palermo protestaron por la construcción indiscriminada. Jaque a los torres." 2006. <http://palermoviejosite.iespana.es/protesta.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

⁷ This is not to say that every Global North urban scholar makes blanket class gentrification analytical claims about the urban middle-classes. Some scholars present more careful complementary analyses of the cultural-urban negotiation of meanings. These scholars include, but are not limited to, David Harvey on Paris, Katharyne Mitchell on Vancouver, and Timothy Gibson on Seattle.

⁸ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. (London: Routledge, 2005), 211.

gentrifiers.⁹ These urban scholars categorize the urban middle classes as agents of “globalization-oriented urban development.”¹⁰ In other words, middle class urban dwellers often accept and are complicit in neoliberal urban transformations.

While these analyses of urban middle classes are certainly valid in the context of many U.S. cities and other cities in the Global South, the situation in Buenos Aires is more complex. Thus, the question becomes: why are *Palermo Despierta* and other citywide neighborhood activists organizing for a more spatially just and equitable city, and how should this phenomenon be interpreted with respect to a wide body of scholarship that depicts middle class urban dwellers as routinely complicit in neoliberal development policies? In response to this question, I argue that *Palermo Despierta* contests neoliberal models of urban development in order to defend imagined national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness inscribed in the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires. In the eyes of Palermo residents, historical traces of their middle class, European urban identity are now threatened¹¹ by larger forces that manifest in the destruction of historic urban forms and restructuring of the urban landscape – rationalized in the neoliberal language of global competitiveness. Far from asserting an inclusive urban identity though, my analysis will demonstrate that *Palermo Despierta*'s activism operates on the basis of historic racial and class hierarchies as it responds to the fragmentation of “traditional” *porteño* identity following the economic crisis. This nascent activism is thus deeply contradictory and problematic from the perspective of urban scholars who advocate for a universal right to the city.¹²

⁹ See Smith, Neil. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." *Antipode* 3, no. 34 (2002); Goldsmith, William. "From the Metropolis to Globalization: the Dialectics of Race and Urban Form." In *Globalizing Cities: A new Spatial Order?*, by Peter Marcuse and Ronald Van Kempen, 37-55. Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 2000; Leichenko, R. M., and W. De. Solecki. "Exporting the American Dream: The Globalization of Suburban Consumption Landscapes." *Regional Studies* 2, no. 39 (2005).

¹⁰ Kanai, Juan M. "The In-Between City: Neoliberal Globalization, Inequality and Middle-Class Politics in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2002-2007)." Diss., UCLA, 2008, 75.

¹¹ This form of neoliberal urbanism is expressed in the current real estate boom in Buenos Aires. See Chapters One and Three.

¹² Harvey, David. "The Right to the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 4 (2003): 939-41.

My argument supplements a basic political-economic reading of Buenos Aires' post-crisis milieu with a critical analysis of the cultural-urban negotiations of meaning and space that have contested neoliberalism in the wake of the crisis.¹³ While my ethnographic analysis centers on the Palermo district, this thesis is much more than a neighborhood analysis. Rather, it is an examination of urban residents struggling to reinforce and preserve contradictory cultural-urban meanings in the midst of a neoliberal real estate boom that is enveloping the city's core.

This thesis is presented in four chapters. Chapter One formulates a theoretical framework that incorporates arguments from the literatures on neoliberalism, cities, and national narratives. I then discuss how different authors conceptualize urban change in Buenos Aires since the inauguration of the conservative Menem administration in 1989.

The following two chapters contextualize the historical formation of Argentine national identity as well as the socioeconomic conditions of post-crisis Buenos Aires. This context is crucial to understanding the conditions that shape the Buenos Aires cityscape and inform the mobilizations of *Palermo Despierta*. In particular, Chapter Two traces the historical conjunctures between narratives of the Argentine nation and the urban landscape of Buenos Aires. I offer an ethnographic account of these conjunctures in the form of a walk in the Palermo District with Carolina, a first-year college student and resident of Palermo. Through this tour, I argue that the city of Buenos Aires perpetuates Argentine national narratives into the present day by embedding historical traces of a middle class, European nation in various urban landmarks located throughout the city. I also argue that these national narratives were originally designed to exclude the indigenous working class and rural peasants from the idea of the Argentine nation – and this exclusion also lives on in the Buenos Aires urban landscape.

¹³ Jonas and Ward note that the city-region literature says virtually nothing on “how new territorial forms are constructed politically and reproduced through everyday acts and struggles around consumption and social reproduction.” in Jonas, A., and K. Ward. "Introduction to a debate on city-regions: new geographies of governance, democracy and social reproduction." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, no. 31 (2007): 170.

Chapter Three illustrates how Argentina's turn towards neoliberalism in the 1990s and the ensuing crisis of 2001-2002 produced a fragmented and unequal Buenos Aires rife with informal and precarious employment as well as urban poverty. I argue that the economic crisis ruptured the national narratives of Buenos Aires as a middle class, European city that we explored in Chapter Two. During the crisis, Buenos Aires was no longer in a position to reasonably tout itself as a middle class city due to the deteriorating material conditions of the *porteño* middle class, as well as the visible presence of growing structural inequality. Chapter Three will also demonstrate how, in the wake of this economic collapse, an unregulated real estate boom took hold of Buenos Aires, particularly in *barrios* (neighborhoods) along the city's central and northern corridors. Palermo was at the epicenter of this boom, as the neighborhood became the locus of a new Buenos Aires that was beginning to take shape following the crisis.

It is in this context that several Palermo neighborhood activist groups emerged to contest the negative effects of the real estate boom on their *barrios*. Chapter Four will examine one cross section of these Palermo resident neighborhood mobilizations: the anti-*torre* (anti-tower) movement led by *Palermo Despierta*. My analysis examines the ways in which *Palermo Despierta* contests the urban transformations brought on by the construction of residential mega-towers in Palermo. I will argue that their anti-tower campaigns need to be understood as a response to fears that these buildings would *further threaten* Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeaness associated with the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires. However, in articulating their activism in the language of these national narratives, *Palermo Despierta* simultaneously perpetuates historical exclusions of the poor, immigrants, and non-white racial groups from the city. To support these conclusions, I analyze interviews with *Palermo Despierta*-affiliated residents as well as *Palermo Despierta's* official documents.

Chapter One: Critical Scaffolding: The Literature and the Methodology

“Beneath the veneer of common-sense and seemingly ‘natural’ ideas about space and time, there lie hidden terrains of ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle.”

-David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*¹⁴

This literature review chapter serves two aims. First, this chapter’s initial section formulates the theoretical framework that ties together critical literatures on neoliberalism, cities, and national narratives. This framework will provide the analytical tools necessary to later examine the linkages between neoliberal urbanism and national narratives of middle-classness and Europeaness in Palermo neighborhood activism.

Second, this chapter presents scholarly perspectives on neoliberalism in both Buenos Aires and Argentina. Several scholars have already critiqued neoliberal economic policy in Buenos Aires, examining both the relevant actors and processes. Thus, the goal of this thesis is not to produce yet another one of these critiques, but rather to analyze the sociological underpinnings of a novel form of urban contestation led by *Palermo Despierta* that challenges neoliberal global hegemony in the local context of the Buenos Aires cityscape. Nevertheless, my project depends upon a robust understanding of how neoliberalism operates in both past and present Buenos Aires in order to flesh out the processes that *Palermo Despierta*’s activism contests. To this end, I will review scholarly perspectives on Argentina’s neoliberal economic transition, the neoliberalization of Buenos Aires municipal governance, and neoliberal urbanism in Buenos Aires.

Neoliberalism, Cities, and National Narratives

The theoretical aim of this thesis is to place three disparate yet related theoretical literatures on neoliberalism, cities, and national narratives in dialogue with one another to better understand my

¹⁴ Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford [England]: Blackwell, 1989), 205.

empirical work on neighborhood activism in Buenos Aires. Through an analytical articulation of these discrete bodies of literature, I argue that scholars can produce theoretically sophisticated and empirically grounded studies on the “messy actualities” of rule and resistance in late capitalist urban settings.

In order to formulate this theoretical framework, I will first put forward a working definition of neoliberalism used in the remainder of this thesis. I will then explore the theoretical linkages between neoliberalism and cities before transitioning to the relationship between cities and national narratives. In exploring these linkages, urban space and cities will serve as the pivot point by which I move from one theoretical linkage to the next. I will end this section with an evaluation of two works – one by Katharyne Mitchell on the Vancouver, B.C. metropolis and the other by Emanuela Guano on Buenos Aires – that combine elements of these three bodies of literature through examinations of urban politics in their respective cities of interest.

Defining Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has become a veritable buzzword in academic circles in recent years with different meanings advanced depending on one’s vantage point and field of study. Therefore, some clarification of the term is necessary in the context of my research. Wendy Larner defines neoliberalism as a term denoting “new forms of political-economic governance premised on the extension of market relationships.”¹⁵ Larner argues that scholars interpret neoliberalism in three general ways: first, as a coherent “policy framework” consisting of trade liberalization, curtailing of the welfare state, labor flexibilization, privatization of state-owned industries, and government fiscal

¹⁵ Larner, Wendy. "Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality." *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 63 (Autumn 2000): 5.

austerity;¹⁶ second, as a pro-market ideology that is more complex and uneven than unified and coherent; and third, as a form of Foucauldian governmentality founded on discourses that establish systems of “market governance” through processes of so-called responsabilization that operate at the level of individualized risk management.¹⁷

In my own use of the term, I take up Matthew Sparke’s exhortation to integrate neo-Gramscian critiques of “neoliberalism as ideology” and Foucauldian, discursive accounts of “neoliberalism as governmentality” into one coherent framework.¹⁸ That is, I acknowledge in the Gramscian tradition that neoliberalism and the economic logic of *lassiez-faire* capitalism has become an influential form of global rule or hegemony. But, at the same time, I argue that neoliberalism’s “global hegemony” has fault lines. The articulation of neoliberalism in specific places at specific times involves all sorts of context-contingent innovations that depart from a coherent, uniform ideology and regime of rule. In the context of Buenos Aires, I focus on the oppositional discourses of *Palermo Despierta* and other Palermo residents who resist the articulation of neoliberalism as global market-led urban redevelopment. This approach allows me to demonstrate neoliberalism’s contested, context-contingent presence in post-crisis Buenos Aires.

Neoliberalism and Cities

I have chosen to explore neoliberalism in the context of Buenos Aires, rather than rural areas of Argentina, because cities are *the* quintessential spatial sites in which neoliberalism is both articulated and contested. They are, in short, the sites where neoliberalism’s “ultimate fantasy of disembodied, ahistorical spacelessness” comes into contradiction with its messy geographical roll-

¹⁶ See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 53-54; and Kingfisher C., and Maskovsky J. 2008. "Introduction: The Limits of Neoliberalism". *Critique of Anthropology*. 28 (2): 117

¹⁷ Larner 2000, 5-6.

¹⁸ Matthew Sparke, "Political geography: political geographies of globalization (2) – governance," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 3 (2006): 367.

outs and roll-backs on the ground.¹⁹ Peck, Theodore, and Brenner argue that “cities have become strategically central sites in the uneven, crisis-laden advance of neoliberal restructuring projects.”²⁰

Saskia Sassen has founded an entire “global cities” literature that examines the ways in which cities like New York, London, and Tokyo function as engines of economic growth as well as strategic nodes in a spatially-dispersed, globally competitive world.²¹

In my analysis, I will employ Peck, Theodore, and Brenner’s term, “neoliberal urbanism,” to refer to the intersection of neoliberalism and urban space in Buenos Aires, Argentina.²² This term is based upon the concept of “actually existing neoliberalism,” which seeks to underscore the messy, context-contingent articulations of neoliberal policy programs in actual urban spaces.²³ I associate neoliberal urbanism with the influx of real estate capital into Buenos Aires following the economic crisis of 2001-2002, which stimulated market-led efforts to make Buenos Aires more competitive and globally relevant. As I will explore in my analysis of *Palermo Despierta* neighborhood activism, residential mega-towers that began to invade the district following the crisis served as a salient symbol of post-crisis neoliberal urbanism for Palermo residents.

¹⁹ Katharyne Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004), 1.

²⁰ Jamie Peck, Neil Brenner, and Nik Theodore, "Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations," *SAIS Review* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 49.

²¹ Saskia Sassen, *Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3-4.

Despite claims that Buenos Aires is transforming into a global city, many of the city’s urban transformations cannot be explained within global city framework. A ranking study of 55 select global cities including Buenos Aires conducted by Beaverstock et al. (1999) concluded that—on a scale of prime, major, and minor—Buenos Aires has “minor global advertising service centers,” “major global banking service centers,” and “minor global legal service centers.” Thus, while the transnational banking sector in Buenos Aires exhibits strong global city attributes, the legal and service centers do not. In addition, unlike traditional global cities such as New York, London, or Tokyo, Buenos Aires is *more* a city in which transnational investors could use the overvalued currency and legal guarantees to market consumption goods to middle- and high-income *porteños*, and *less* a city for the stationing of global corporate activities.²¹ As a result, Horacio Torres argues that Buenos Aires functions as a “transmission center” for transnational corporations to tap the *porteño* consumer market rather than the “command and control” global city imagined by Sassen. For more information, see: J. V. Beaverstock, R. G. Smith, and P. J. Taylor, "A roster of world cities," *Cities* 6, no. 16 (December 1999).

²² Peck, Brenner, and Brenner 2009, 49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 53.

Conjunctures Between Cities and National Narratives

A discussion of the role of national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness in the activism of *Palermo Despierta* must begin with an analysis of how these narratives constitute the nation, often times to the detriment of poorer, subaltern groups. By national narratives, I refer to the heterogeneous symbols and discourses that perpetuate an imagined national identity and power structure. National narratives are fundamentally linked to theorizations of national consciousness and nationhood. In literary critical analysis, there is a complex set of deconstructive arguments led by post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha on the ways in which national narratives break down.²⁴ The performance of the national story, Bhabha argues, always leads to moments of rupture and displacement in which minority voices and oppositions can be articulated.²⁵ This idea of a rupturing of national narratives is crucial to understanding the effects of the economic crisis of 2001-2002 on *porteño* urban identity.

Here, however, I am more concerned with the social uptake of *nostalgic* national narratives for the deliberate purposes of resistance following the crisis. For these reasons, the more useful theorizations of national narratives come from more sociologically and geographically inclined theories of national identity. These theories include Benedict Anderson's arguments about the imagined nation and Thongchai Winichakul's concern with the geographic demarcation of nation. Anderson and Winichakul highlight how national identity is constructed by way of internal modes of connection²⁶ that establish long-distance ties of solidarity and empathy even as they simultaneously lead to the exclusion of diverse non-national "others."²⁷ Central to both authors' theories of the nation is the importance of mass media and the resulting communication between individuals who

²⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁷ Winichakul Thongchai, "The Presence of Nationhood," in *Siam Mapped: A History of The Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

come to view themselves as part of an “imagined community.” Winichakul in particular argues that nations create unity and a sense of identity by denigrating other nations in order to separate themselves.

The theoretical linkage between cities and national narratives is a crucial part of *Palermo Despierta's* neighborhood activism because I argue that Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness are inscribed into the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires. But this argument begs the question of how national narratives become inscribed into urban space and why such inscription continues to be important?

In order to better understand this theoretical linkage, we can turn to the work of Li Zhang who argues that there is a profound connection between national and spatial belonging (citizenship), as the right to belong in the nation is connected with the right to belong in the city.²⁸ In the context of China, Zhang argues that the Chinese nation has been constructed and grounded in the geographical spaces of cities and rural localities.²⁹ This construction is not ahistorical. On the contrary, Zhang argues that in order to understand the parallel construction of national and spatial identity, one must examine the historical formations of national narratives and the ways in which cities and other spaces grounded these narratives.

Similarly, David Harvey traces the political history of Paris' Basilica of Sacre-Coeur.³⁰ Harvey's analysis demonstrates the importance of rich historical and empirical detail in examining the relationship between the nation and urban space. While Harvey examines why and how the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur monument continues to be interpreted as a political symbol in Paris, this thesis will focus on the urban form of the *casa baja* (low house) that I argue historically symbolizes Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness.

²⁸ Li Zhang, "Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 313.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David Harvey, "Monument and Myth," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, no. 3 (September 1979).

The theoretical connection I draw between national narratives and cities runs counter to the global cities sub-discipline, which claims that the processes of globalization “denationalizes” both cities and citizenship. Saskia Sassen, the founder of global city studies, writes that the term “denationalization” seeks to “capture something that remains connected to the ‘national’ as constructed historically, and is indeed profoundly imbricated with it but is so on historically new terms of engagement.”³¹ However, as Matthew Sparke has noted, this body of literature nevertheless discursively downplays the role of national narratives in a globalized world.³² Thus, my study seeks to demonstrate how national narratives both remain profoundly important for urban identity and respond to imperatives associated with globalization and neoliberalism.

Connecting Neoliberalism, Cities, and National Narratives

Katharyne Mitchell’s treatment of Vancouver B.C. and Emanuela Guano’s analysis of Buenos Aires serve as two quintessential works integrating theoretical literatures on neoliberalism, cities, and national narratives. Mitchell’s work investigates urban politics in Vancouver, B.C. in the context of massive Pacific Rim migration from Asia into the Vancouver metropolis. In her analysis of urban contestation Mitchell proposes a theoretical framework where:

The spaces of cities are the spaces where the hegemonic struggles over liberalism are now being fought. Whose liberalism? Whose hegemony? The socially revisionist liberalism of “well-being” or the neoliberal mantra of “international competitiveness”? There are clearly new alliances, new struggles, new forms of subject formation, new forms of consciousness, new narratives, and new ongoing imperatives to rework the ever-shifting articulations of state and nation, and nation and city. The disjunctures between neoliberal state practices and national urban narratives of social liberalism, for example, create a rent in the fabric, a tear in the sutures, a moment where the taken-for-granted becomes suddenly visible.³³

³¹ Saskia Sassen, "Incompleteness and the Possibility of Making: Towards Denationalized Citizenship?" *Cultural Dynamics* 21, no. 3 (2009): 229.

³² Matthew Sparke, "On Denationalization as Neoliberalization: Biopolitics, Class Interest, and the Incompleteness of Citizenship," *Political Power and Social Theory* 20, (2009): 288.

³³ Mitchell 2004, 19.

The power of Mitchell's analytical framework lies in its incorporation of literatures on liberalism and neoliberalism, transnationalism and globalization, and hegemony. Similar to my analysis, Mitchell examines the intersections between neoliberalism, cities, and national narratives not in an abstract, aspatial sense, but in the empirically grounded arena of context-contingent struggles and urban politics in Vancouver neighborhoods. Mitchell regards "the literal spatial positioning, movements, and struggles of actors as integral to the conceptual analysis: first, of how neoliberalism is both entrenched and resisted; and second, of how modern liberal notions of reason, progress, equality, and tolerance become used as rhetorical tactics in this larger hegemonic battle."³⁴

Mitchell also argues that "actually existing liberalism...is a fundamentally national formation...[while] it is neoliberalism that has global ambitions."³⁵ Such a formulation is useful for conceptualizing urban politics in Palermo because it allows me to frame the struggle between neoliberal urbanism and national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness as the clash between two hegemonies – a global hegemony and a national hegemony – in the localized urban space of Buenos Aires. Rather than view neoliberalism as a totalizing force that envelops anything and everything with its market-mediated mechanisms of control, my analysis demonstrates that neoliberalism confronts the equally salient hegemony of middle-classness and Europeanness that lives in the both Buenos Aires and the city's inhabitants.

While Mitchell describes how the urban space of Vancouver acts as the arena in which hegemonic struggles between national narratives and neoliberalisms play out, my aim is to demonstrate how the city of Buenos Aires is itself integral and constitutive of *porteño* national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness. To do so, Chapter Two of this thesis will historicize the parallel development of Buenos Aires and the Argentine nation at the turn of the 20th century as well as the inscription of Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and

³⁴ Ibid., 10.

³⁵ Ibid., 32.

Europeanness in the urban space of Buenos Aires and Palermo. My argument aims to demonstrate how the Buenos Aires urban landscape (re)produces national narratives that are under threat in the post-crisis regime of neoliberal urbanism.

Emanuela Guano's dissertation analyzes the middle-class urban experience in Buenos Aires during the economic decline of the neoliberal policy program in the 1990s. Guano argues that in the midst of its downward economic mobility, the *porteño* middle-class "turn[ed] spatial representations of its own modernity into matrixes of an everyday experience that articulated both consent and opposition to neoliberalism."³⁶ Guano examines how middle-class *porteños* confront, negotiate, and struggle with their urban "Others," most notably of which are the racialized urban poor in the city.³⁷ Through these everyday encounters in a neoliberal city, Guano argues that middle class urban residents produce urban spectacles to defend both the city they inhabit and an imagined Argentine identity.

While Guano's innovative analysis on neoliberalism, national narratives, and urban space in Buenos Aires is useful for my own theoretical framings, her work does not deal with two important issues that are at the very heart of my own study. First, whereas Guano's work focuses almost exclusively on middle-class conceptions of the racialized urban poor in Buenos Aires, this thesis focuses instead on how the Buenos Aires middle-class confronts the neoliberal urban elite through an analysis of anti-towers mobilization in the Palermo district. This analysis will analyze middle-class feelings of being squeezed out of the city and the nation by the forces of neoliberal urbanism. Second, Guano's fieldwork occurred before the outbreak of the economic crisis of 2001, which (as I argue later) had profound implications for the economic livelihood and identity of middle-class *porteño* residents.

³⁶ Emanuela Guano, *Emplacing Modernity: The Buenos Aires' Middle-Class and the Politics of Urban Spectacle in Neoliberal Argentina*, diss., The University of Texas- Austin, 1999, vi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

Neoliberal Economic Transformations in Argentina during the 1990s

Having established a critical framework linking neoliberalism, cities, and national narratives, I now expand further on the role of neoliberalism in Buenos Aires. But to do so, it is necessary to first detail the “Washington Consensus” inspired³⁸, neoliberal economic policy changes at the national level in Argentina. To preface this discussion, it is important to note that while much of the economic restructuring that occurred during the 1990s in Argentina resembles that of other Latin American countries, the scope and ramifications of neoliberal reform in Argentina far surpassed regional patterns in Latin America.³⁹

The Argentine neoliberal restructuring program included state-industry privatizations, deregulation, curtailment of the welfare state, and trade and financial liberalization. Arguably, the *ley de convertibilidad* (the convertibility law) passed in early 1991 was the most influential of these reforms. The convertibility law established a currency board whose prerogative was to maintain a one-to-one fixed exchange rate between the dollar and the peso in order to reign in hyperinflation rates and restore macroeconomic stability.⁴⁰ This reform eliminated the Argentine central bank’s use of monetary policy, artificially overvalued the peso, and – many scholars argue – eventually precipitated the Argentine economic crisis of 2002/2002.⁴¹ In addition, this reform had many social and cultural implications as the regime of “*un peso, un dolar*” granted middle class Argentines unprecedented purchasing power along with greater access to transnational goods and services.⁴²

³⁸ The Washington Consensus is a term coined by John Williamson (1990) to refer to “the lowest common denominator of policy advice being addressed by the Washington-based institutions to Latin American countries as of 1989.”

³⁹ Juan M. Kanai, “The In-Between City: Neoliberal Globalization, Inequality and Middle-Class Politics in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2002-2007)” (diss., UCLA, 2008), 182.

⁴⁰ P. Gerchunoff and J. C. Torre, “La Política de Liberalización Económica en La Administración de Menem,” *Desarrollo Economico* 36, no. 143 (1996).

⁴¹ For debates concerning the convertibility law, See: Daniel Muchnik, *Argentina Modelo: De La Furia a La Resignación : Economía y Política Entre 1973 y 1998* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 1998).; and Julio Gambina and Daniel Campione, *Los Años de Menem: Cirugía Mayor* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2002).

⁴² This fact is crucial in understanding the emergence of shopping mall culture in Buenos Aires during the 1990s and supports urban geographers’ point that economic transformations are spatialized in the urban landscape. Increased consumer purchasing power resulting from the *ley de convertibilidad* paved the way for the arrival of shopping centers, which altered the Buenos Aires cityscape.

There are several specific policies that reflected standard neoliberal reforms characteristic of the Washington Consensus. The same month he entered the presidency in 1999, President Carlos Menem's administration implemented Plan "BB" which included a number of "shock therapy" policies including raising government controlled prices, a 180 day suspension of tax breaks and fiscal support for businesses, and the devaluation of the Austral currency.⁴³ Following Plan "BB," Congress passed the Law of State Reform allowing the executive to wholly or partially privatize all public enterprises, including oil, telecommunications, electricity, television, airlines, steel companies, and the highway system.⁴⁴ According to the World Bank, the combined effect of these privatizations for labor was that "between 1990 and 1993, over 85,000 employees lost their jobs due to the privatization of formerly state-owned industries...[and] reductions in the size of the national state administration entailed 103,000 layoffs and the transfer of 283,000 employees to provincial employment."⁴⁵ In total, "217,000 unemployed civil servants were fired by Menem between 1989 and 1992 in an attempt to curtail the expanding budget, [and] the trend only worsened, as, by 1995, the unemployment rate had reached 18.6 percent and the underemployment rate was at 11.3 percent."⁴⁶ In order to further this neoliberal agenda, Congress passed the Economic Emergency Act, granting Menem executive authority to pass NUDs (necessity and urgency decrees) to eliminate private sector subsidies, export subsidies, import tariffs, and permit public sector layoffs and wage reductions.⁴⁷

⁴³ W. C. Smith, "State, Market and Neoliberalism in Post-Transition Argentina: The Menem Experiment," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 33, no. 4 (1991): 53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁵ World Bank, Washington D.C., *Argentina: From Insolvency to Growth. A World Bank Country Study*, by The World Bank Group (1993), 299.

⁴⁶ Brittany Williams, "Between Polyarchy and Autocracy: The Delegative Democracy of Carlos Menem," *BC Journal of International Affairs*, <http://bcjournal.org/2006/between-polyarchy-and-autocracy/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

The Neoliberalization of Buenos Aires Municipal Governance

This section transitions from a discussion of neoliberal economic transformations at the national level to municipal neoliberal governance in Buenos Aires.⁴⁸ Here I engage pertinent scholarship to determine the paradigms driving urban governance at the Buenos Aires municipal level, and how these paradigms have enabled neoliberal urbanism to take root in the city. I will review literature concerning *strategic planning* and *sustainable development*, two paradigms of Buenos Aires urban governance that have perpetuated undemocratic, neoliberal urbanism in the city.

Strategic Planning as a Past and Present Paradigm

Broadly, strategic planning emerged as a dominant paradigm of urban planning in the U.S. beginning in the 1980s. Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells argue that strategic planning is marked by three key elements: 1) Thinking beyond questions of land use to questions of health, education, culture, etc. in urban spaces, 2) strategic flexibility that can adapt to environmental changes, and 3) the participation and inclusion of key actors.⁴⁹ Contrary to these lofty elements, other scholars including Adrián Gorelik maintain that strategic urban planning rejects the idea that the local state should pursue the principle of the “common good” of its residents by acting as a mediator between capital and labor.⁵⁰ Rather, under strategic planning, the goal of the local state is to improve the

⁴⁸ Until 1996, the president of Argentina appointed the mayor of the Buenos Aires municipality.⁴⁸ As a result, many of my interviewees remember this era as a time in which municipal and national governance were two sides of the same coin. Despite the fact that the national government transferred technical control over high schools and all national hospitals to the municipal government, ex-president Carlos Menem (1989-1999) still maintained near complete political control over the operations of local state and its resources. In 1994, Menem promulgated a new constitution through the Argentine parliament in the infamous Olivos Pact between the Radical and Peronist parties. The new constitution came into effect in 1996, allowing Menem to pursue a fourth presidential term. The constitution also enshrined the autonomy of the Municipality of Buenos Aires from the national government, ending the president’s ability to appoint municipal heads of state. The municipal government created its own constitution in 1996, signaling a new era of decentralized urban planning in Buenos Aires. For more information, see David Myers and Henry Dietz, *Capital City Politics in Latin America Democratization and Empowerment* (New York: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 82-83.

⁴⁹ Jordi Borja et al., *Local and Global: The Management of Cities in The Information Age* (London: Earthscan Publications, 1997), 165.

⁵⁰ Adrian Gorelik, *Miradas Sobre Buenos Aires Historia Cultural y Critica Urbana* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Ediciones, 2004).

quality of life of the individual by allowing the market to act as a mediator between the state and civil society in order to address the needs of privileged residents.

Strategic planning became a paradigm of urban governance in Buenos Aires during the De La Rúa municipal administration in 1996. The municipal constitution created *El Consejo de Planeamiento Estratégico* (The Council of Strategic Planning, CoPE), which served as the first real attempt to institutionalize the concept of strategic planning in Buenos Aires.⁵¹ Ivana Socoloff also identifies the *Plan Estratégico Buenos Aires 2010* (Buenos Aires Strategic Plan for 2010, PEBA), passed in November 2004, as the first piece of sweeping legislation that granted the CoPE the institutional authority to transform Buenos Aires through the principles of strategic planning.

Socoloff's discursive analysis of the PEBA demonstrates that both the PEBA and the CoPE employ the language of a more democratic urban planning process in order to legitimate the changes implemented by the council while simultaneously excluding large segments of the population from the planning process. This exclusion occurs through technical stipulations concerning the forms in which public participation can take place. Socoloff states that in order for an organization to have a voice in the CoPE, 1) "the scope of the organization has to encompass the entire city of Buenos Aires" and 2) "organizations have to possess to legal personality and initialed statutes."⁵² In delineating such stringent requirements for participation in the urban planning process, the CoPE effectively excludes numerous "neighborhood centers, small sports clubs, and a range of grassroots organizations with local or neighborhood impact" because these organizations cannot claim to represent the interests of every citizen of Buenos Aires.⁵³ Neighborhood organizations like *Palermo Despierta* become effectively excluded from the municipal planning process, as they have no institutional recourse through organs of the municipal government. In the words of Socoloff,

⁵¹ Ivana Socoloff, "Buenos Aires Bajo el Lente de la Planificación Estratégica: Discursos Sobre la Ciudad Presentes en el Plan Estratégico Buenos Aires 2010" (2007): 17.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 18.

“What we find in these documents is a profound tension between those who *should* make decisions regarding the city, those who *really* makes decisions, and what the role of citizenship will be.”

(Author’s emphasis)⁵⁴

While Socoloff does not link the paradigm of strategic planning to the wider currents of neoliberal urbanism in Buenos Aires, the connection is unequivocal. She even hints at this connection by including a passage from the *Plan Estratégico Buenos Aires 2010* stating that it “is a plan of action...[and] its success consists of unifying the strategies of entities and businesses that have the capacity and resources to influence the progress of the city through its actions.”⁵⁵ Strategic planning is related to neoliberal urbanism in Buenos Aires because the PEBA heavily depends on businesses and the market for the success of its urban planning programs.

Sustainable Development as a Paradigm of Post-Crisis Urban Governance

In addition to strategic planning, sustainable development has emerged as a central paradigm driving urban planning in Buenos Aires, particularly with respect to the *Plan Urbano Ambiental* (Urban Environmental Plan) promulgated in 2000 and put into effect in 2001. Ryan Centner brilliantly illustrates the neoliberal logics and contradictory forces within the plan.⁵⁶

Centner identifies two main problems with the neoliberal logics of the sustainable development model, the first being inherent to the transnationalized concept of sustainable urban development itself, and the second being the problematic implementation of sustainable development paradigms in the city of Buenos Aires. As a concept, sustainable urban development couples three main tenets: environmental sustainability, sociopolitical participation, and economic

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁶ Ryan Centner, "Conflictive sustainability landscapes: the neoliberal quagmire of urban environmental planning in Buenos Aires," *Local Environment* 14, no. 2 (2009).

competitiveness.⁵⁷ Several critics of urban sustainable development including Scott Campbell view these three tenets as too disparate to consolidate under one conceptual umbrella, because, at times, these tenets can be mutually exclusive, or worse, mutually destructive.⁵⁸ Centner takes Campbell's analysis a step further and notes that in the context of Buenos Aires, "the concepts of sustainability, participation, and competitiveness, respectively, encapsulate these different interests."⁵⁹

According to Center, sustainable development has proved highly problematic for the government of the City of Buenos Aires as a paradigm for urban planning. *Plan Urbano Ambiental* (PUA) defines sustainable development as a:

"Participatory process that integrates urban-design transformation, economic growth, social equity, the preservation of cultural diversity, and the rational use of environmental resources, with the objective of improving the living conditions of the population and minimizing the degradation or destruction of its own ecological base of production and habitability, without putting at risk the satisfaction of the needs of future generations."⁶⁰

Moreover, according to Centner, the main priorities embedded within the PUA are:

"(1) balancing geographic disparities in urban development (2) revalorizing the central city (3) increasing cross-city interconnections but also buttressing neighborhood centers (4) upgrading parks and adding them the neighborhoods most deprived of green space (5) improve all infrastructure and access points to the city, and (6) fostering metropolitan-level cooperation with other jurisdictions."⁶¹

Centner examines how these priorities and definitions of sustainable urban development played out in the aftermath of the restructuring and "revitalization" of Puerto Madero from a industrial port district into a wealthy promenade for Buenos Aires' elite citizens by the Menem government in the late-1990s. In Puerto Madero, the goal of economic competitiveness essentially won out over the other goals of sociopolitical participation and environmental sustainability. PUA officials devoted

⁵⁷ Ibid., 175.

⁵⁸ S. Campbell, "Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? Urban Planning and the Contradictions of Sustainable Development," *American Planning Association* 62, no. 3 (1996).

⁵⁹ Centner 2009, 174.

⁶⁰ Argentina, Consejo de Plan Urbano Ambiental, Secretaría de Planeamiento Urbano, *Plan Urbano Ambiental: Documento Final*, by Gobierno De La Ciudad De Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires, 2000), 12.

⁶¹ Centner 2009, 177.

more time and energy to the construction of a multi-lane highway running above Puerto Madero and to the expansion “high-end office space, luxury residences, and international tourist development” than projects related to political participation and environmental sustainability.⁶² Centner argues that the reason why economic competitiveness has won out over the other two urban planning priorities in Buenos Aires is that, “in a part of the world prone to financial instability, the *landscape of competitiveness* is a projection to make Buenos Aires more attractive to global investment.”⁶³ The neoliberal institutional legacy in Buenos Aires therefore limits the ability of the sustainable development paradigm to be truly holistic, as neoliberal logics reinforce the dominance of economic competitiveness considerations over social justice considerations.

Neoliberal Urbanism and Buenos Aires

With an understanding of neoliberal economic transformation at the national level and political-economic transformations at the municipal level, we can now transition to an examination of the ways in which these neoliberal reforms have become spatialized within Buenos Aires from 1990 to present day. Indeed, the changes at the Buenos Aires city level were just as stark as the changes at the national level as evidenced by Graciela Silvestri and Adrián Gorelik’s remark that it is only since 1990 that a “new era in the city’s [Buenos Aires] history has taken shape.”⁶⁴ Different authors highlight different elements of neoliberal urbanism in Buenos Aires, but I will initially limit my discussion of urban restructuring to various forms of privatization of the city that had major implications for urban fragmentation and the fate of middle class residents.

Pedro Pérez has written extensively on the privatization of public urban services. For instance, Pérez notes that the privatization of the transportation network in Buenos Aires

⁶² Ibid., 192.

⁶³ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁴ Graciela Silvestri and Adrián Gorelik, "Ciudad y Cultura Urbana, 1976-1999: El Fin de la Expansión," in *Buenos Aires, Historia de Cuatro Siglos*, ed. Jose L. Romero (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2000), 461.

precipitated a fragmentation of various modes of transportation including trains, buses, “charters,” taxis, and *remises* as coordination ceased to exist between differing modes of transportation due to various multinational companies being in charge of different modes and spaces of transportation in the city.⁶⁵ Pérez also demonstrates that, in the aggregate, the privatization of urban public services including water, sewage, garbage, transportation, electricity, and natural gas increased urban inequalities because “risers in the rates of public services were reflected in their higher costs for low-income groups... [while] users in residential areas with more purchasing power (and a greater capacity to consume) and large firms (also large consumers) benefit[ed] disproportionately.”⁶⁶

Several authors have analyzed the privatization of urban planning in Buenos Aires, often times characterizing this process as a shift towards “urban entrepreneurialism.”⁶⁷ Adrián Gorelik describes this shift towards “urban entrepreneurialism” as one in which Buenos Aires became a “*ciudad de los negocios*” (city of businesses) where rent-seeking real estate companies came to dominate many urban planning decisions.⁶⁸ Pérez sharpens Gorelik’s critique by stating that private “developers resort[ed] to the principles of urban planning, no longer as a tool to serve the public interest, but [rather to turn the city into] the product of a market ‘rationalization’ of individual operations...with the aims of enhancing the quality of the final product (the development) and increasing profit margins.”⁶⁹ Kanai argues that the “revitalization” of the Puerto Madero district was emblematic of the shift towards “urban revitalization through private investments while placing the city in competitive positions within transnational networks.”⁷⁰ Common to all these authors’ arguments concerning the

⁶⁵ Pedro Pérez, “Buenos Aires: Fragmentation and Privatization of the Metropolitan City,” *Environment and Urbanization* 14 (2002): 153. The privatization of urban public services that Pérez outlines is significantly related to Palermo Despierta’s campaign against the mega-towers because residents claim that the construction of these towers interrupts their urban utilities. See Chapter 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶⁷ See Pérez, 2002; Kanai, 2008.

⁶⁸ Adrián Gorelik, *Buenos Aires En Cuestión: Notas Para Un Diagnostico* (Buenos Aires: Contraduria General Comunal, 1993).

⁶⁹ Pérez 2002, 155.

⁷⁰ Kanai 2008, 189.

privatization of urban planning is the notion that these new forms of market-led urbanism resulted in the fragmentation of Buenos Aires as some spaces became profitable for real estate and capital speculation while other areas became spatially disadvantaged and neglected.⁷¹

A last example of the privatization of Buenos Aires is the private enclaving of urban residential space through the proliferation of gated communities, *torres-jardines*,⁷² and *countries*.⁷³ According to Monica Lacarrieu and Guy Thuillier,⁷⁴ newly developed gated communities, primarily in the northern area outer ring of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan area, occupied 300 square kilometers by 2000.⁷⁵ Gorelik also documents the emergence of high-rise towers in Buenos Aires with private recreational areas and panoptic security measures, dubbing this phenomenon as the *torres-jardin* (tower-garden) model of urbanism.⁷⁶ Michael Janoschka documents a 1,600 hectare, enclosed, private mini-city called Nordelta located in the Metropolitan Buenos Aires that contains 8,000 people within its walls.⁷⁷ According to Janoschka, Nordelta is changing the face of urban space in metropolitan Buenos Aires by marketing itself as a perfectly controlled and secure mini-city that will deliver “*una vida mejor*” (a better life) to each and every one its residents.⁷⁸

While not by any means exhaustive, the aforementioned examples of the privatization of Buenos Aires – the privatization of urban public services, the privatization of urban planning, and the privatization of urban residential space – illustrate a wider trend of polarization and

⁷¹ Silvestri and Gorelik 2000, 489.

⁷² Sealed-off residential towers in the CABA.

⁷³ Elite country clubs in Buenos Aires.

⁷⁴ Monica Lacarrieu and Guy Thuillier, "A Utopia of Order and Enclosure: Private Districts and Countries in Buenos Aires," *Espace Geographique* 33, no. 2 (2004): 152-53.

⁷⁵ According to Kanai 2008, 217: "The authors list a total of 350 complexes, which have been subdivided into 83,000 lots. Approximately half of the 27,000 newly built houses incorporated to the registry in these sites constituted the permanent residence of about 50,000 people."

⁷⁶ Adrián Gorelik, "Modelo Para Armar: Buenos Aires, De La Crisis Al Boom," *Punto De Vista* 84 (April & may 2006): http://www.bazaramericano.com/bazar_opina/articulos/gorelik_crisis_al_boom.htm (accessed November 24, 2009). This *torres-jardin* urban phenomenon is at the heart of Palermo Despierta's activism.

⁷⁷ Michael Janoschka, "El Modelo de Ciudad Latinoamericana, Privatización y Fragmentación del Espacio Urbano de Buenos Aires: El Caso de Nordelta," in *Buenos Aires a La Deriva: Transformaciones Urbanas Recientes*, ed. Max W. Guerra (Buenos Aires: Biblios, 2005)

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

fragmentation that most of urban scholars identify in the city of Buenos Aires.

Conceptualizing Buenos Aires in the Midst of Neoliberal Globalization

Juan Miguel Kanai's study stands as the most comprehensive analysis to date on the above neoliberal transformations in Buenos Aires.⁷⁹ Kanai examines middle class politics in the context of neoliberal globalization, arguing that the middle class is still a politically important group in Buenos Aires. While Kanai's study is a useful starting point for analyzing middle class politics in Buenos Aires, it falls short in two ways. First, Kanai does not examine the theoretical implications of how middle class contestation can actually rework and resist neoliberal globalization, favoring instead an examination of the political importance of middle class actors for municipal elections. Second, and more importantly, Kanai's emphasis on political-economic urban processes elides any examination of the deeper urban-cultural meaning behind contemporary middle class neighborhood politics in Buenos Aires. While Kanai provides a plethora of historical data, his analysis does not link historical legacies of middle-classness and Europeanness to current middle class politics in the wake of the crisis. In other words, Kanai overlooks the fact that middle-classness and Europeanness are *urban identities* that require deeper cultural excavation. In this sense, my study serves to bridge the gap between Kanai's more political-economic emphasis on middle class urban actors and Emanuela Guano's aforementioned analysis of urban-cultural spectacle in pre-crisis Buenos Aires.

Method and Motive: Why Palermo?⁸⁰

My analysis will involve a combination of historical, quantitative, and qualitative data. In September 2009, I spent five weeks in Buenos Aires collecting this data and conducting

⁷⁹ See Kanai, 2008.

⁸⁰ I received IRB Human Subjects Exemption approval to conduct my research in Buenos Aires, Argentina in September 2009.

ethnographic interviews with Palermo residents concerning the urban transformations in their neighborhood in the wake of the economic crisis of 2001-2002. However, before moving to further discussion of my data, some justification is need for choosing the Palermo district as my site of research.

Why Palermo?

Some Buenos Aires residents were incredulous upon learning that I had decided to take up the district of Palermo as my spatial unit of analysis. Palermo is the largest district in Buenos Aires with many different components and sub-districts. But rather than view the size and complexity of the neighborhood as a reason to be weary of its analysis, I argue that there are four reasons why Palermo is a rich arena in which to analyze neighborhood resistance to neoliberal urbanism

First, the Palermo district has a distinctly middle-class history (a history I discuss in Chapter Two) that has been threatened by the current real estate boom in Buenos Aires. Second, my quantitative analysis (in Chapter Three) will demonstrate that Palermo had the highest real estate investment rate of any Buenos Aires neighborhood by 2008.⁸¹ Third, Palermo is one of the Buenos Aires neighborhoods with the highest levels of neighborhood activism.⁸² Fourth, Palermo is itself a paradoxical neighborhood in terms its middle-classness. While few *porteños* or tourists would now refer to Palermo as a middle class neighborhood (preferring the slightly pejorative term middle-upper class), the vast majority of my Palermo resident interviewees emphasized both their own middle class identity and the historic middle class identity of their neighborhood. Thus, the Palermo neighborhood presents an ideal arena in which to explore the intersection between Argentine

⁸¹ Gobierno de Buenos Aires, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, *Indicador Trimestral de La Construcción de La Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires Primer Semestre de 2008* (Buenos Aires, 2009), 4.

⁸² Valeria Duran et al., "Mapas Barriales: Marcas de Las Nuevas Centralidades?" in *Buenos Aires a La Deriva: Transformaciones Urbanas Recientes*, by Guerra Max Welch (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005), 426.

national narratives, neoliberalism, and urban space due to its rapid transformation in the current real estate boom as well as its contradictory origins and representations.

The Data and its Relevance

My method of analyzing the historical and political-economic context underlying Buenos Aires neighborhood activism aims to address the danger that anthropological “thick description” can sometimes lead to accounts that are devoid of critical analysis of context.⁸³ Chapter Two marshals secondary source historical data in order to examine the parallel development of the Argentine nation and the Buenos Aires cityscape. Chapter Three then employs the extensive use of primary source quantitative data from the Buenos Aires municipal government and other state-run agencies to examine post-crisis socioeconomic conditions in the city. Far from mere background to the “actual” study, these two chapters critically examine the cultural-urban and political-economic conditions that continue to shape the Buenos Aires cityscape and inform the political contestation led by *Palermo Despierta*. Additionally, my critical use of quantitative data in Chapter Three seeks to counteract a growing trend in urban anthropology to disavow quantitative analyses of the city in favor of purely qualitative results. I argue that quantitative analysis can supplement qualitative accounts of the city by allowing scholars to examine the tension and harmony between residents’ perceptions of urban change and the processes reflected in official data.

Chapter Four employs qualitative data gathered during my September 2009 ethnographic fieldwork in Buenos Aires. This bulk of this qualitative data consists of semi-structured and unstructured interviews conducted with Palermo residents in public and semi-public spaces including parks, plazas, and shopping malls. While I conducted over 50 interviewees in total during

⁸³ Arguably, Clifford Geertz’s inaugural illustration of thick-description also evidences some of this danger itself. For example, his detailed descriptions of Balinese cockfights did not address the broader transformations of Indonesian society and political-economy taking place at the time. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

the course of my fieldwork, a change in the scope of my research once I returned from Buenos Aires has left me with seven relevant interviewees for my research. My analysis of these interviews seeks to identify statements by certain individuals who precisely articulate general trends observed among all or most of my interviewees.

All of my seven interviewees live in the Palermo district, identify as middle class, and affiliate themselves with the *Palermo Despierta* anti-towers movement in the neighborhood. I encountered all seven of these interviewees through ethnographic observation, random coincidence, and neighborhood activist contacts I made in the city. I tried to select interviewees that presented a range of age and gender backgrounds. The youngest interviewee was a first year college student and the oldest interviewee was a retired teacher who has lived in Buenos Aires since the 1920s. All of my interviewees identified as white/European. While my analysis would have been significantly strengthened had I interviewed more residents from other racial groups, as well as working class and elite residents in the city, these were the limitations of a short period of fieldwork.⁸⁴

I am aware that scholars have expressed concern over qualitative data analyses like my own. Catherine Kohler Riessman writes about the difficulty of “*transcribing experience*” as well as “*analyzing experience*” due to the inherent flaws in attempting to codify and piece together the complex human experience captured during an interview.⁸⁵ I have relied heavily on Palermo residents’ direct statements, some of which I have presented in both Spanish and English, in order to minimize these problems associated with qualitative data interpretation.⁸⁶ I have also conducted my ethnography and interviews in a similar way to that described by Katharyne Mitchell in her spatial ethnography of Vancouver, B.C. Namely, my qualitative methodology is such that “space and the sedimented

⁸⁴ Certainly more research is needed to examine how non-white populations and the urban poor in Buenos Aires contest neoliberal urbanism and narratives of Europeanness in particular. See Conclusion for more on this point.

⁸⁵ Catherine K. Riessman, "Narrative Analysis," in *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, by A. M. Huberman and Matthew B. Miles (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 225-226.

⁸⁶ Further complicating this fact is that while I am near fluent in Spanish, my 5% of misunderstanding often hinders translation.

histories of life are not just theoretical variables but actively constitute what happens, how, and why.”⁸⁷

It is to an analysis of these “sedimented histories of life” in Buenos Aires, Argentina that we now turn.

⁸⁷ Mitchell 2004, 11.

Chapter Two

Palermo through the Eyes of a *Palermitana*: An Abridged Journey through Buenos Aires Urban History⁸⁸

Ask any Buenos Aires resident why they love their city and they will immediately begin to describe the city's rich cultural history and sense of identity. But what is this "rich history" and why does it remain so instrumental for *porteños'* representations of their city and nation? This section explores the historical conjunctures between narratives of the Argentine nation and the urban landscape of Buenos Aires. I narrate these conjunctures through a walk in the Palermo District with Carolina, a first-year college student and resident of Palermo.⁸⁹ Through this tour, I argue that the construction of the Buenos Aires played a major role in the formation of Argentine national narratives of a middle-class, European people. I also argue that just as these national narratives were originally designed to exclude the indigenous working class and rural peasants from the idea of the Argentine nation, so too was Buenos Aires designed to exclude the racialized urban poor from the right to the city. This journey through Buenos Aires urban history will allow us to contextualize and deepen our understanding of present-day neighborhood activism against the arrival of hypermodern, residential mega-towers in the Palermo district that, according to residents, destroys the identity of their neighborhood and city.

On the first leg of our journey through Argentine urban history with Carolina, we will stop in Palermo's Plaza Italia and examine a statue commemorating Argentine founding Father Domingo Sarmiento and his role in the colonial project of Europeanizing Argentina. Central to Sarmiento's nation-making was the creation of European city, Buenos Aires, which would distinguish Argentina from other Latin American countries. On the second leg of our journey, we will examine how

⁸⁸ This chapter is based upon a real walk I took with Carolina through the Palermo District. However, the route that Carolina and I took does not exactly mimic the one presented in this chapter due to reasons of form and historical narrative. Nevertheless, the conversations and sites in this chapter reflect my transcribed field notes following our walks together.

⁸⁹ See Map One in the Appendix of this thesis for the approximate route through the city that my chapter narrates.

various urban sites in Buenos Aires and the Palermo district embody the second Argentine national narrative of interest: middle-classness. During this leg, the *casa baja* (low house) will be a particular urban site of interest for explaining how the narratives of a middle-class Argentine nation became embedded in the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires.

Meet Me at Alto!

In the third week of my fieldwork in Buenos Aires, I decided to rendezvous with Carolina whom I had interviewed a week earlier in the food court of *Alto Palermo*, the Palermo district's largest shopping mall. We had planned to meet at the mall and attend a museum showing in the Once district, but when I arrived I discovered that Carolina had concocted an alternate agenda. "Today I am going to show you Palermo through the eyes of a *Palermitana* (Palermo resident)," she told me. Anxious to get a fresh perspective on the *barrio* I had studied for the past three weeks, I agreed to Carolina's request and we descended from the mall's top floor to the semi-organized chaos below on Santa Fe Street. It was four in the afternoon and as we walked together Carolina's words were barely audible due to a cacophony of stop-and-go traffic. "Palermo has lost all of its *tranquilidad* (calmness) with the arrival of the *boom inmobiliario* (real estate boom)," she shouted. Indeed, Palermo had the highest rate of construction and real estate investment in 2008 compared to all other Buenos Aires *barrios*.⁹⁰ As we walked towards the Plaza Italia and Palermo Park, I wondered to myself if I would even recognize Santa Fe Street on my next visit to Buenos Aires.

Sarmiento: The Colonial Project of Europeanizing Argentina

As we approached the Plaza Italia, the bustle of the Alto Palermo sub-district began to evaporate and the Palermo Park foliage came into view. When we arrived at the plaza, Carolina and I

⁹⁰ Gobierno de Buenos Aires, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, *Indicador Trimestral de La Construcción de La Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires Primer Semestre de 2008* (Buenos Aires, 2009), 4.

sat down on a bench looking out towards the *Rio de La Plata*. Carolina directed my gaze to an ostentatious statue situated in the roundabout of Libertador and Sarmiento Avenue. She told me that the distant statue was that of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, founding father of Argentina. Carolina told me that as president in the late 19th century, Sarmiento was responsible for educational reforms that extended education to Argentines in nearly every province by 1900. He also recruited elite French architects to plan and construct Buenos Aires, giving the city a distinct identity that it had not held previously. Carolina did not tell me, however, about the racial and class hierarchies that Sarmiento and other Argentine elites constructed as part of their colonial project to turn Argentina into a “modern”, European nation.

Sarmiento was one of the Buenos Aires elite whose worldview consisted of a simple dichotomy between *civilización y barbarie* (civilization and barbarism) where civilization meant a “European, white, urban, capitalist, industrialized” nation and barbarism represented a “Latin American, rural, non-white, pre-capitalist” society.⁹¹ Emanuela Guano characterizes this dichotomy as one drawn between a European modernity and a Latin American pre-modernity.⁹² Sarmiento’s colonial legacy is one of attempting to position Argentina on the European side of this dichotomy. He did so by first implementing sweeping educational reforms that aimed to “civilize” indigenous and mestizo Argentines.⁹³ Believing, however, that simply educating Argentina’s native population would be insufficient to bring the country into European modernity, the country’s elites implemented a political project to import Europe to Argentina through immigration from countries like Italy, Spain, France, England, and Germany. The legal foundations of this project were codified in Article 25 of the 1853 Argentine National Constitution, sponsored by Juan Bautista Alberdi, which committed the federal government to “encourage European immigration” and to provide free

⁹¹ Emanuela Guano, *Emplacing Modernity: The Buenos Aires’ Middle-Class and the Politics of Urban Spectacle in Neoliberal Argentina*, diss., The University of Texas- Austin, 1999, 12.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 136.

entry to European immigrants. The colonial aims of this article were clear, as Alberdi argued that “if you were to put the *roto*, the *gaucho*, the *cholo*, the basis element of our popular masses through the finest educational system; in one hundred years you would not make him an English worker...who lives comfortably in a dignified manner.”⁹⁴ As a result, by 1914, 49.4 percent of the Buenos Aires population was foreign-born, mostly originating from Italy and Spain.⁹⁵

Figure Three: The Buenos Aires Port Through Which European Immigrants Arrived, 1931

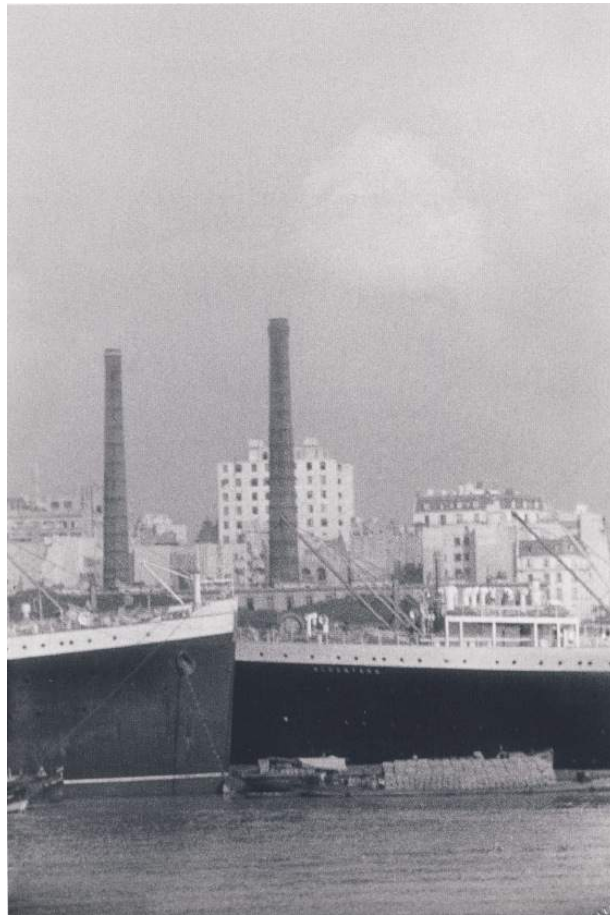


Photo By Horacio Coppola

⁹⁴ Alberdi, Juan B. 1852. *Bases y puntos de partida para la reorganización nacional*. Available online at <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/00360552199914939647857/index.htm>. Chapter 15, pg 90.

⁹⁵ David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 143.

Equally important to the construction of an imagined European national identity was the building of a city to serve as the nation's capital.⁹⁶ To this end, Sarmiento and other politicians – namely Marcelo Alvear who, at the time, became known as the “Haussmann of Buenos Aires”⁹⁷ – recruited European (mostly French) architects to plan Buenos Aires in the cosmopolitan image of a European metropolis.⁹⁸ The Buenos Aires of today with its rigid square grid and *barrio*-based sub-municipal structure has its roots in the first metropolis expansion from 1890 to 1930 that these European architects planned and facilitated.⁹⁹

Figure Four: President Roque Saenz Peña Avenue, 1936



Photo By Horacio Coppola

⁹⁶ For the most in-depth historical description of this process, see: Adrián Gorelik, *Grilla y El Parque: Espacio Público y Cultura Urbana en Buenos Aires, 1887-1936* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1998).

⁹⁷ See David Harvey for more on Haussmann's historical legacy in Paris: David Harvey, *Paris, capital of modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁹⁸ Adrián Gorelik, "A Metropolis in the Pampas: Buenos Aires 1890-1940," in *Cruelty & Utopia: Cities and Landscapes of Latin America*, by Jean-Francois Lejeune (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 148.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

The construction of a European urban identity accelerated at the turn of the 20th century as Buenos Aires elites sought to evoke Europe through their city as much as possible leading up to the 1910 national centennial celebration where the whole world would be watching the up-and-coming nation.¹⁰⁰ Buenos Aires politicians recruited French urban planner Joseph Bouvard in 1907 to implement the city's "centenary plan" which modernized the center of the city with large public buildings, impressive residences, and an integrated web of parks and plazas strung across the northern corridor of the city's traditional sector.¹⁰¹ Much to the delight of these Argentine politicians, Adrián Gorelik remarks how visitors to Buenos Aires for the centennial started "a saga of comparisons [to Europe]: the Avenida de Mayo resembled Paris, with its spacious sidewalks and cafes; the narrow streets of the financial sector resembled the city of London; the Park of Palermo resembled the Bous de Boulogne [Paris' most famous park]; the district of La Boca resembled Genoa in Italy; and so on."¹⁰²

Figure Five: Dusk. A View of the City From the River, 1936



Photo By Horacio Coppola

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ In particular, these European planners designed the center of the city with a uniform rectangular grid that was intended to facilitate an urban and social integration among disparate sectors of the city.

¹⁰² Gorelik 2005, 152.

At the same time that Sarmiento that set out to construct a modern, European city, political changes in the city began to shape the forms of “modern” urban citizenship for Buenos Aires residents. One of the key scales for the development of this urban citizenship beginning in 1917 was the sub-municipal scale of the *barrio* (neighborhood). The Buenos Aires *barrio* was both a socially constructed scale of urban life and an imagined urban community borne out of the cultural infusion of avant-garde literature and art in the suburbs around the micro-center of Buenos Aires during the 1920s.¹⁰³ From its inception, the *barrio* was the scale of social mobilization associated with the popular sectors of Argentine society and egalitarian/communal threads of liberal thought.¹⁰⁴ According to Luciano de Privilettio, this association is a result of the parallel expansion of citizenship rights and *barrio* representation through the law of 1912 that guaranteed universal male suffrage for men above the age of 18, and the reform of 1917 that provided the *barrios* with political representation through organs called *sociedades de fomento barrial* that funneled local demands for planning initiatives to the municipal level.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the *vecino* (resident of a *barrio*) and the *ciudadano* (citizen) mutually constituted one another as “the forms of the city were being defined simultaneously with the ways of its citizenship.”¹⁰⁶ As Carolina noted in our conversation and as I will later argue in the remainder of this thesis, this dual transformation of city and citizenship continues to influence urban mobilizations into the present day as urban residents organize to contest the transformation of their *barrios* and their city from their imagined European form.

In sum, Sarmiento and other elites’ colonial project of constructing a European nation in Latin America relied on encouraging immigration from Europe, building Buenos Aires with

¹⁰³ Juan M. Kanai, "The In-Between City: Neoliberal Globalization, Inequality and Middle-Class Politics in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2002-2007)" (diss., UCLA, 2008), 307.

¹⁰⁴ As a result, the Buenos Aires *barrio* continues to be an important political scale of mobilization and citizenship in contemporary Buenos Aires. Most urban activism in Buenos Aires is *barrio*-based.

¹⁰⁵ Luciano De Privilettio, *Vecinos y Ciudadanos Política y Sociedad en La Buenos Aires de Entreguerras* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2003), 205-206.

¹⁰⁶ Horacio Coppola, Facundo De. Zuviría, and Adrián Gorelik, *Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lariviere, 2006), 206.

European architects and planners, and marginalizing the country's non-white indigenous and mestizo population. At the turn of the 20th century, Buenos Aires became the epicenter of this national narrative of Europeanness, which became further embedded through further metropolis expansions planned by European architects from 1910-1930.

Constructing A Middle-Class National Narrative in Buenos Aires

Once traffic in the roundabout surrounding the Plaza Italia began to increase, Carolina and I decided that we had enough of Sarmiento and began to amble towards Plaza Serrano, the focal point of the new trendy Palermo Soho sub-*barrio* (previously known to older residents as Palermo Viejo). On our way, Carolina pointed out the few remaining urban vestiges of Palermo Viejo (old Palermo) that had not yet been converted into restaurants, bars, or residential towers. One such vestige was the *casa baja* (short house), which consisted of nothing more than a quaint one or two story house fit with a colonial façade. Another similar urban landmark was the *casa chorizo* (literally, sausage house), known as such because each these homes was divided into at least two separate tenements in order to accommodate the ever-increasing flow of European immigrants sailing into the Buenos Aires port in the early 1900s. Carolina told me that these two types of homes were often one in the same as the bottom floors of many *casas bajas* were divided in the layout of the *casa chorizo*, leaving the house's second floor for wealthier *porteños* who could afford the entire living space.

As we walked, Carolina lamented that most of the remaining *casas bajas* and *casas chorizo* have been “recycled” into trendy boutiques or demolished to make way for the construction of residential mega-towers due to Palermo's real estate boom. She explained that it has pained her parents who have been residents of Palermo for 35 years to see these urban icons disappear from the neighborhood in the urban boom following the crisis of 2001-2002. As I walked, I wondered why

Palermo residents displayed such visceral attachment to *casas bajas* and *casas chorizo*. Only later did I discover that these built forms connote middle-class national narratives for many *porteños*

Prior to the influx of European immigrants into Buenos Aires from 1870 to 1930, Argentine society was starkly divided along class lines between wealthy Spanish Creole elites and an impoverished, rural, working class of native inhabitants.¹⁰⁷ However, an export-led economic boom period from 1900 to 1930 facilitated the growth of a burgeoning middle class. By 1930, Gino Germani notes that immigrants and their first generation children had filled the void between the creole elites and the rural working classes with a robust middle class population.¹⁰⁸ According to David Rock, the Buenos Aires middle class became the largest of its kind in Latin America during the early 20th century.¹⁰⁹ Due to the access to higher education promised by Sarmiento, many first generation European immigrants became white-collar workers in public administration and other professions.¹¹⁰ With its turn of the century economic boom and the presence of a large, upwardly-mobile middle class, Argentina registered as the seventh wealthiest country in the world at the beginning of the 20th century.¹¹¹

The *casa baja* and *casa chorizo* described by Carolina became common urban representations of Buenos Aires' incipient middle class. According to James Scobie, the economic boom of the early 1900s brought an expansion of credit lines to middle class Argentines as well as improved transportation services, which both contributed to a newfound ability for middle class residents to afford "small individual lots and homes."¹¹² This newfound homeownership brought many Buenos Aires residents out of *conventillos* (crowded tenements for the racialized urban poor) located in the

¹⁰⁷ Guano 1999, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Gino Germani, *La Asimilación de Los Inmigrantes en La Argentina y El Fenómeno del Regreso en La Inmigración Reciente* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1964).

¹⁰⁹ David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982: from Spanish colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 175.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Guano 1999, 16.

¹¹² James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 178.

south of Buenos Aires in *barrios* like La Boca and Constitución, into rapidly multiplying small houses – known as *casas bajas* and *casas chorizo* – located in neighborhoods like Palermo.¹¹³ Many middle-class residents completed this urban migration by purchasing a lot and constructing their home themselves.¹¹⁴

Figure Six: A Typical Casa Baja in the Suburbs



Source: James Scobie. Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910. Pg 181.

The early 20th century *casa baja* served as an urban symbol of not just any middle class urban identity, but an upwardly mobile middle-class identity. Scobie writes that many of these homes began as one-room homes and:

In a one room house, the entire space – roughly twelve by fifteen feet – served as kitchen, living room, and sleeping quarters for the family. As family earnings increased, the building would be expanded: the room became a kitchen and living area and a second, third, and even fourth room would be added as bedrooms. Finally, as a Brazilian visitor noted, “...sometimes fifteen years after acquiring the lot, with his daughters attending normal school and aspiring to a bourgeois status, this rising member of society added a *sala*, or living room.”¹¹⁵

Scobie’s description indicates that *casas bajas* and *casas chorizo* became physical manifestations of urban middle class upward mobility. New European immigrants moved from working class *conventillos* to one-room *casa bajas* to expanded and renovated homesteads in a stage play of upward

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 180.

urban class geographical mobility from the south to the north of the city. Moreover, developers and surveyors of these *casas bajas* housing lots “applied the same regulated lot that had been given for the patio-style residence of the wealthy” in rich districts like Recoleta and *Barrio Norte* which further embedded the feeling of upward mobility among middle-class *porteños*.¹¹⁶

It is important to note that *casas bajas* became not only representations of upward class mobility, but also an actual *means* by which European immigrant residents could add something of stable value (land and homes) to their name. The *casa baja* and *casa chorizo* are more than mere Buenos Aires and Palermo urban traditions – they are urban forms of a spatialized, “solid,” middle class identity that that appeared “built to last.”

Chapter Conclusion: The Urbanization of National Narratives¹¹⁷

Although she most likely did not realize it at the time, Carolina’s tour through Palermo mirrors a historical narrative of the formation of national narratives of Europeanness and middle-classness that – as I will argue in the following sections – inform the present-day self-representations of Palermo district residents who protest the invasion of residential mega-towers into Palermo and Buenos Aires. In the spirit of Li Zhang’s analysis of late-socialist China, my historical examination of the parallel development of the Argentine nation and the Buenos Aires cityscape has highlighted the profound connection between national and spatial belonging (i.e. national identity and urban identity).¹¹⁸ So too is there a profound connection between national and spatial *exclusion*, as the indigenous working class and rural peasants were excluded both from the imagined Argentine nation and the right to the newly constructed city.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁷ It is important to note that while I presented the national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness separately in this historical analysis, these narratives fundamentally constitute one another.

¹¹⁸ Li Zhang, "Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002).

An important caveat is that the account presented above is by no means a comprehensive history of Argentina and Buenos Aires. Indeed, several monumental periods occurred between 1930 and 1990 – most notably of which is the rise of Juan Perón in 1945 and his transformation of Buenos Aires into a “*ciudad de las masas*” (city of the masses) as well as the Dirty War under the “*Progreso*” dictatorship from 1976-1983 – that I leave out of my walk with Carolina. The point here is not to ignore or discount this history. Rather, the point is to narrate a particular history that informs Palermo residents’ self-representations.

As with any national narratives, there are both “real” and mythical foundations to *porteños*’ imagined European and middle class identity. Benedict Anderson in particular emphasizes this constructed, imagined quality of the nation.¹¹⁹ The aim of this section is not to reify *porteño* self-representations (an intellectual sin committed by infinitely many second-hand guidebooks to Buenos Aires). Rather, the point is to deconstruct these national narratives through a historical analysis of their politically orchestrated, colonial origins. From this historical analysis, I argue that we can better understand not only the material effects of the catastrophic economic crisis of 2001-2002 (see Chapter Three), but also the ways in which the crisis served as a rupture point for *porteño* middle class, European identity. Through an understanding of the importance of this rupture, I will later argue in Chapter Four that middle class *porteños* sought to reconstitute and reclaim these national narratives by defending from destruction the very neighborhood urban landmarks that embody this identity. For now, I turn to Chapter Three where I analyze the crisis of 2001-2002 and its impact on the socio-geographical landscape of Buenos Aires.

¹¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

Chapter 3: **Socioeconomic Geography of Post-Crisis Buenos Aires**

The Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA) – the city proper of Buenos Aires that my study examines – is the second most populous census-defined city in Latin America with a total population of 11.6 million people.¹²⁰ It alone accounts for 8.3 percent of Argentina's national population and 25.5 percent of the Argentine GNP (equivalent to Chile's GNP).¹²¹ Understanding the basic geographical and socioeconomic composition of the city is a vital prelude to examining its urban politics. Far too often, ethnographic and qualitative studies of urban politics lack quantitative analyses of urban change that allow us to understand a city's composition. Thus, here in Chapter Three we will outline some of the key facts about Buenos Aires in order to better contextualize the study of the urban contestation that follows.

The shifts that have taken root in the Buenos Aires urban landscape during and following the economic crisis of 2001-2002 serve as central components of this survey's narrative. As we will see, Argentina's turn towards neoliberalism in the 1990s, and the ensuing crisis, produced a fragmented and unequal Buenos Aires cityscape rife with informal and precarious employment as well as urban poverty. Central to this story of urban change were the deleterious effects of the economic crisis on middle and working class residents. Through an examination of these effects, I argue that the economic crisis was a rupture point that fundamentally challenged national narratives of Buenos Aires as a middle class city that we explored in my walk through urban history with Carolina in Chapter Two. Middle-class neighborhood mobilization around the Buenos Aires cityscape can thus be seen as a reaction to the urban middle class's continued erosion in the wake of the economic crisis.

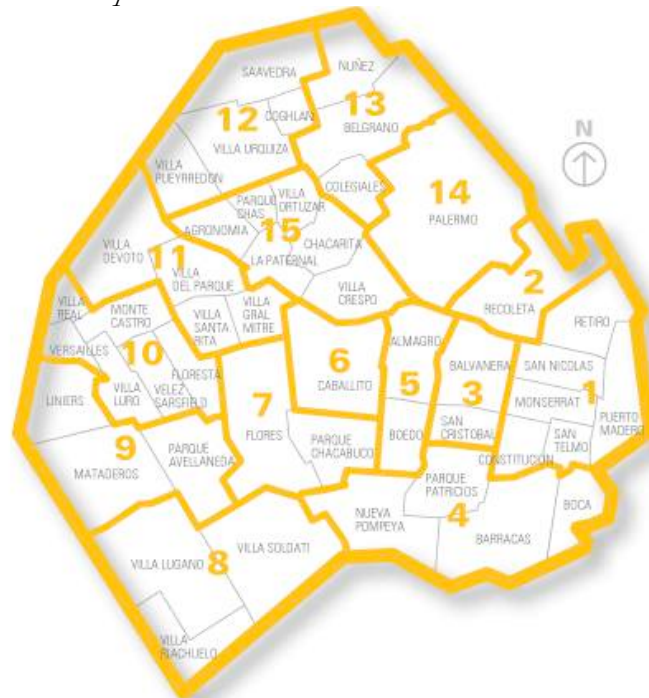
¹²⁰ Iliana Mignaqui and Pablo Ciccolella, "Buenos Aires: Sociospacial Impacts of the Development of Global City Functions," in *Global networks, Linked Cities*, ed. Saskia Sassen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 310.

¹²¹ Ibid.

This analysis is organized thematically. First, I consider the geography of fragmentation and inequality in Buenos Aires. I then discuss the dimensions of informal labor and poverty. Finally, I consider the character of the real estate and construction boom. My intention is to discuss the associated quantitative data and determine its relevance to the neighborhood activism that I consider in detail in Section Four. Each of these lines of inquiry calls attention to the notion that, in the wake of economic crisis, the Buenos Aires urban landscape is more than a mere *tabula rasa* upon which urban actors perform. Rather it is a landscape in constant transformation, being reproduced and remade by multiple forces.

Buenos Aires is divided into 48 different *barrios* (neighborhoods). The grey text and lines in Map One illustrate the official dividing lines for each *barrio*. Palermo is the largest of these *barrios*. Beginning with the passage of law 1,777 in 2006, these *barrios* were grouped into *comunas*, which serve as electoral units for decentralized local governance. The bolded orange lines in Map One illustrate the *comuna* divisions and the numbers associated with each *comuna*.

Map One: Buenos Aires Barrios and Comunas

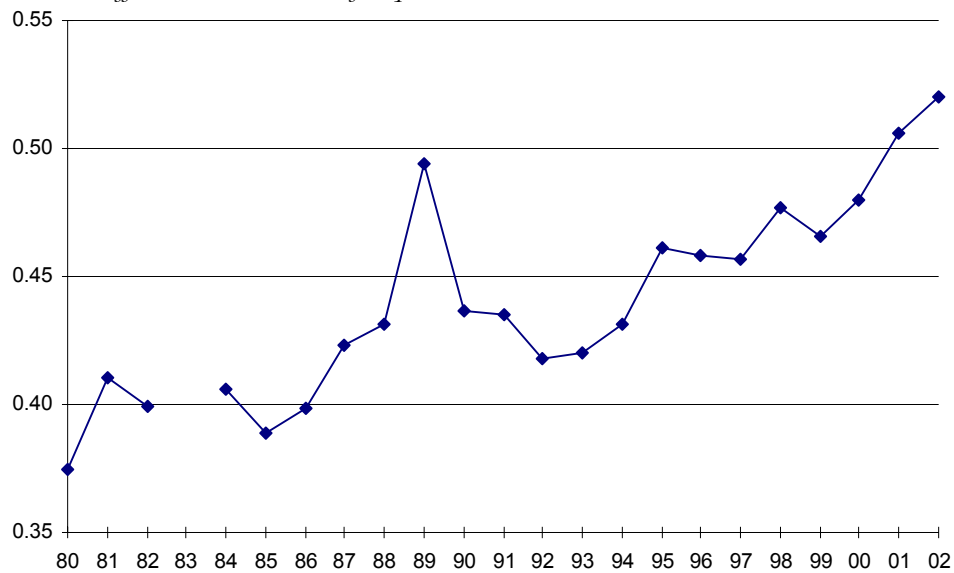


Source: Ministerio de Gestion Publica y Descentralización

Geography of Fragmentation and Inequality

Between 1989 and 1999, Argentine president Carlos Menem implemented a neoliberal economic restructuring program that had major implications for the character of the Buenos Aires cityscape. The economic and demographic data we have about the city make clear that fragmentation and inequality increased substantially in the city. As some *barrios* in the city's northern corridor became profitable for real estate and capital investment, others, particularly in the south, became spatially marginalized and neglected.¹²²

Figure Seven: Gini Coefficient, Distribution of Equivalent Household Income in Greater Buenos Aires, 1980-2002



Source: Sosa, Marchionni, Gasparini, 2004.

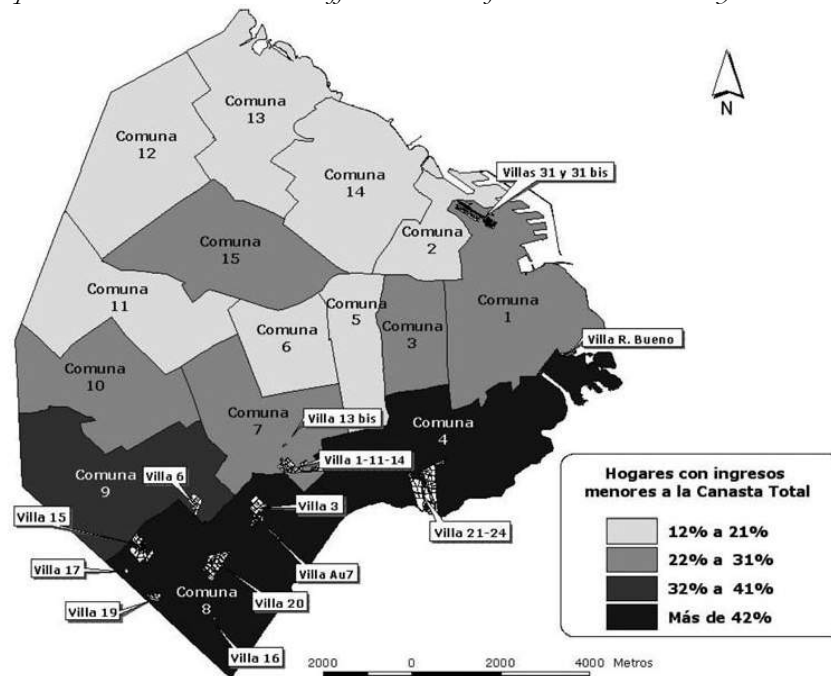
Figure Seven above graphs the Buenos Aires Gini coefficient¹²³ from 1980 to 2002. The graph illustrates that the city's inequality has been steadily increasing since 1980 until reaching its

¹²² Silvestri and Gorelik 2000, 489.

¹²³ According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme report's definition: "The Gini coefficient is a useful metric for understanding the state of cities with regard to distribution of income or consumption. It is the most widely used measure to determine the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini coefficient of 0 indicates perfect equality, whereas a Gini coefficient of 1 indicates perfect inequality. Higher values, therefore, denote greater inequality, but the correspondence of the ratio to specific conditions is complicated" (UN, 51). It is worth noting that while this measure is aspatial in the sense that it does not tell us about the geographical distribution of inequality, it nevertheless serves as a useful tool for measuring inequality in absolute terms.

apogee during the economic crisis of 2001-2002 with a coefficient of 0.53. To put these levels into perspective, a 2008 United Nations Human Settlements Programmed report stated that the average Gini coefficient of selected cities by region is 0.31 for Europe, 0.54 for Africa, 0.4 for Asia, and 0.55 for Latin America.¹²⁴ Buenos Aires' Gini coefficient is significantly higher than European cities and on par with that of other Latin American cities. This level of inequality falls under what the UN Programmed defines as “high levels of inequality, reflecting institutional and structural failures in income distribution.”¹²⁵

Map Two: Households with Insufficient Income for Basic Necessities by Comuna



Source: Contuntura Económica de La Ciudad De Buenos Aires 2009, Buenos Aires Government.

Map Two above illustrates the percentages of households that do not have sufficient income for basic necessities and expenses (*canasta total*) according to different *comunas*. This map tells us more about the spatialization of inequality that the gini coefficient elides. For the Buenos Aires metropolitan region, the geographical distribution of Buenos Aires income inequality falls ostensibly

¹²⁴ United Nations Human Settlements Programme., *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009* (London: UN Habitat, 2008), 63.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

along traditional north-south territorial lines. Map Two shows that the majority of the city's *villas miserias* (shantytowns) and low-income residents are located in the southern most points of the city. Several scholars, including Ciccolella and Mignaqui (2002), have coined terms like “dual city” to describe this north-south territorial divide.¹²⁶ Map Two, however, also illustrates that spatial inequality in Buenos Aires is more complex than “dual city” scholars acknowledge. *Comunas* in the central part of the city such as *comunas* 1, 3, 7, 10, and 15 all have rates of households with insufficient income between 22% and 31%.

There are still more forms of spatial inequality and fragmentation that the Gini coefficient and income distribution maps alone cannot illustrate. While it is possible to detail hundreds of examples, I will describe only two here. First, *porteños* can access 87 percent of jobs in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area in 45 minutes of travel time with the use of a car, but only 23% of metropolitan jobs are accessible in 45 minutes through public transportation (a mode of transportation that working class residents in the southern arc heavily rely on due to their low income and inability to afford a car).¹²⁷ Second, public expenditure on infrastructure, education, and healthcare across Buenos Aires' *barrios* during the 1990s was highly uneven according to one's location in the city. Comparing five broad geographical areas of Buenos Aires, the wealthy Recoleta-Retiro area received \$306 per capita infrastructure investment while the central and north-west areas of the city only received \$18 per capita.¹²⁸ Additionally, according to Austin Kilroy, “the Recoleta-Retiro area and the northeast corridor received three times the per capita public education expenditure of the rest of the city.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Mignaqui and Ciccolella, 2002.

¹²⁷ World Bank, by Austin Kilroy (2007), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2009/Resources/4231006-1204741572978/Kilroy2.pdf> (accessed April 1, 2010), 10.

¹²⁸ World Bank 2007, 19.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Understanding the aforementioned spatial inequality and fragmentation in Buenos Aires is critical to the Chapter Four analysis of urban contestation in Palermo. In this *barrio*, many of the sources of city-wide fragmentation and inequality – weak urban regulatory institutions, marginal public participation in urban planning, and a market-led paradigm for urban planning – are the same forces that confront Palermo residents in their quest to organize for more control over the identity of their neighborhood.

Informal Employment and Poverty in Buenos Aires: The Decline of the Urban Middle Class

The relative success in the realm of formal unemployment since the crisis of 2001¹³⁰ masks two hidden trends: the rise of informal labor outside of the official labor market and the rise in urban poverty in Buenos Aires. A survey of the Buenos Aires labor market, with an emphasis on the modern-day prevalence of informal employment and urban poverty, demonstrates that the post-crisis city is an environment of precarious labor conditions where almost no one is exempt from the threat of urban poverty.

According to the Centro de Estudios Para Desarrollo Económico Metropolitana (CEDEM), at the peak of the crisis in 2002, Buenos Aires labor analysts began to see an incipient trend of “hidden unemployment” as workers withdrew from the labor market in search of subsistence jobs such as street vending, bartering, and recycling.¹³¹ In 2002, the Buenos Aires working population of 1.5 million people consisted of 250,000 people who were openly unemployed, while nearly half of the employed population (530,000 people) had a least one attribute of job insecurity.¹³² Furthermore, while the average annual job growth in Buenos Aires was 6.1% between 2003 and 2007, informal labor rates have remained near constant since the economic crisis. The *Centro de Estudios Para el*

¹³⁰ El Gobierno de Buenos Aires, Centro de Estudios Para El Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano, *La Ciudad de Buenos Aires Durante La Década de Los 90': Un Balance en Términos de Empleo*, by Elina López (Buenos Aires, 2002), 54.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano (CEDEM) states that the rate of non-registered workers in urban areas was near 40% in the fourth quarter of 2007 while in October 2001 the rate of non-registered workers was 39%.¹³³ The rate of informal labor has remained near constant since the crisis, despite a decline in formal unemployment.

Several studies have confirmed the reciprocal relationship between precarious employment conditions and urban poverty. In the case of Buenos Aires, the city saw a sharp rise in urban poverty along with urban informality before, during, and following the economic crisis of 2001. According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos* (INDEC), in 1999 about 80% of the Buenos Aires population lived below the poverty line, a status that the Buenos Aires government defines as earning less than the 1,030 pesos needed to support a family of four.¹³⁴ In 2002, the urban poverty rate had increased to 63% for households and 82% for individuals, while urban destitution had increased 100% for households and 370% for individuals from 2001 to 2002.¹³⁵

The Buenos Aires middle class has been hit particularly hard by the rise of informality and poverty in the city. While the middle class comprised 57.2% of the Buenos Aires population in 1986, this class was nearly cut in half to just 37% of the population by 2004.¹³⁶ 48.2% of middle class residents are now members of the new urban poor according to the INDEC.¹³⁷ These new urban poor are urban residents who come from a middle class background and have seen their class standing slip through the cracks during the economic crisis. This number of new urban poor is three

¹³³ Gobierno de Buenos Aires, Centro de Estudios Para el Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano, *El Empleo No Registrado en La Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Tendencias e Impacto Sobre la Población Asalariada, 2003-2007* (Buenos Aires.: El Gobierno de Buenos Aires, 2008), 7.

¹³⁴ Emanuela Guano, "Spectacle of Modernity: Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires," *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (May 2002): 183

¹³⁵ Centro de Estudios Para El Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano 2002, 54.

¹³⁶ Sergio Olivieri, *Debilitamiento de la Clase Media: Gran Buenos Aires 1986-2004*, thesis, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2007, 18.

¹³⁷ *La Nación*, "Fuerte impacto de la crisis en la clase media," July 16, 2000, http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=24932 (accessed April 10, 2010).

times higher than the traditional poverty segment in Buenos Aires.¹³⁸ Moreover, an economic study published in *La Nación* states that 63% of the Buenos Aires middle class did not have the ability to save any of their earnings. Instead, the urban middle class continues to spend all of its income for basic subsistence.¹³⁹

The middle class has also fallen victim to informal labor conditions. In the wake of the crisis, Buenos Aires had a considerable amount of unregistered and informal employment in jobs that require high levels of education. In 2006, 33% of unregistered workers engaged in tasks that required professional or technical qualifications and 22% of unregistered workers had university education or beyond.¹⁴⁰ Post-crisis Buenos Aires challenges urban scholars to think beyond preconceived notions of urban informality, and imagine the ways in which conditions of labor informality and precariousness envelop the whole of the city, including middle class residents. This is of particular importance because of the ways in which such informality has rendered large sections of the urban middle class unprotected by formal buffers – pensions, access to public services, etc. – and thus more vulnerable to the economic shock waves that the city has endured.

The chapter on neighborhood mobilization in Palermo that follows will illustrate that residents of Buenos Aires, including middle class Palermo residents, experience this data on labor precariousness, informality, and insecurity as part of their daily realities. Many Palermo residents are still reeling from the devastating effects of the economic crisis and the downward economic mobility that followed in its wake.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *La Nación*, "El 63% de la *clase media* aún no tiene capacidad de ahorro," June 14, 2005, http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=721180 (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Centro de Estudios Para El Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano 2002, 25.

Real Estate and Construction Boom

One of the most salient urban motifs among *porteños* following the crisis of 2001-2002 is that of the *boom inmobiliario* (real estate boom). After the crisis, construction and real estate became one of the most preferred options for the allocation of transnational capital as well as savings of wealthy local *porteños*.¹⁴¹ Real estate became what David Harvey calls the “spatial fix” for the overaccumulation of capital flowing into Buenos Aires after the Argentine peso’s 75% devaluation in 2002.¹⁴² In short, overcapacity and economic turbulence in the traditional economy were resolved in part by shifting capital from the banking sector into new real estate and urban development initiatives. As a result, construction grew at twice the rate of the city’s economy by 2005.¹⁴³ The *boom inmobiliario* was therefore due in large part to the collapse of the Argentine banking sector during the economic crisis. During the crisis, the government froze all bank accounts in an act known as the *corralito*, which resulted in the elimination of the savings accounts of thousands of *porteños* and instilled a staunch distrust of the city’s banking sector. Since the *corralito*, wealthier *porteños* have shifted to real estate and construction as a safe alternative to the banking system for the investment of their funds.¹⁴⁴

During the 1990s, land uses and construction in Buenos Aires were “largely oriented to consumption, recreation, luxury housing, tertiary services, and exclusive shopping centers.”¹⁴⁵ Puerto Madero’s revitalization in the 1990s from a port *barrio* to the most luxurious and exclusive

¹⁴¹ In particular, Muxi (2004) states that an “important element that marks patterns of the existence of global areas within the interior of Buenos Aires is the city’s arrival on the world stage of the ‘real estate market,’ which is one of the main businesses of globalization.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴² These processes, though, were not exactly the same as the sorts of spatial fix traced by Harvey and others in cities such as New York, Paris and London. Argentina’s own particular experience of global crisis, with the failures of the dollarization experiment adding to chronic peripheral volatility, meant that the local banking crisis was also a key component of the spatial fix.

¹⁴³ Ezequiel Burgo, “Las Razones Del Nuevo Boom Del Negocio Inmobiliario,” *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), September 11, 2005, <http://www.clarin.com/suplementos/economico/2005/09/11/n-00311.htm> (accessed April 02, 2010).

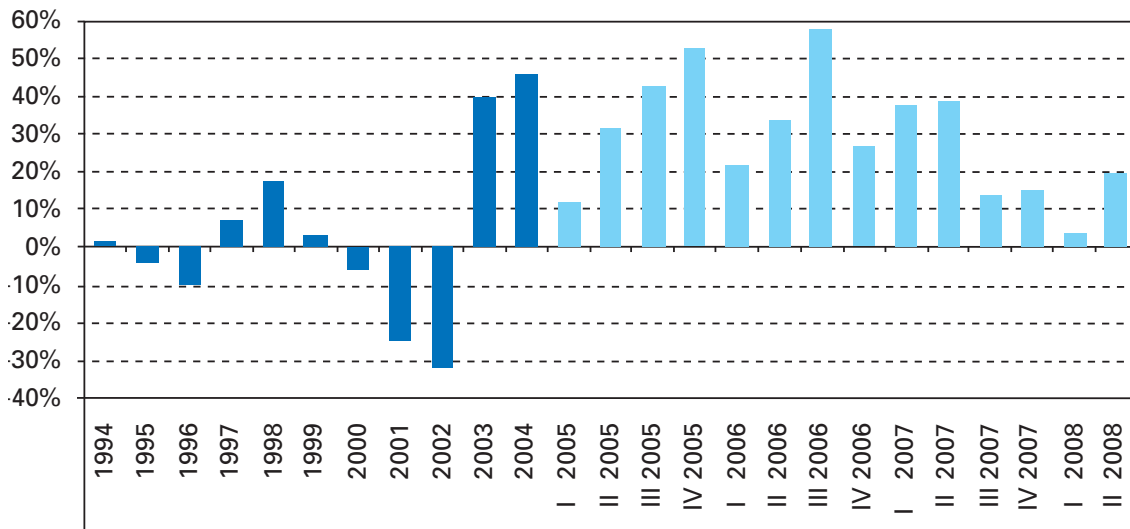
¹⁴⁴ *La Nación*, “El 63% de la *clase media* aún no tiene capacidad de ahorro,” June 14, 2005, http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=721180 (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Pírez 2002, 149.

neighborhood in all of Buenos Aires – a process one scholar called the building of a “corridor of modernity and wealth”¹⁴⁶– is the quintessential example land use and construction during the 1990s. Following the economic crisis, construction and real estate have been concentrated in the residential housing sector, with high-rise, gated residential towers (*los torres-countries*) occupying 47% of residential housing construction projects by 2005.¹⁴⁷ There has been a significant shift in the types of construction projects that investors and urban residents finance in the transition from the Menem era to the post-crisis era.

Figure Eight: Inter-year Variation in the Construction Index.

*Note that the 1993 construction rate corresponds to base percentage rate, and the 1994-2004 rates are annual rates while the rates beginning in 2005 are semester rates.



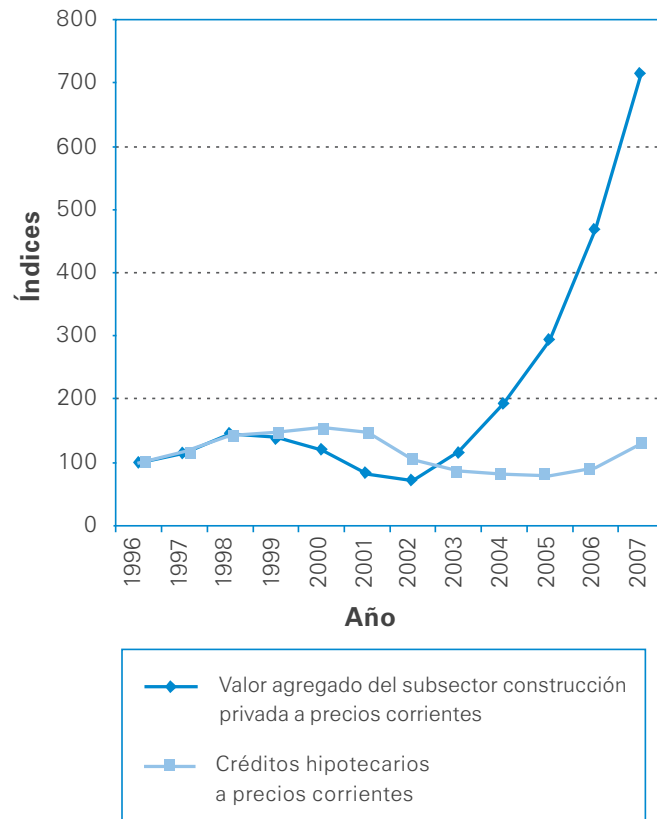
Source: Direccion General de Estadistica y Censos (Ministerio de Hacienda GCBA).

Figure Eight above illustrates the trend of annual and biannual rates of total construction from 1994-2004. As the figure demonstrates, construction rates declined precipitously from 1999-2002, but surged in the years following the economic crisis with a minimum of 25% yearly increases from 2003-2007. While the 1990s witnessed a real estate boom, the rates of construction during this period nowhere near approach the construction rates since 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Gorelik, 2006.

Figure Nine: Value Added Rates of the Private Construction Subsector in the City of Buenos Aires and the Balance of Mortgage Credits of the Banking System in Argentina.¹⁴⁸

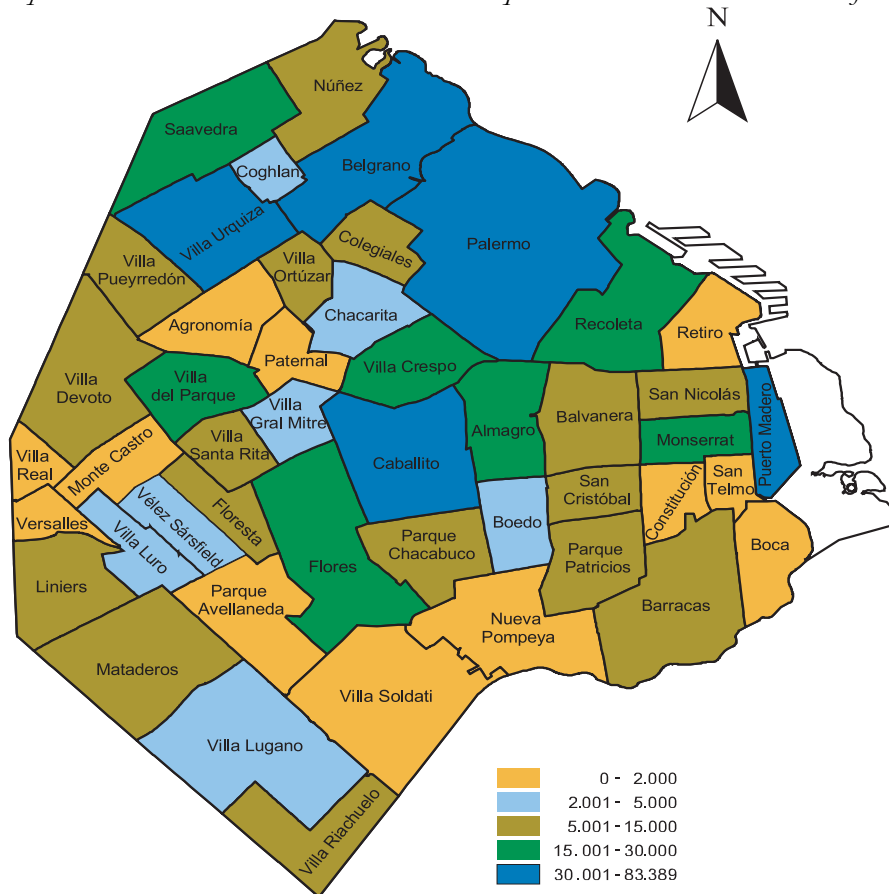


Source: Direccion General de Estadistica y Censos (Ministerio de Hacienda GCBA), through the Entidades Financieras del BCRA database.

Figure Nine graphs both the rates of private sector construction and mortgage usage from 1996 to 2007. The rate of private sector construction (represented by the dark blue line) has increased seven-fold since 2002. This sharp increase relative to the increases in total construction rates shown in Figure 3 demonstrates that the private sector has been at the hull of the post-crisis real estate boom. Contrary to the popular notion that “urban entrepreneurialism” and neoliberal planning ended with Menem’s second term in 1999, market-led development has in fact remained the dominant planning paradigm in the post-crisis era.

¹⁴⁸ Figure Nine also relates a peculiar trait of the post-crisis boom. Namely, unlike most developed economies where mortgage credit serves as a driving factor stimulating construction growth, the boom in construction and real estate in Buenos Aires has occurred alongside stagnant, if not slightly declining, rates of mortgage credit. Due to both a lack of local credit and a lack of trust in the banking system, many *porteños* finance the construction and purchases of their living spaces with cash and savings, thus lowering the incidence of mortgage loans.

Map Three: Construction Area Per Barrio in Square Meters. Second Trimester of 2008



Source: Direccion General de Estadistica y Censos (Ministerio de Hacienda GCBA).

Map Three illustrates the spatial distribution of the real estate boom by categorizing construction rates according to *barrios*. The Buenos Aires Construction Monitoring survey states that in the first half of 2008 the majority of square meters in construction were located in the *barrios* of Palermo, Puerto Madero, Caballito, Belgrano, and Villa Urquiza. By *barrio*, Palermo had 148,000 m² of construction, Puerto Madero had 118,000 m², Caballito had 105,000 m², Belgrano had 91,000 m², and Villa Urquiza has 89,000 m² of construction.¹⁴⁹ According to the survey, the 2008 construction rates were merely a continuation of unbridled real estate development and construction in all of

¹⁴⁹ Gobierno de Buenos Aires, Direccion General de Estadistica y Censos, *Indicador Trimestral de La Construcción de La Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires Primer Semestre de 2008* (Buenos Aires, 2009), 4.

these neighborhoods, particularly Palermo, which stands as the neighborhood most transformed by the real estate and construction boom.¹⁵⁰

Chapter Conclusion: City in the Wake of a Rupture

This chapter has illustrated the socioeconomic effects of Buenos Aires' turn towards neoliberalism in the 1990s and the ensuing economic crisis of 2001-2002. Buenos Aires is now a fragmented and unequal cityscape rife with informal and precarious employment as well as urban poverty. Central to this story of urban change are the deleterious effects of the economic crisis on the Buenos Aires middle class. Having experienced an unprecedented rollback in the wake of the economic crisis, many middle class urban residents now find themselves among the Buenos Aires new urban poor.

In light of these facts, I argue that the economic crisis served as a rupture point for national narratives of a middle-class, European city. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha argues that these moments of rupture are crucial to understanding the ways in which national narratives break down. In the wake of crisis, the historical urban roots of the national narratives that we explored in Chapter Two have come undone. Middle class residents can no longer tout the opulence of their city as a justification for these narratives because the deteriorating material conditions of the middle class as well as the presence of structural inequality make Buenos Aires anything but an egalitarian, European city.¹⁵¹ In the words of Bhabha, the crisis has “ruptured the discourse”¹⁵² that coheres national narratives of middle classness and Europeaness in the urban space of Buenos Aires.¹⁵³ The

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ This is not, of course, to say that all European cities are equal.

¹⁵² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 123.

¹⁵³ However, far from a rupture that makes these national narratives irrelevant in the post-crisis context, Chapter 4 will show how Palermo residents mobilize to re-empower these “ruptured discourses” in the urban space of their neighborhood.

crisis has revealed that these national narratives are not impermeable and static, but are instead subject to change and revision.

In the wake of the economic collapse, an unchecked real estate boom has taken hold of Buenos Aires, particularly in *barrios* located in the city's northern corridor. Palermo was the epicenter of this boom as it had the highest rate of construction and real estate investment compared to all other Buenos Aires *barrios* by 2008.¹⁵⁴ Palermo became the locus of a new city that was beginning to take shape in boom following the crisis. My examination of *Palermo Despierta* will show how this group's activism seeks to reconstruct national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness as a response to these changes.

¹⁵⁴ Gobierno de Buenos Aires, *Indicador trimestral de la construcción*, 4.

Chapter 4:

Contesting *Los Torres*: An Analysis of Palermo Resident Discourses and *Palermo Despierta* Neighborhood Activism

The aim of this chapter is to explore the response of Palermo residents to urban redevelopment – specifically the anti-*torre* (anti-tower) movement led by Palermo Despierta. I argue that, in the eyes of many Palermo residents, the “invasion” of residential mega-towers into Palermo needs to be understood as a response to fears that these buildings would *further threaten* Argentine national narratives of Buenos Aires as a middle class, European city. Rather than reify these national narratives, I argue that *Palermo Despierta*’s activism responds to the ongoing fragmentation and disintegration of porteño urban identity after the economic crisis in contradictory ways. In the face of this fragmentation, Palermo residents cling to an imagined middle class, European Buenos Aires that itself excludes the city’s racialized working class.¹⁵⁵ While these national narratives animate urban middle class activists to contest neoliberal urbanism, they also operate – implicitly, and at times explicitly – on the basis of racism and classism towards other residents in the south of the city. This should lead observers to be weary of *Palermo Despierta*’s seemingly anti-neoliberal, progressive vision for Palermo and Buenos Aires.

To justify these conclusions, I begin with a brief history of mega-towers and an introduction to the wider urban movements to which *Palermo Despierta* belongs.¹⁵⁶ Second, I analyze interviews with *Palermo Despierta*-affiliated residents in order to demonstrate the importance of middle class and European urban narratives in the everyday lives of Palermo residents. Third, I analyze *Palermo Despierta*’s official documents, multimedia, and newspaper coverage to demonstrate how the group’s demands and discourses contest neoliberalism by defending the imagined middle class, European

¹⁵⁵ For more information on this phenomenon, see David Harvey, *Consciousness and the urban experience: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

¹⁵⁶ The point of this chapter is not to analyze the specific tactics and organizational styles employed by *Palermo Despierta*, but rather to uncover and examine the sociological underpinnings and motives for the group’s anti-*torres* activism.

Buenos Aires evoked by my interviewees.¹⁵⁷ Lastly, I address the question of the racialized urban poor in Buenos Aires from the contradictory perspectives of my Palermo interviewees and *Palermo Despierta*.

A Brief History of Mega-Towers

Today the most imposing mega-tower in Palermo – and perhaps all of Buenos Aires – is the Le Parc tower (Figure Ten). Up until 2002, Le Parc was the tallest building in Buenos Aires, located in a fenced-off block in northeast Palermo and equipped with panoptic security measures, including guard booths and security cameras.

Figure Ten: Le Parc Tower, Photo Taken by Garrett Strain



However, skyscrapers and residential towers like Le Parc are nothing new to Buenos Aires. Laura Podalsky has written extensively on the arrival of these built forms in the city beginning in the

¹⁵⁷ Note that all names used in this analysis are pseudonyms for actual interviewees.

1960s.¹⁵⁸ She writes that as far back as the 1960s skyscrapers such as the Fiat and Olivetti (Figure Eleven) buildings began to appear in downtown Buenos Aires, as well as wealthier neighborhoods in the north like *Barrio Norte* and Belgrano.¹⁵⁹

*Figure Eleven: The Olivetti Building, One of Buenos Aires' First Skyscrapers*¹⁶⁰

Similar to today, Podalsky states that “the appearance of these buildings dominating the city’s skyline served as a visual reminder of the growing importance of foreign capital to the Argentine economy.”¹⁶¹ Podalsky describes how many middle class *porteños* were complicit in the arrival of these first residential towers, using them as a means to escape street-level urban threats of alterity.¹⁶² The “Progreso” military dictatorship from 1976-1983 was also responsible for a temporary



proliferation of skyscrapers in the heart of the city as part of its efforts to move the city away from import-substitution industrialization toward global financial services. The difference between these previous iterations of tower development and the boom following the economic crisis, however, is

¹⁵⁸ Laura Podalsky, *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter 2, Podalsky 2004.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² This observation of the role of the middle class in Buenos Aires in the 1960s presents an interesting opportunity for further analysis. This observation also stands in stark contrast to my analysis, which demonstrates how middle-class residents actually contest neoliberal urbanism. This difference in contemporary urban practices of the middle class in Buenos Aires perhaps illustrates the importance of the economic crisis of 2001-2002 in the creation of a city with a distinctly new sociospatial organization.

the sheer frequency with which towers have been erected in the past eight years. As urban historian Adrian Gorelik noted, the *torre-country*¹⁶³ – a mega-tower residence that contains many of the same amenities as a country club – represented 47% of annual residential projects by 2005.¹⁶⁴

In Defense of Buenos Aires: Urban Movements and *Palermo Despierta*

It is in this context of residential mega-tower proliferation in Palermo and other *barrios* in the north and west of Buenos Aires that *Palermo Despierta* has emerged. The group refers to itself as a “new neighborhood movement dedicated to the struggle for a *barrio* that respects its own identity which is now threatened by the indiscriminate proliferation of towers, as a result of a lack of respect for public spaces and the will of local residents.”¹⁶⁵ The group is not an autonomous entity, but rather a coalition of Palermo neighborhood activists from like-minded groups including *Los Vecinos de la Plaza Italia*, *Jovenes Por La Igualdad*, and the *Sociedad de Fomento de Palermo Viejo*. Since 2007, *Palermo Despierta* has been at the forefront of anti-tower activism in Buenos Aires, following in the footsteps of middle-class activists in the Caballito *barrio* who, in 2005, successfully protested the municipal government to issue a temporary ban on construction projects in a high-density portion of the neighborhood.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Also known as the “*torre premium*” in Buenos Aires real estate language.

¹⁶⁴ Adrián Gorelik, “Modelo Para Armar: Buenos Aires, De La Crisis Al Boom,” *Punto De Vista* 84 (April & may 2006): http://www.bazaramericano.com/bazar_opina/articulos/gorelik_crisis_al_boom.htm (accessed November 24, 2009).

¹⁶⁵ “¿Qué Es “*Palermo Despierta*”?” *Palermo Despierta*, weblog entry, http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/05/palermo-despierta_20.html (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁶⁶ Pablo Novillo, “En Palermo, los vecinos también piden control sobre las *torres*,” *Clarín*, June 3, 2008, <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2008/06/03/laciudad/h-01685854.htm> (accessed April 10, 2010).

Figures Twelve and Thirteen: Palermo Despierta Protests



Source: <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/>

Like the Caballito activists, *Palermo Despierta* targets the municipal government with the aim of pressuring the local state to restrict the development of towers and other luxury construction projects in Palermo. The group's mobilization has been highly effective, as evidenced by the municipal government's issuance of a temporary construction ban in high-density areas of Palermo in March of 2007 in response to *Palermo Despierta's* protests.¹⁶⁷ The group has also organized several

¹⁶⁷ Pablo Novillo, "Seguirá trabada la construcción de torres en una zona de Palermo," *Clarín*, March 15, 2007, <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2007/03/15/laciudad/h-03815.htm> (accessed April 10, 2010).

panels with government official and state urban planners for Palermo residents who have directly voiced their concerns about the fate of their neighborhood to municipal state officials.

Palermo Despierta participates in several larger coalitions with neighborhood groups in the north and west of Buenos Aires that have also been negatively impacted by the whirlwind of urban development and tower construction following the economic crisis.¹⁶⁸ Along with these groups, *Palermo Despierta* has pressured the Buenos Aires government to implement regulatory mechanisms to control the speed of development in the city.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, Palermo is a ranking member of a popular broad-based coalition called *Queremos Buenos Aires* (We Want Buenos Aires) that addresses what it calls the “urban/environmental/social and heritage emergency in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires.”¹⁷⁰ A central aim of this coalition is the protection of Buenos Aires’ *patrimonio urbano* (historic urban forms) in the same spirit as *Palermo Despierta*.¹⁷¹ These coalitions to which *Palermo Despierta* belongs demonstrate, among other things, that the group’s movement against the construction of towers in Palermo is not an isolated urban phenomenon, but part and parcel of a robust city-wide network of neighborhood activists who seek to defend Buenos Aires’ historical urban sites.

¹⁶⁸ *Palermo Despierta* has worked closely with other urban green space defense groups in Palermo and Buenos Aires like *La Asociación Amigos del Lago de Palermo* (The Association of Friends of Palermo Lake) and *Asamblea Permanente Por Los Espacios Verdes Urbanos* (The Permanent Assembly for Urban Green Space).

¹⁶⁹ In November 2008, *Palermo Despierta* presented a document co-authored with 45 other neighborhood organizations—particularly organizations from other traditional neighborhoods like San Telmo, Baracas, Caballito, Recoleta, Floresta—to 60 Buenos Aires legislators demanding an end to the destruction of the city’s urban heritage, the privatization of its public green spaces, the elimination of urban public goods, and the lack of citizen participation in the planning process.¹⁶⁹

¹⁷⁰ Queremos Buenos Aires, "Queremos Buenos Aires - Adhieren y Participan," Queremos buenos aires: alternativa para el Área Metropolitana en emergencia, web log entry posted June 1, 2008, <http://queremosbsas.blogspot.com/> (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁷¹ The coalition has been highly successful in publicizing *Palermo Despierta*’s struggle to preserve the cultural heritage and identity of Palermo on a citywide and metropolitan-wide scale. In November 2009—shortly after the conclusion my fieldwork—the Buenos Aires legislature approved Law 3056 in response to pressure from *Palermo Despierta* and the Queremos Buenos Aires coalition. Law 3056 extended an existing rule, which mandated that all buildings built before 1940 throughout the city of Buenos Aires be evaluated for their historical and architectural quality before being demolished. Law 3056 also mandated for the first time that urban sites located outside of the city’s central historical protection areas be appraised for their historical urban value before any construction takes place. For more information, see: Diana Plaza, "Vecinos al rescate del patrimonio," *La Nación*, January 3, 2010, http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=1225103 (accessed April 15, 2010).

Discourses of Urban Experience: Which Buenos Aires Are These Residents Fighting For?

My interviews with individuals who live in Palermo or otherwise affiliate themselves with the *Palermo Despierta* movement demonstrate the consistent presence of two discourses: middle-classness and Europeaness. To avoid totalizing these interpretations, I employ these interviews to represent the common sentiments I observed and heard in Palermo neighborhood activist circles. I do not claim that they represent the opinion of every porteño, every Palermo resident, or even every *Palermo Despierta* participant. I did not interview members of the *Palermo Despierta* leadership; the discourses that follow reflect some of the opinions of the *Palermo Despierta* rank-and-file, and thus I can only infer that these “unofficial discourses” also influence and guide the decisions of the *Palermo Despierta* leadership. Caveats aside, the interviews below are nonetheless reflective of widely circulating porteño self-representations and national narratives that other porteño scholars have identified as well.¹⁷²

The Fall of the Middle Class: Gentrification à la Buenos Aires

The Buenos Aires middle class appeared thematically in practically every conversation I had during my fieldwork in the city. From my homestay in the Province of Buenos Aires to the train rides into the center of the city to conversations overheard in shopping malls, plazas, buses, and cafés – discussions concerning Buenos Aires and Argentine middle-classness are ubiquitous and unavoidable. Such was also the case during the course of my semi-structured interviews with Palermo residents affiliated with *Palermo Despierta* and other neighborhood activist groups contesting the invasion of mega-towers into Palermo. The interview excerpts below examine two aspects of this middle class identity: 1) its rise as a defining characteristic of *barrios porteños* (Buenos Aires neighborhoods, particularly Palermo) during the expansion of the metropolis in the early 1900s; and

¹⁷² For instance, see Adamovsky for the most comprehensive study of the Buenos Aires middle class: Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media Argentina: apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009).

2) its erosion as an urban identity in both Palermo and Buenos Aires during crisis of 2001-2002, the invasion of the mega-towers, and the city's turn towards neoliberal urbanism.

Anita and Rocio are mother and daughter who live together in a booming northwest sub-*barrio* of Palermo called *Las Cañitas*. Anita, the mother, has been a resident of Buenos Aires since before the days of Juan Perón (1945-1955). Both Anita and Rocio have attended neighborhood actions and meetings, including a few of *Palermo Despierta's* events. Out of all my interviewees, Anita provided the most forceful narrative on class and *porteño* identity. When asked at the beginning of our interview, "what kinds of people live in a *barrio porteño* [Buenos Aires neighborhood]," Anita answered my question before I could finish it: "*vive la clase media. Media media* (the middle class lives there. Middle, middle class)."¹⁷³ Further along in the conversation I asked Anita and Rocio to elaborate more on this statement:

GS: How would you define a *barrio porteño*?

Anita: Palermo was a *barrio porteño*, a *barrio porteño* that had people that are middle class.

Rocio: Are you sure? Weren't there *conventillos* (poor tenements) in *barrios porteños*?

Anita: No, there was only *la clase media* (middle class). *Barrios porteños* do not have *conventillos*. But now, everything has changed. Now I'm outdated.¹⁷⁴

Anita imagines Palermo as a neighborhood that was once a *barrio porteño*, which has, by her definition, a robust middle class. However, her use of the past tense indicates that Palermo is losing this ideal-type of the *barrio porteño*. Anita's aggressive reaction to the Rocio's statement concerning the presence of working class residents also demonstrates her stake in reinforcing the imagined connection between middle classness, *porteño* identity, and the "true" nature of Palermo, to the exclusion of the city's working class.

Aníbal, a resident of Palermo who is an active member of *Palermo Despierta* and other neighborhood activist groups, offers a narrative similar to that of Anita. During the course of our

¹⁷³ "Personal Interview with Rocio and Anita, Palermo Residents," Interview by author. September 24, 2009.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

interview together in La Plaza Palermo Viejo (one of the neighborhood's most famous plazas),

Aníbal made the following indignant reply in response to one of my statements:

GS: Someone told me that there has been no change in the class of this neighborhood [Palermo] in recent years.

Aníbal: That is a lie. This neighborhood used to be slightly better than the others due to its proximity to the lake, but there were *common people* here. Not poor people, but common people (my emphasis).¹⁷⁵

In defining Palermo as a neighborhood historically inhabited by common people, Aníbal does not invoke the term “middle class.” Nevertheless, he implies this class signifier when drawing a distinction between the “poor people” and “common people” in Palermo.

Like Rocio and Aníbal, nearly all of my interviewees responded to the question of “who lives in a *barrio porteño*” with a firm “*la clase media*.” This response demonstrates the imagined middle-class national narrative reviewed in Chapter Two on the urban space of Buenos Aires and Palermo. Middle-classness remains a defining characteristic of present-day Palermo activists’ narratives of their neighborhood, their city, and their nation. But how does middle-classness connect to the invasion of mega-towers into Palermo? To answer this question, we now turn to Marcos.

Marcos is a middle-class resident of the Palermo Viejo sub-district. He moved to the district in the early 1980s and is a neighborhood activist in *Palermo Despierta* and other cultural groups. When asked to describe the class-based change in Palermo that he has noticed since the arrival of *los torres*, Marcos responded in the following way:

Marcos: During the *boom inmobiliario* (real estate boom) and the arrival of the towers, the old *vecinos* (neighbors) began to sell their properties because there was a tripling in their value...imagine, I could sell my house here and buy another in another neighborhood, in addition to a car and a swimming pool. Everyone did this. Those that made the neighborhood left, and millionaires arrived, people that could buy these over-priced properties and that didn't know the *barrio*. Not tourists, but people with a lot of purchasing power...The people that have come to live in Palermo Soho want to exterminate the little that is left – the people of the *barrio*. This is the attitude...

GS: Then why do you stay?

¹⁷⁵ "Personal Interview with Aníbal, Palermo Resident," Interview by author, September 26, 2009.

Marcos: The reason I stay here is, loosely speaking, resistance.¹⁷⁶

Marcos' story is nearly identical to those that I heard time and time again during my fieldwork. With the post-crisis real estate boom, the arrival of mega-towers, and the proliferation of neoliberal urbanism, Palermo is becoming an exclusive upper-class neighborhood, putting the traditional middle class identity of its residents and its urban landscape at risk. Another older Palermo resident captured this same sentiment in stating that "this *barrio* [Palermo] is becoming more and more like Puerto Madero [Buenos Aires' richest and most exclusive *barrio*]." ¹⁷⁷

While Marcos' description of class-based urban change in Palermo may seem to describe a process of gentrification native to cities like London, New York, and Los Angeles, in fact the details of Marcos' story distinguish Palermo's experience. U.S. and European gentrification is a process of sociocultural change in which a middle-class "gentry" invades working class neighborhoods, marginalizing its existing residents. In Palermo, these urban actors do not match up with those described by scholars of gentrification in the Global North.¹⁷⁸ Instead, the class-based marginalization described by Marcos is one in which the Buenos Aires super-wealthy *elite* moved to Palermo and displaced *traditional middle-class residents* who could no longer afford increased rental rates and, as a result, moved to cheaper neighborhoods. Urban marginalization is therefore more complex in the context of Buenos Aires because, in the case described by Marcos, middle-class residents are at times the victims rather than the agents of urban marginalization.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ "Personal Interview with Marcos," Interview by author, September 21, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ "Personal Interview With Maria, Palermo Resident," Interview by author, September 14, 2009. As a point of reference, many residents claim that Palermo is becoming more and more like Puerto Madero, a district that the Menem government restructured and "revitalized" into an exclusive, wealthy residential area for Buenos Aires' elite citizens during the 1990s. Puerto Madero has since become the prototypical example of neoliberal urbanism among many *porteños*.

¹⁷⁸ See, for example: Neil Smith and Peter Williams, *Gentrification of The City* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

¹⁷⁹ This evidence should help to temper the claims of scholars who posit the existence of global or transnational gentrification. Class and urban formations vary significantly across the global north and south. See for instance Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 3, no. 34 (2002). However, it's also true that at times the Buenos Aires middle class also commits forms of gentrification in working class neighborhoods that mirrors U.S. gentrification patterns.

Lastly, Anita and Rocio once again offer the most vivid illustration of what is at stake for middle class Palermo residents with the invasion of mega-towers and neoliberal urbanism into their district and their city:

GS: Do you think there has been a change in social class in Palermo?

Anita: There has definitely been change in social class in Palermo. *La zona se fuera para arriba* the zone has risen up. *La clase media* (the middle class) is disappearing. And the *clase rica* (rich class) has all the money and is doing well for itself.

Rocio: The class of people with a lot of money lives in *los torres*. Those towers that you see in Palermo Hollywood, there are people in those buildings with a lot of money, protection, cars, and garages. They are another type of people. They [the rich] have become richer and the *clase media* is disappearing. Now there are a few rich people with all the money and many poor people living in conditions like *villas* (shantytowns), *conventillos*, *casa tomadas*¹⁸⁰. And we, the *clase media*, are hanging by a thread (*colgados de la palmera*), trying to maintain what we have, paying our bills as we can. This is what happens to me.¹⁸¹

This exchange with Anita and Rocio encapsulates the most pressing sentiment among middle class Palermo neighborhood activists – namely, that the invasion of mega-towers like those in Palermo Hollywood is uprooting both the cultural history and material conditions of the middle class in Palermo. As a result, Anita and Rocio agree that Palermo is no longer an archetypical *barrio porteño* because its middle-classness has been destroyed by mega-towers. Rocio’s analysis of the middle class predicament in Buenos Aires also speaks to a common sentiment of feeling “squeezed” by the city’s post-crisis urban conditions: middle class residents become suspended in a nether region between a super-wealthy elite who invade Palermo with their mega-towers and an ever-increasing pool of urban poor. Rocio’s monologue is laden with the language of urban class precariousness, an uncertainty about the future of her material class position and constructed class identity as a middle class *porteña* in Buenos Aires.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ See this thesis’s Spanish Glossary.

¹⁸¹ Personal Interview with Rocio and Anita, Palermo Residents." Interview by author. September 24, 2009.

¹⁸² Chapter Three demonstrated the economic data behind this sense of urban precariousness.

Many of my interviewees affiliated with *Palermo Despierta* employed narratives of Europeanness that were linked with middle class national narratives. The Argentine founding father Sarmiento's racist project to create a European city in Latin American that we reviewed in Chapter Two appears to wield continued influence as a national narrative in Palermo and Buenos Aires. The interviews below illustrate ways in which Palermo residents inscribe discourses of Europeanness into their urban experiences and perceptions.

Similar to the discourse of a middle-class Buenos Aires, discourses of European Buenos Aires construe the proliferation of mega-towers as a significant threat to the national narrative of a European city. Most often my interviewees expressed discourses of European Buenos Aires by referring to Palermo's urban traditions and culture. Carlos and Elida are two interviewees who most overtly captured the European discourses of Buenos Aires. They are both second year college students in the University of Buenos Aires. I met them on a crowded day in the Plaza Palermo Viejo during one of their school's holidays. They both claimed to have attended *Palermo Despierta* actions with their families, and Carlos in particular was sympathetic to the movement's aims because, as a student in the university's school of architecture, he bemoaned the chaotic invasion of mega-towers into Palermo and the lack of effective urban planning and regulation in the city as a whole. Carlos began the interview by stating that the *torres* have "destroyed the *barrio*, [while] businesses have taken over *casas bajas*."¹⁸³ Carlos and Elida's notion of Buenos Aires as a European city shone through in the following exchange:

GS: What is a *barrio porteño*?

Carlos: A *barrio porteño* is a neighborhood with tradition. Now, this place [Palermo] is all full of towers and buildings. This is a city that destroys the houses of the past. A traditional *barrio* has *casas bajas* and *tranquilidad*.

Elida: A more traditional *barrio* will have fewer businesses than Palermo. This *barrio* has changed too much.

¹⁸³ "Personal Interview With Carlos and Elida, Palermo Residents," Interview by author, September 21, 2009.

Carlos: I live in a house that they luckily haven't touched.

GS: What kind of people live in a *barrio porteño*, like the one Palermo used to be?

Carlos: *Gente del barrio* (people of the neighborhood), families that have stayed.

Elida: My grandmother who lives nearby is very *porteña* because she is from Italy.

Carlos: The *barrios* were founded by European immigrants who came here and made everything. The people who live in *barrios porteños* like Palermo used to be are the people that have *valores del barrio* (neighborhood values). These people would defend their house from a business or prevent a *boliche* (dance club) from moving in. Most of the people here don't respect the *barrio*.¹⁸⁴

Carlos deplores the loss of his neighborhood's traditional urban forms (*casas bajas*) as well as the specter of a business-driven neighborhood that has lost all sense of *tranquilidad*. Both Elida and Carlos reproduce the historical narrative of a European *porteño* identity instigated by Sarmiento at the turn of the 20th century.¹⁸⁵ Elida confirms her grandmother as a "true" resident of Palermo due to her European heritage and Carlos goes as far as to say these European immigrants possessed "neighborhood values" that the district super-wealthy elite do not. Both Carlos and Elida detect a loss of Europeanness in Palermo that has been provoked by the arrival of the *torres* and trendy businesses in the district.

Carlos' description also mentions the connection between traditional neighborhoods and *casas bajas*: indeed, these physical structures were most often cited as embodying Palermo's European identity among my Palermo interviewees. As my walk through Buenos Aires urban history with Carolina demonstrated, *casas bajas* were built by European immigrants in suburbs like Palermo. For many of immigrants, these houses served as a source of upward class mobility. Historically, these structures form the physical foundations for national narratives of Europeanness and middle classness in Buenos Aires. As such, these are the structures that interviewees cited as most threatened by the proliferation of mega-towers. The following quote from Marcos, the aforementioned Palermo Viejo resident, exemplifies this sentiment:

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter Two for this national and urban history.

Marcos: Palermo has lost the level of its houses. Here, there were only *casas bajas*. It was all *barrio*. A low *barrio*. But it started to grow, floor by floor, one to two floors. Then there was a building with 50 floors! Now there are building towers everywhere in the district, especially Palermo Viejo. Here, everything has changed. If you look at a picture of the *barrio* from before, it won't at all look like the *barrio* today.¹⁸⁶

Marcos' description of the mega-towers phenomenon focuses exclusively on its effects on *casas bajas* and the *nivel* (level) of his neighborhood. Marcos' statement ascribes a symbolic importance to the level or altitude of his neighborhood. Other interviewees also associated the low altitude of the *barrios'* physical structures with a traditional neighborhood. Because of this symbolic importance, the invasion of the mega-towers into Palermo represents more than the physical destruction of the *casas bajas* – it also represents the symbolic shift from a predominantly middle-class neighborhood to an elite neighborhood in the eyes of Palermo residents as well as the destruction of urban structures that inscribe national narratives.

Throughout my interviews and observations, nostalgia was the most common device by which Palermo residents invoked the discourse of a European Buenos Aires. Interviewees would often recall the city's French architecture, as well as its European clothing, as relics of the city's European past. My aforementioned interview with Anita and Rocio best captured these narratives of Buenos Aires. In particular, the following exchange with Anita – who has lived through more than 70 years of Buenos Aires urban history – is steeped in nostalgia for the Palermo of the early 1900s that, she says, has long since passed:

GS: How has Palermo changed? For example, what did Santa Fe Street [one of Palermo's most important arteries] used to be like?

Anita: It was another world here in the city. Santa Fe Street *era otra cosa* [was another thing]. The windows, they actually worried about their cleanliness. Santa Fe street was so *paquete*, only with good people. Stores sold really beautiful things, imported things. The dresses, everything. It was another thing – another world.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ "Personal Interview with Marcos, Palermo Resident," Interview by author, September 21, 2009.

¹⁸⁷ "Personal Interview with Rocio and Anita, Palermo Residents," Interview by author, September 24, 2009.

Anita's nostalgia for a lost elegance in Buenos Aires is subtler than most interviewees because it does not invoke the same face value reference to Europe used by other *porteños*. Instead, Anita uses the word *paquete* to describe her idealized version of Santa Fe Street, which in *porteño castellano* literally means "a person that presents themselves with particular elegance in terms of his or her arrangement, dress, or manners."¹⁸⁸ While she never states it explicitly, Anita's descriptions recall a previous elegance on Santa Fe Street that is clearly linked with European discourses of style and status. The link to Europe becomes even clearer when Anita references the beauty of the Santa Fe Street's imported goods. Buenos Aires scholar Emanuela Guano argues that *porteños* were enamored with European imported goods: at the turn of the century one of the most common ways for *porteños* to demonstrate status was to vacation to Europe and return with European furniture and clothing.¹⁸⁹

Excavating Porteño Narratives:

Narratives of Argentine middle-class European identity circulate throughout public spaces in Palermo and Buenos Aires. Similar to Teresa Pires' notion of "talk of crime" in Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires Cafés, parks, plazas, and even shopping malls are constantly abuzz with talk of the *porteño clase media* and the deterioration of the city's European history.¹⁹⁰ These two national narratives are fundamentally linked in the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires. These interviews demonstrate that Palermo activists clearly associate the invasion of *los torres* with larger socioeconomic forces that threaten their urban middle class position and identity. Moreover, there exists a commonly held discourse of Europeanness among those affiliated with Palermo neighborhood activism and *Palermo Despierta*. This discourse was often expressed through a nostalgic filter, which located the essence of Buenos Aires' Europeanness in its turn of the 20th century urban

¹⁸⁸ Translation taken from the Real Academia Española online dictionary.

¹⁸⁹ Guano 1999, 292-294.

¹⁹⁰ See Part One of Teresa Pires, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

form. The focal point of this discourse is the *casa baja*, which serves as the physical structure in Palermo that grounds this discourse in the actual cityscape.

Diagnosing the Towers Phenomenon: Contesting Neoliberal Urbanism

It is clear throughout *Palermo Despierta's* official literature that the group links the indiscriminate proliferation of residential mega-towers in Palermo with wider socioeconomic processes of neoliberal urbanism. For example, the first of *Palermo Despierta's* "Points of Unity" states that the group "opposes the indiscriminate construction of buildings and towers in Palermo...because we believe that it is not the market, but rather the state that should plan real estate development."¹⁹¹ From this we can infer that *Palermo Despierta* associates the invasion of residential mega-towers into Palermo with a lack of state regulation in the urban planning process. As I demonstrated in part four of my literature review, neoliberal urbanism (also known as "urban entrepreneurialism" or neoliberal urban restructuring) is a process whereby market mechanisms determine urban planning and regulation in place of public actors, often resulting in an uneven socioeconomic urban landscape.¹⁹² Central to *Palermo Despierta's* diagnosis of the *torres* phenomenon is not only a lack of state regulation, but also that, in the words of the group, "the collusion between real estate developers and political power is destroying the countenance of our beloved Palermo. Gradually, the neighborhood is being destroyed by towers rising into the sky...protected by the corruption and negligence of our bureaucrats."¹⁹³ Thus, the group claims that political collusion and corruption allows neoliberal urbanism to take root in their city and neighborhood. Their proposed

¹⁹¹ See Document One in Appendix

¹⁹² See Jamie Peck, Neil Brenner, and Nik Theodore, "Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations," *S.A.I.S. Review* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2009).

¹⁹³ "¿Qué Es "Palermo Despierta"?" *Palermo Despierta*, weblog entry, http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/05/palermo-despierta_20.html (accessed April 10, 2010).

solution is to have the state plan urban processes and maximize urban citizen representation by eliminating corruption between private real estate developers and corrupt bureaucrats.

A rejection of neoliberal urbanism embodied in the residential mega-towers permeates all of the Palermo's *Despierta* activism. As I will show, underlying *Palermo Despierta's* analysis of the mega-towers is a clash between market-based logics of urban development and *porteño* logics of tradition, place, and space.

El Colapso de los Servicios Públicos (The Collapse of Public Services)

One of *Palermo Despierta's* primary claims against the unregulated construction of mega-towers is that the construction of these towers disrupts public services like gas, water, sewage, and electricity service because of the size of the projects and the fragility of the Buenos Aires urban service infrastructure. Point two of *Palermo Despierta's* "Points of Unity" (see Document One) states that the group opposes the construction of towers in Palermo because this construction "generates a collapse in the public services of old houses and buildings. The towers create a crisis of over demand that results in a lack of committed investment by private firms for public services [water, gas, electricity, etc]."¹⁹⁴ This claim about failing urban public services is central to *Palermo Despierta's* campaign as it formed the primary basis upon which the municipal government agreed to issue a temporary construction ban in high-density areas of Palermo in 2007.¹⁹⁵ In response, several government officials and commentators have claimed that *Palermo Despierta* is against "progress" in the city.¹⁹⁶ However, according to Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, *Palermo Despierta* leader José Sánchez stated in a recent protest that "there are people that believe that this is progress, but the

¹⁹⁴ See Document One in Appendix.

¹⁹⁵ Pablo Novillo, "Seguirá trabada la construcción de torres en una zona de Palermo," *Clarín*, March 15, 2007, <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2007/03/15/laciudad/h-03815.htm> (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁹⁶ *La Nación*, "Quejas de los vecinos de Palermo," June 3, 2008, http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=1017954 (accessed April 10, 2010).

indiscriminate construction [of towers] governed only by the real estate market will bring down all of our [urban] services.”¹⁹⁷

Underlying point two of *Palermo Despierta*'s points of unity is the same issue that Marcos articulated in the “fall of the middle class” discourse analysis. Namely, middle class Palermo residents worry that the construction of residential mega-towers physically displaces them from their neighborhood as many are forced to migrate to other neighborhoods because their utilities stop functioning and their homes (often *casas bajas*) become surrounded by towers. *Palermo Despierta*'s resident testimonies and chat room are filled with personal stories of residents who were forced from their homes because of the construction of towers.

For example, one resident named Aurora claimed that the combined construction of residential mega-towers on around three sides of her house, disruption of water and gas utilities, and pressure from real estate developers to sell her home forced her to relocate from her family's home of 93 years to another house in Palermo where she experienced the same problem as before.¹⁹⁸

The physical displacement illustrated by Aurora's story is not unlike the displacement that the *porteño* middle class experienced during the crisis of 2001-2002.¹⁹⁹ Underlying *Palermo Despierta*'s claim that mega-towers are destroying resident access to public utilities is



Figure Fourteen: “We Save the Houses. We Save the Barrio.”

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ *Crítica De La Argentina*, "En Palermo no quieren más torres," September 2, 2008, <http://www.criticadigital.com.ar/imprensa/index.php?secc=nota&nid=11102> (accessed April 10, 2010).

¹⁹⁹ See Chapter Three.

a perception that the invasion of the mega-towers towers into Palermo acts as a continuation of the middle class' marginalization that climaxed during the economic crisis.

Identidad Barrial (Barrio Identity) and Patrimonio Urbano (Urban Heritage)

A second claim of *Palermo Despierta* against the invasion of mega-towers is that these urban forms do not reflect the neighborhood's "true" identity. Point Three of *Palermo Despierta*'s "Points of Unity" states that they oppose the construction of towers "because [it] affects their *identidad barrial* (neighborhood identity), aiming to impose the weight of economic power over the claims of *vecinos* [urban residents] who are the authentic cultivators of the neighborhood."

This point draws a contrast between maintaining Palermo's "*identidad barrial*" (neighborhood identity) on the one hand, and the forces of neoliberal urbanism that prevent *vecinos* (urban residents) from having an active stake in the preservation of their neighborhood's identity. In other public statements, representatives of *Palermo Despierta* have argued that "fundamental [to our movement] is the defense of the identity of the *barrio* [and] the loss of this essence is reflected in the construction of the *mega-torres* that does not have anything to do with the true identity of Palermo."²⁰⁰ Another one of the group's common refrains is that "our [Palermo residents'] *patrimonio urbano* [urban heritage] is [being] left to the real estate market's laws of supply and demand that reduce it to [nothing more than] the ridiculous value of the lot it occupies."²⁰¹ Taken together, these statements articulate the sentiment that market forces cannot appraise the true value of Palermo residents' urban identity. Therefore, steps must be taken to allow these residents to dictate how the neighborhood's *identidad barrial* will be preserved.

²⁰⁰ Clarin, "Palermo: protesta de vecinos contra la construcción de *torres*," Testigo Urbano, weblog entry posted June 03, 2008, <http://blogs.clarin.com/testigourbano/2008/06/03/palermo-protesta-vecinos-contra-construccion-torres/> (accessed April 10, 2010).

²⁰¹ *Palermo Despierta*. "Movilización Interbarrial." *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry. <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/11/movilizacion-interbarrial.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

But why is the market an insufficient means for valuing these residents' neighborhood? Put another way, what does the urban space of Palermo mean to residents that cannot be captured by neoliberal market forces? Just as we previously asked what kind of Palermo and Buenos Aires my interviewees imagine, we must now ask this same question of the *Palermo Despierta* movement.²⁰²

Several of *Palermo Despierta's* public statements and flyers reflect the discourses of middle-classness and Europeanness presented by my interviewees. While these discourses are not always overtly present in *Palermo Despierta's* literature, an informed reading based on my previous interviewee analysis allows us to uncover the underlying national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness that drive the group's activism. For example, one *Palermo Despierta* flyer illustrates the explicit links that the group draws between the current urban transformations in Palermo and threats to Argentine national identity. The flyer contains a series of rhetorical questions all beginning with the phrase ¿Sabías que? (Did you know?). I have translated the relevant lines below²⁰³:

- Did you know that Jorge Luis Borges is considered one of the best writers in history?
- Did you know that Borges lived in Palermo, the *barrio* to which he dedicated several of his works?
- Did you know that the house that [Borges] lived in was the art nouveau style of the 19th century [and that] his house was located in on 2147 Borges Street?
- Did you know that in Buenos Aires the style of houses was that which marked the history and personality of the city?
- Did you know that in the last four years 3000 of these houses have been demolished to build towers?
- Did you know that the appearance of a city is the mark of the personality of its inhabitants?
- Did you know that a city that is chaotic, disorganized, without respect for history, without green space, contaminated, loud, stressful, and unequal causes its inhabitants to be the same way?
- Did you know that Borges' home that we mentioned at the beginning was demolished to build a 10 story building?

²⁰² *Palermo Despierta* trumpets the *casa baja* (see Chapter Two) as the quintessential urban form embodying Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness. Thus, the destruction of *casas bajas* to make way for real estate ventures and mega-towers poses a serious threat to a fragile middle-class, European identity in the city.

²⁰³ See Document 2 in the Appendix.

- Did you know that luckily there are *agrupaciones vecinales* (neighborhood groups) that meet to find solutions to these topics?

There are two primary implications to be drawn from this flyer. First, *Palermo Despierta* argues that *casas bajas* define the “history” and “personality” of Buenos Aires, which then shape and reflect the personality of the city’s inhabitants. There is an underlying claim that the space of the city determines the character of its people. While *Palermo Despierta* uses the term “personality” in place of Argentine national identity, references to a national author, history, and appearance in the flier – all traits of national identity – suggest that *Palermo Despierta* implies Argentine national identity with the term “personality.” The group’s claim then becomes that Argentina’s middle class, European national identity is under threat with the urban changes taking place in Palermo and Buenos Aires more broadly.

Even more crucial to this flyer is the reference to Jorge Luis Borges. Borges is widely considered to be Argentina’s most important national author who wrote several poems and stories about Buenos Aires that continue to inform the ways that *porteños* experience and perceive the city. *Palermo Despierta*’s mention of the destruction of Borges’ historic *casa baja* at the hands of the real estate boom is important because it reasserts the linkages between neoliberal urbanism and the destruction of Argentine national identity. Hence, there is a symbolic connection embedded in the group’s message relating the destruction of Borges’ home to a larger destruction of the “true,” historic Buenos Aires as well as Argentine national identity at the hands of mega-towers and neoliberal urbanism.

Figure Fifteen is a flyer that contains a mega-tower alongside several *casas bajas* with the title “Fuck You Buenos Aires.”

Figure Fifteen: "Fuck You, Buenos Aires"²⁰⁴



Fuck you Buenos Aires y tus hermosas casas "PH". Fuck you y tu alma de barrios amigables. Fuck you y tus barrios de casas bajas. Fuck You Buenos Aires ! traigo un ejército de edificios para demoler tu historia, destruir tu encanto y derribar tu espíritu. Con el poder del dinero construiré lo mas alto posible para oscurecer tus calles, ahogar tus árboles y aplastar el alma de tu gente. Fuck you Buenos Aires ! Ensordeceré tus barrios con la locura del tráfico desquiciado y te dominaré con el descontrol !!! **Cubriré tus cielos con cemento y secaré tus plazas. ya eres mía Buenos Aires, nadie te ayuda.**

On the bottom of the flyer is a sardonic series of brash statements written by the group from the perspective of a real estate developer (or perhaps a corrupt politician) that I have translated below:

Fuck you Buenos Aires and your beautiful houses. Fuck you and your soul of friendly *barrios*. Fuck you and your *barrios* of *casas bajas*...I have brought an army of buildings to destroy your history, destroy your charm (*encanto*) and topple your spirit. With the power of money I will construct to the highest [altitude] possible to obscure your streets, choke your trees, and crush the soul of your people...you are mine Buenos Aires, no one will help you.²⁰⁵

These statements playfully express the group's anger toward the proliferation of towers in Buenos Aires. In the same fashion as my interviewees, these statements associate *casas bajas* with the "history" and "charm" of Buenos Aires, two aspects of the city with which *Palermo Despierta* clearly identifies. This is the same association that *Palermo Despierta* made in their open letter to 60 Buenos Aires legislators stating that "entire neighborhoods of *casas bajas* with rich and emblematic building

²⁰⁴ *Palermo Despierta*. "Material para descargar." *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry. <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/06/material-para-descargar.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

profiles are no longer recognizable due to their alteration into tall buildings [towers] of dubious architectural value that destroys their [the neighborhood's] identity."²⁰⁶

A separate statement by a leader of the *Palermo Despierta* named Claribel during a rally covered by Channel 5 Buenos Aires news makes the link between *casas bajas* and *porteño* national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness even more explicit:

Many of the houses [*casas bajas*] have been destroyed and many houses are closed in [by the towers] so the people there have no other option but to sell their homes...they are destroying a beautiful, antique neighborhood [Palermo] that represents the history of Argentina. I have lived in this neighborhood for 18 years and each time it gives me more sadness [*me da mas tristeza*] to see the facades [of these homes] fall. These are things that don't happen in Europe where they respect *barrios antiguos*...people have lost their properties, their living floors...We want the residents of Palermo to wake up and come with us.²⁰⁷

Claribel's statement contains two important notions concerning the relationship between *Palermo Despierta* and Palermo's *casas bajas*. First, she states that Palermo is a "beautiful, antique neighborhood that *represents the history of Argentina*," thereby explicitly acknowledging the imagined connection between her built environment (Palermo) and Argentina's national narratives. Second, Claribel suggests that one would not find such a brazen disregard for one's own urban history in Europe where, she claims, "they respect *barrios antiguos*." This statement places Argentina, Buenos Aires, and Palermo in direct relation to Europe as a point of reference. Claribel's statement thus implies a desire to return to "European" urban values. This desire is similar to that expressed by Carlos (the interviewee described in the previous section) who pined for a return of the *valores del barrio* (*barrio* values) that he believed the early modern city's European immigrant inhabitants embodied.

²⁰⁶ *Palermo Despierta*. "Movilización Interbarrial." *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry. <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/11/movilizacion-interbarrial.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

²⁰⁷ *Palermo Despierta en C5N*. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrvqLkx_egg&feature=player_embedded (accessed April 10, 2010).

Of all *Palermo Despierta's* public statements and actions, perhaps the most revealing is a two-part informational video created in 2009 entitled *Queremos Buenos Aires* (We want Buenos Aires) addressing the recent urban transformations in the city.²⁰⁸ The video opens with footage of Buenos Aires during the early 1900s. Its narrator begins to tell the history of the city's European, middle class formation in much the same fashion that I narrated my walk with Carolina through Buenos Aires urban history. The video notes that the goal of the city's European planners was to "build Buenos Aires in a fashion similar to Paris," emphasizing that Buenos Aires was known as "the city of elegant parks and *paseos* (passages)." The narrator wistfully recalls the city's French buildings as well as English, German, and Italian goods. The video says that the early founders of the Buenos Aires metropolis felt that it was incumbent upon them to preserve the European beauty and opulence of the city by creating the *Comision de Critica Edilicia* (Commission of Critical Building) in 1923 as a body that defended the city's *patrimonio arquitectonico* (architectural heritage).

Following these nostalgic scenes of early 20th century Buenos Aires, *Palermo Despierta's* video transitions to scenes of present day Buenos Aires from the view of one of its mega-towers. The narrator states that "Buenos Aires has transformed from the city of the 'Queen of the Rio de Plata' to the 'City of Fury' [as] urban planners have begun to ruin the splendor that was Buenos Aires." The narrator then proceeds the lack of sustainable urban planning that has taken root in Buenos Aires following the crisis. The last four minutes of the video consist of a string of scenes displaying Buenos Aires' European architecture and turn-of-the-century urban landscape. The narrator says "far away, there waits our beautiful Buenos Aires...the queen of the Rio Plata." These scenes of the Buenos Aires yesteryear morph into scenes of the demolition of *casas bajas* and other French-style

²⁰⁸ Part One: Queremos buenos aires A (EX BODEGAS GIOL), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJDM6guou1E> (accessed April 10, 2010)., Part Two: Queremos buenos aires B (LA RURAL), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC_RZmLuVh4&feature=related (accessed April 10, 2010).

homes by construction workers. The narrator concludes that “we want a city that reflects who we are and what we deserve.”

As a whole, *Palermo Despierta's Queremos Buenos Aires* video demonstrates that the imagined Buenos Aires that the group mobilizes for is, in fact, the same turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires that inscribed imagined Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness in its urban landscape. Moreover, the video illustrates once more that the most substantial threat to this city and these national narratives is the neoliberal urbanism that demolishes the city's traditional urban forms (*casas bajas*) to construct mega-towers and hypermodern buildings. Taken together, this video as well as *Palermo Despierta's* fliers, official documents, and official statements advocate valuing *patrimonio urbano* (urban heritage) and *identidad barrial* (*barrio* identity) by some means other than the urban real estate market – that is, by means other than neoliberal urbanism.

The Threat From Below: Contradictory Relationships with the Racialized Urban Poor

I now turn to the question of the Buenos Aires' racialized urban poor and delve further into the contradictory perspectives of my Palermo interviewees and *Palermo Despierta*. During my interviews and informal observation, several Palermo residents made clear that they saw the urban poor as nothing more than an untrustworthy burden for the city. One interviewee recounted tales of robbery at the hands of an anonymous *villero boliviano* (Bolivian shantytown dweller), as well as stories that focused on the urban poor's “dirtiness” (as demonstrated by massive trash mounds in working class neighborhoods in the south of the city). Nearly every interview contained at least one piece of advice for avoiding robbery at the hands of a *villero* (shantytown resident) or a *punga* (pocket thief) who Palermo residents often assumed were immigrants from other Latin American countries or from Argentina's outer provinces. One of the most common parting phrases after my interviews was “*ojo, eh*” [keep a look out], indicating that I should be on my guard for the threat of a racialized

underclass in the city. I met one of my interviewees, Maria, in Palermo's Botanical Gardens and when we began to talk about Palermo, she explicitly articulated what separates *porteños* from the city's "other" inhabitants. Toward the end of our interview, I asked Maria how Palermo and Buenos Aires have changed since the crisis of 2001 and she responded as follows:

Maria: Now, there are still many Argentines here, but there are also many (laughs) *importados* (imported people) too (laughs).

GS: Imported people like me?

Maria: No, no, Americans, British, and Europeans are very trustworthy because...In the province you find everything. Good and bad. There's everything – Bolivians, Paraguayans, Peruvians. There are many Koreans and Chinese [also]...the people in the province are distinct.²⁰⁹

Maria's statement draws a clear distinction between what she refers to as "Argentines" and untrustworthy "imported" people from the province and surrounding Latin American countries. For Maria, immigrants epitomize the specter of "difference" – a different city and a different nation, one that is much more "Latin American" in appearance. Maria's distinction between foreign European inhabitants of Palermo and inhabitants from the Provinces of Argentina was common among my interviewees. After inviting me up to her house for coffee, Rocio, for example, confided to me that she never would have invited me up to her apartment had she thought that I was Argentine or Latin American.

The relationship between Palermo *porteños* and the urban poor is also contradictory. A common phenomenon among Palermo *porteños* is to simultaneously scorn and bemoan the fate of the Buenos Aires urban poor. For these residents, the deleterious effects of the economic crisis in the form of spatial inequality and urban poverty outlined in Chapter Three serve as yet another reminder that the more unequal and poverty-stricken the city becomes, the closer it appears to one of its Latin American counterparts. This reminder surfaced toward the beginning of my conversation with Rocio on the street outside her apartment.

²⁰⁹ "Personal Interview With Maria, Palermo Resident," Interview by author, September 14, 2009.

GS: It appears that there has been huge growth in this district [Palermo].

Rocio: Yes, but did you see the poverty – terrible. Before it wasn't like this. Not necessarily in this district but in the south [of the city]. But do you know what's really happening? There is a greater difference between the rich and the poor, and the middle class has shrunk. It seems to me that the *clase media* is disappearing. Ok then, so what happens? In the zones in the south like *Congreso* and *Constiucion*, there are many *pobres tirados* (poor people in the street). Here, you don't see it as much, but there it's terrible. I swear to you (*te juro*) that it pains me (*me da pena*) to see such poverty in this city, because this is a rich country yet you have such poverty. *Me da lastima, verdad* (it gives me shame, truly).

GS: Because there is so much wealth?

Rocio: Of Course! You know what, they have taken everything [the wealth]. The government and the bureaucrats allied with *la clase*...with the *empresarios* (businessmen) and the special interests. I would say this is a country with many conflicting interests and we always lose everything.²¹⁰

Rocio's statement illustrates a form of compassion for the Buenos Aires urban poor that was not present in Maria's statements. When describing the situation of the urban poor as something that "pained" her and gave her "shame", Rocio's voice cracked and her intonation shifted to indicate the weight with which she bemoaned the presence of so much human suffering in the city. Rocio's statement also indicates her own insecurity over the prospect that members of her own class (*la clase media*) are joining the ranks of the urban poor each day. Indeed, as shown by the data in Chapter Three, the economic crisis of 2001-2002 brought urban labor informality and poverty that continues to affect both the working and middle classes alike. Notably, Rocio places the blame for the plight of the urban poor squarely on the poor governance of the Buenos Aires municipal government, which colludes with business interests and undermines the social cohesion of the city. Like other previous interviewees, Rocio blames these developments on *empresarios* (businessmen).

Despite Rocio's ostensible compassion for the urban poor and her class's relation to their plight, she nevertheless proceeded with her mother Anita to condemn the presence of the immigrant urban poor later in the interview. At one point, Anita stated that when she leaves her apartment, she

²¹⁰ "Personal Interview with Rocio and Anita, Palermo Residents," Interview by author, September 24, 2009.

thinks that “this is not Buenos Aires. It seems like a different country.”²¹¹ She added that “now it’s full of immigrants: Bolivians, Peruvians, and Paraguayans...they are part of *barrios* that are different from the *barrios porteños*. Many of them live in *villas miserias* (shantytowns) and they rob people very often.”²¹² Similarly Rocio noted that the profile of Palermo has changed significantly since the economic crisis, stating “La gente parece la otra [people seem like the other]. There are many Bolivians, and Peruvians, many Paraguayans; it [Buenos Aires] is not the city that it seemed like. It now seems like Bolivia or Peru.”²¹³ Both Rocio and Anita’s statements perpetuate an “otherizing” discourse directed at the Buenos Aires urban poor who are framed as immigrants from Latin America who compromise the middle class and European appearance of Buenos Aires. Their statements underscore the ways in which Argentine national narratives continue to operate on the basis of racism, xenophobia, and classism.

Moreover, a juxtaposition of Rocio’s two series of statements reveals that she, like other Palermo residents I interviewed, has two contradictory ways of representing the Buenos Aires urban poor. In the first interview excerpt, Rocio spoke about the poor as though it were a homogeneous, de-racialized class deserving of empathy due to the similarity between its material plight and that of the *porteño* middle class. On the basis of her middle class identity, Rocio could sympathize with the mutually deleterious effects of neoliberalism on both the middle class and the urban poor. Yet, the moment that she characterized the urban poor as Latin American (Bolivian, Peruvian, and Paraguayan), Rocio’s scorn emerged: these racializing discourses reveal the perceived threat from below by the urban poor to her imagined national narrative of Buenos Aires as a European city. Rocio narrative of Europeanness is one of racial whiteness that excludes other Latin American populations that are perceived as too “indigenous” and “backward” to be part of the urbanized

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

nation. Rocio's statements demonstrate that middle class and European national narratives can come into conflict as Rocio sympathized with the plight of the urban poor on the basis of her middle class identity but also scorned its existence on the basis of her discourses of Buenos Aires as a white, European city.²¹⁴

In yet another example of contradiction, Aníbal, my aforementioned interviewee from Palermo Soho, demonstrated that residents can often times defend their national narrative of middle classness while also embracing their Latin Americanness. Throughout my interview with Aníbal, he consistently lauded the efforts of Juan Perón, Argentina's much-lionized populist president who, from 1945-1955, transformed Buenos Aires into a *ciudad de las masas* (city of the masses) and re-oriented Argentina toward the rest of Latin America. Aníbal emphasized that he was a firmly middle class *Peronista* (Peron supporter) who wanted to help the urban poor and embrace Latin American nationalism. At one point in our interview, Aníbal stated that "many *porteños* continue to be fascinated with European modernity, but we live here. This is a Latin American city and I am Latin American. I don't feel European. I am Latin American."²¹⁵ Aníbal's statement illustrates that discourses of Europeanness and middle-classness are not totalizing; individuals choose to adopt both, one, or none of these discourses in relation to the urban poor.

Palermo Despierta: Connecting the Urban Poor, Neoliberal Urbanism, and Mega-towers

Among other reasons, *Palermo Despierta* claims they are mobilizing against residential mega-towers because they represent the widening gap between the rich and the poor in the city. Using the contradictory relationships to the racialized urban poor illustrated above, I argue that, similar to my

²¹⁴ As Emanuela Guano noted in an essay examining pre-crisis Buenos Aires, many middle-class Buenos Aires residents believed that "Bolivian, Peruvian, and Paraguayan immigrants outnumbered the Argentine residents in the villas... [despite the fact that this] perception was invariably disputed by those who lived in the slums, as well as by those who worked there." As many middle-class residents found themselves among the urban poor in the wake of the crisis, myths that separate the urban poor from the middle class could not stand up to reality.

²¹⁵ "Personal Interview with Aníbal, Palermo Resident," Interview by author, September 26, 2009.

interviewees, *Palermo Despierta* aims to reduce urban poverty in the city because the organization believes that visible urban poverty challenges Buenos Aires' appearance as a middle-class, European city.

Points four and five of *Palermo Despierta's* "Points of Unity" state that the group opposes the indiscriminate construction of towers because:

- 1) [it] reinforces the asymmetry between the rich north and the poor south: there is 50 times more construction in the northern-central zone (Caballito, Villa Urquiza, Belgrano, Palermo) than in the southern zone [of the city].
- 2) [And] indiscriminate construction of towers, without any type of regulation, is what leaves no less than 500,000 inhabitants of the city with housing problems. Bear in mind that these towers are constructed exclusively for sectors of high economic income.²¹⁶

These points demonstrate *Palermo Despierta's* multi-scalar approach to understanding sociospatial inequality in Buenos Aires. Point four acknowledges that unbridled construction in Buenos Aires' northern corridor has widened socioeconomic inequality between the north and south Buenos Aires, reflecting an awareness of material urban struggles beyond the scale of their *barrio*. Point five connects the construction of *torres* (i.e. neoliberal urbanism) with the housing problems of more than 500,000 of the city's residents. In other statements, *Palermo Despierta* has expanded on this theme in claiming that "in these last six years, 48% of total construction in the city of Buenos Aires has been 'premium' or 'luxury' housing while, according to the statistics, less than 20% of the population are able to acquire this type of property."²¹⁷ Both points four and five demonstrate that *Palermo Despierta* relates the invasion of *los torres* in Palermo to a city-wide process of uneven urban development precipitated by neoliberal urbanism.

Compared to Rocio, Anita, and Maria's discourses on the racialized urban poor, *Palermo Despierta's* statements seem to espouse a progressive vision for Buenos Aires that reduces inequality.

²¹⁶ See Document One in the Appendix.

²¹⁷ *Palermo Despierta*. "Movilización Interbarrial." *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry. <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/11/movilizacion-interbarrial.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

I argue, however, that we should not dismiss the tension between my interviewees and *Palermo Despierta's* official statements – after all, these interviewees affiliated themselves with *Palermo Desperate*. Instead, I suggest that underlying *Palermo Despierta's* claims for a more spatially just and equal city is not a desire to empower the urban poor. Rather underlying these claims is a desire to decrease urban inequality in order to preserve discourses of middle-classness and Europeanness that form the foundation of *porteño* self-representations. That is, they have a very specific vision of what “decreased urban inequality” means for the city: namely, the preservation of their middle-class neighborhood with its European flair, but without the presence of poor Latin American immigrants who are excluded from Argentine national narratives.

As my interviewees emphasized, increased urban inequality in Buenos Aires makes it more difficult to tell Buenos Aires apart from other unequal Latin American cities and much easier to distinguish Buenos Aires from Western European cities with comparatively lower levels of inequality (see chapter 3).²¹⁸ Reading *Palermo Despierta's* ostensibly progressive statements through the language used by my interviewees, the symbol of the mega-tower is significantly more complex and contradictory than initially meets the eye. The rise of mega-towers in Palermo has a double-symbolism, as expressed in Rocio's statement:

[In Buenos Aires] now there are a few rich people with all the money and many poor people living in conditions like *villas* (shantytowns), *conventillos*, *casa tomadas*. And we, the *clase media*, are hanging by a thread (*colgados de la palmera*), trying to maintain what we have, paying our bills as we can. This is what happens to me.²¹⁹

My analysis suggests that *Palermo Despierta's* anti-towers activism addresses this precise sentiment expressed by Rocio. The rise of residential mega-towers threatens Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness from two sides. First, the mega-towers represent the destruction of the traditional urban forms (*casas bajas*) within Buenos Aires that inscribe national narratives in the

²¹⁸ This is not to say that European cities have perfect records on inequality, however.

²¹⁹ "Personal Interview with Rocio and Anita, Palermo Residents," Interview by author, September 24, 2009.

urban space of Palermo. On the other hand, mega-towers reinforce “the asymmetry between the rich north and the poor south” and, in doing so, threaten national urban narratives of middle-classness that *porteños* have clung to so desperately in the wake of the economic crisis

Despite *Palermo Despierta*'s goal of reducing urban inequality, its discourse of Europeanness also excludes the immigrant urban poor on the basis of racism and xenophobia. *Palermo Despierta*'s activism is therefore deeply paradoxical: the national narratives that animate the group to contest the exclusionary effects of neoliberalism are themselves exclusionary. While the Buenos Aires that the members of *Palermo Despierta* imagine would likely be less neoliberal, it would still operate on racial and class hierarchies that preclude poor immigrant residents from their right to the city. At the same time that *Palermo Despierta* seems to espouse a progressive opposition to neoliberalism, this opposition is itself contradictory and problematic.

Chapter Conclusion: A Clash of Hegemonies

This chapter has argued that neighborhood activism led by *Palermo Despierta* against the invasion of residential mega-towers represents a larger rejection of neoliberal urbanism in defense of Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness inscribed in the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires. In other words, Palermo is the site for an urban clash of hegemonies – a clash between hegemonic *national* narratives and hegemonic *global* neoliberalism.²²⁰ Far from a mere stage for contestation, my analysis has shown that the urban landscape of Buenos Aires and Palermo is itself the object of struggle. In the wake of the economic crisis of 2001-2002, *Palermo Despierta* and my Palermo interviewees cling to the built forms like *casas bajas* that inscribe national narratives into the urban landscape of their city. In transforming this act of clinging into activism, *Palermo Despierta*'s

anti-towers movement demonstrates that neoliberalism is itself contested, resisted, and reworked by the national hegemony of middle-classness and Europeanness.

Moreover, the contradictory ways in which Palermo residents perceive the urban poor reveal that national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness operate on the basis of racism and classism in context-contingent ways. In the post-crisis milieu of Buenos Aires, the *porteño* middle class struggles for a more spatially just city, but their imagined city still excludes residents who don't conform to ideas of Argentine nationhood. Thus, while national narratives can resist and rework neoliberalism, the form of this resistance and reworking is itself deeply problematic – particularly when it invokes discourses of whiteness and class privilege.

My analysis has shown that with this clash of global and national hegemonies *in* and *over* the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires, we must bear in mind what Katharyn Mitchell refers to as hegemony's "fundamentally unessential character...and chameleonlike qualities."²²¹ Argentine national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness are fragile, heterogeneous, and constantly evolving in the context of a post-crisis real estate boom in Buenos Aires. Zygmunt Bauman writes that "construct[ing] an identity and keep[ing] it solid" is the essential problem of early modernity.²²² Such is the case for Palermo *porteños* who look to their city to perpetuate national narratives and find that their imagined nation and city are not so easily identifiable in the midst of neoliberal urbanism and their own downward economic mobility.

The experience of *Palermo Despierta* and other middle class neighborhood coalitions like *Queremos Buenos Aires* has several implications for how scholars theorize urban citizenship, globalization, and neoliberalism. Namely, my analysis calls into question theories like Saskia Sassen's notion of "denationalized citizenship" that assert the de-linking of the nation-state and the ties

²²¹ Mitchell 2004, 20.

²²² Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist--or a Short History of Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, by Stuart Hall and Gay Paul. Du (London: Sage, 1996), 18.

between citizen and nation in the process of globalization.²²³ Frameworks like Sassen's assert that the development of global cities has effectively severed or curtailed the ties between cities and national consciousness. My analysis instead suggests that, in the context of a nation and city recovering from crisis, urban residents are more willing than ever to contest the globalizing of their city in order to re-empower national narratives.

²²³ Saskia Sassen, "Incompleteness and the Possibility of Making: Towards Denationalized Citizenship?" *Cultural Dynamics* 21, no. 3 (2009): 227-254.

Conclusion:
The View from a Mega-Tower

When I first observed residents from the relatively privileged Palermo district mobilizing with *Palermo Despierta* to defend their neighborhood from the effects of a post-crisis real estate boom, I had little idea how to interpret their claims. My ethnographic interviews with middle-class residents revealed a pervasive sense of precariousness, displacement, and loss of urban identity in the wake of the economic crisis of 2001-2002. These interviews did not match with the gentrification analytical frameworks that I was accustomed to as a resident of a U.S. city. I discovered that there were deeper cultural-urban meanings at stake in the battle over the neoliberalization of the Buenos Aires urban landscape.

This thesis has argued that *Palermo Despierta* contests neoliberal urbanism in order to defend imagined national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness inscribed in the urban space of Palermo and Buenos Aires. In the wake of an economic crisis that tore asunder the material foundation of the city's middle class, Palermo residents and other *porteños* are mobilizing in defense of urban forms like *casas bajas* in order to rearticulate their own imagined urban identity in the face of neoliberal globalization. But this activism manifests in contradictory and problematic ways as the narratives animating *Palermo Despierta* operate on the basis of historic racial and class hierarchies that exclude the racialized urban poor from the right to the city. To advance this argument, I offered an ethnographic rendering of the historical development of the Argentine nation in relation to the Buenos Aires urban landscape. I argued that this landscape embeds historical traces of a middle class, European identity in landmarks throughout the city, along with traces of the historic exclusion of non-white working class Argentines. Residents mobilize under the banner of *Palermo Despierta* because these traces of their urban identity are now threatened by post-crisis neoliberal urbanism

(e.g. the rapid construction of mega-towers), which is destroying historic urban forms to make Buenos Aires more globally competitive.

My method of analyzing the historical and political-economic context underlying Buenos Aires neighborhood activism has aimed to address the danger of anthropological “thick description,” which often leads to research devoid of critical analysis of context.²²⁴ My study’s method has sought to understand larger urban processes through the examination of neighborhood activism in a single Buenos Aires district. Through Palermo, this thesis has narrated the larger story of urban dwellers struggling to preserve contradictory cultural-urban meanings in the midst of a neoliberal, post-crisis real estate boom. At the heart of this story are the multi-scalar conjunctures and disjunctures between neighborhood, city, and nation produced by neoliberal globalization.

This thesis has engaged with the theoretical themes of urban space, neoliberalism, and national identity. First, this thesis has taken up Matthew Sparke’s suggestion²²⁵ to break away from reductionist economic readings of global city transformations by focusing on what Ananya Roy calls “the terrain of political struggle and subject-making through which space is lived and negotiated.”²²⁶ This thesis supplements a basic political-economic reading of Buenos Aires’ post-crisis milieu with a complementary analysis of the cultural-urban negotiations of meaning and space. In doing so, this thesis bridges the prevailing gap between studies on the Buenos Aires cityscape like that of Emanuela Guano,²²⁷ which examine cultural-urban meaning, and studies like that of Juan Miguel Kanai,²²⁸ which examine political-economic transformations in the post-crisis city.

²²⁴ See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

²²⁵ Matthew Sparke, "Global Seattle: The City, Citizenship, and the Meaning of World Class," ed. Richard Morrill and Michael Brown, in *Seattle Geographies*, (Seattle: University of Washington press, Forthcoming).

²²⁶ Roy, Ananya. "The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory." *Regional Studies* 6, no. 43 (2009): 821.

²²⁷ Emanuela Guano, *Emplacing Modernity: The Buenos Aires' Middle-Class and the Politics of Urban Spectacle in Neoliberal Argentina*, diss., The University of Texas- Austin, 1999.

²²⁸ Juan M. Kanai, "The In-Between City: Neoliberal Globalization, Inequality and Middle-Class Politics in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2002-2007)" (diss., UCLA, 2008).

Second, this thesis complicates abstract theoretical propositions about neoliberalism and the city by examining the “context-contingencies” of neoliberalization on the ground: using, *inter alia*, extensive historical as well as ethnographic and quantitative data analysis. The point is to show that context counts: that local geographies still matter in the ebb and flow of globalization and neoliberalism. Argentine national narratives still wield considerable hegemony over the Buenos Aires cityscape and this local hegemony is successful at reworking the global hegemony of neoliberalism – even as it problematically excludes the racialized urban poor from its vision of the city. My analysis casts doubt on the claims of globalization scholars like Appadurai who herald the arrival of a “deterritorialized,” “postnational” world in which all local context and history submit to the totalizing forces of market-based “ideoscaping.”²²⁹

Lastly, by examining the city of Buenos Aires, this thesis has sought to challenge the hegemonic study of Global North cities. In the words of Ananya Roy:

Much of the theoretical work on city-regions is firmly located in the urban experience of North America and Western Europe. This is not unusual. It is part of a canonical tradition where theory is produced in the crucible of a few ‘great’ cities: Chicago, New York, Paris, and Los Angeles – cities inevitably located in EuroAmerica. It is time to rethink the list of ‘great’ cities...[as] the urban future already lay[s] elsewhere: in the cities of the Global South.²³⁰

This thesis has taken up the task of “dislocating” what Roy calls the “EuroAmerican centre of theoretical production” by examining the intricacies of non-north negotiations of urban meanings.²³¹

I do so not in the spirit of orientalizing Buenos Aires as an aberrational case study, but rather in the spirit of re-centering Global South cities in the theories produced by Western scholars.²³²

²²⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

²³⁰ Roy 2009, 820.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Through an examination of a city whose experience is neither distinctly Global North nor distinctly Global South – but rather an “in-between city” to use Kanai’s formulation²³³ – my study challenges the Global North/South dichotomy that Amin refers to as the “hegemonic territorial imaginary of the world.”²³⁴ Not just another apocalyptic scene from the “Planet of Slums” or a simple “Dreamworld of Neoliberalism,”²³⁵ Buenos Aires’ historical, cultural, political, and economic experience challenges scholars to think beyond dualistic urban categories. Buenos Aires embeds early modern national narratives of middle-classness and Europeanness that implicate Global North subjectivities in the Global South. In fact, Palermo residents appeal to Global North subjectivities of middle-classness and Europeanness as the very basis upon which they contest the Global North forces of neoliberalism! Scholars can no longer afford to generalize the spread of neoliberalism to Buenos Aires as a purely Global North to Global South flow of ideas.

In sum, this thesis has examined Buenos Aires as a 21st-century urban palimpsest in which multiple overlapping and contested modernities are jumbled together: early 20th century European modernity, middle-class modernity, national modernity, market-made-over modernity, and what is arguably also a form of neoliberal postmodernity, too. In this maelstrom of modernities, all that is solid continues to melt into air.²³⁶ But the additional take away point here is that there will always be spaces like those in Palermo where urban citizens resist and recode the melting and remaking process, creating new modernities of their own on the ground.

The framework I develop in this thesis and its empirical findings suggest several future paths to deepen my analysis of post-crisis Buenos Aires. These areas of future research reflect several unresolved questions that continued to resurface during the course of my research. First, future

²³³ Kanai 2008.

²³⁴ A. Amin, "Regions unbound: towards a new politics of place," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, no. 86 (2004): 33-34. For a further critique of this imaginary, see Sparke, Forthcoming.

²³⁵ Two of Mike Davis’ most popular Global South mega-city metaphors.

²³⁶ Borrowing a phrase from Marx and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto*.

studies should examine the relationship between national narratives and neoliberalism in other Buenos Aires neighborhoods, particularly those in the city's middle-class western wedge. This line of inquiry presents the opportunity for a comparative study of how residents in different neighborhoods resist neoliberal urbanism. Moreover, future studies should more extensively examine cross-class, multi-neighborhood movements like *Queremos Buenos Aires*. Second, because the Buenos Aires urban poor is deeply affected by both neoliberalism and urban racism, future research should examine the politics of urban informality and the ways that working class residents contest neoliberalism and urban racism through their own forms of resistance.

From atop the Palermo Le Parc tower – the second tallest urban structure in Buenos Aires – one has to wonder how an elite tower-dweller would perceive urban change in their neighborhood and city. Looking down below onto the streets of Palermo, would this resident see the *Palermo Despierta* protestors? Would they understand the deeper cultural-urban meanings underlying their mobilizations? Looking out onto the far horizon, would they see global opportunities or threats to their own enclaved world? And looking out toward the obelisk in the center of the city – the symbol of the Argentine nation with which we began this investigation – would they see a quaint artifact of an anachronistic national identity or an uncanny reminder of how elites of other eras and other places have seen their landmark legacies contested and replaced?

Bibliography

- Adamovsky, Ezequiel. *Historia De La Clase Media Argentina: Apogeo y Decadencia De Una Ilusión, 1919-2003*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009.
- Alberdi, Juan B. 1852. *Bases y puntos de partida para la reorganización nacional*. Available online at <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/00360552199914939647857/index.htm>.
- Amin, A. "Regions Unbound: Towards a New Politics of Place." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, no. 86 (2004): 33-44.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Argentina. Consejo de Planeamiento Estratégico. Secretaría de Planeamiento Urbano. *Plan Estratégico Buenos Aires 2010*. By Gobierno de La Ciudad De Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires, 2004.
- Argentina. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos. *Contuntura Económica de La Ciudad De Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 2009.
- Atkinson, R. "Padding the Bunker: Strategies of Middle-Class Disaffiliation and Colonisation in the City." *Urban Studies* 4, no. 43 (2006): 819-32.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. "From Pilgrim to Tourist--or a Short History of identity." In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, by Stuart Hall and Gay Paul. Du, 18-36. London: Sage, 1996.
- Beaverstock, J. V., R. G. Smith, and P. J. Taylor. "A roster of world cities." *Cities* 6, no. 16 (December 1999): 445-58.
- Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Borja, Jordi, Manuel Castells, Chris Benner, and Mireia Belil. *Local and Global: The Management of Cities in The Information Age*. London: Earthscan Publications, 1997.
- Burgo, Ezequiel. "Las Razones Del Nuevo Boom Del Negocio Inmobiliario." *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), September 11, 2005. <http://www.clarin.com/suplementos/economico/2005/09/11/n-00311.htm> (accessed April 02, 2010).
- Campbell, S. "Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? Urban Planning and the Contradictions of

- Sustainable Development." *American Planning Association* 62, no. 3 (1996): 296-312.
- Centner, Ryan. "Conflictive Sustainability Landscapes: The Neoliberal Quagmire of Urban Environmental Planning in Buenos Aires." *Local Environment* 14, no. 2 (2009): 173-92.
- Certeau, Michel De. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Ciccolella, Pablo. "Globalización y Dualización en la Región Metropolitana de Buenos Aires: Grandes Inversiones y Reestructuración Socioterritorial en Los Años Noventa." *Eure* 25, no. 76 (1999). http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0250-71611999007600001 (accessed November 20, 2009).
- Clarín. "Palermo: protesta de vecinos contra la construcción de torres." Testigo Urbano. Weblog entry posted June 03, 2008. <http://blogs.clarin.com/testigourbano/2008/06/03/palermo-protesta-vecinos-contra-construccion-torres/> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Coppola, Horacio, Facundo De. Zuviría, and Adrián Gorelik. *Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lariviere, 2006.
- Coy, M., and M. Pohler. "Gated Communities in Latin American Megacities: Case Studies in Brazil and Argentina." *Environment and Planning B-Planning and Design* 3, no. 29 (2002): 355-70.
- Crítica De La Argentina*. "En Palermo no quieren más torres." September 2, 2008. <http://www.criticadigital.com.ar/imprensa/index.php?secc=nota&nid=11102> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- David, Harvey. *Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford [England]: Blackwell, 1989.
- Davis, Mike, and Daniel Bertrand Monk. *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*. New York: New Press, 2007.
- Davis, Mike. *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso, 2007.
- Duran, Valeria, Maria Yacovino, Tamera Domenech, Mariel Rubio, and Mercedes Uzubiaga. "Mapas Barriales: Marcas de Las Nuevas Centralidades?" In *Buenos Aires a La Deriva : Transformaciones Urbanas Recientes*, by Guerra Max Welch, 409-29. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005.
- El Urbanismo Salvaje. El Tema Ambiental en el Propuesto Nuevo Código de Pleanamiento Urbano*. Buenos Aires: La Asemblea Permanente por los Espacios Verdes Urbanos.
- Galafassi, Guido. "Argentina on Fire: People's Rebellion Facing the Deep Crisis of the Neoliberal Market Economy." *Democracy and Nature* 8, no. 2 (July 2002): 331-35.
- Gambina, Julio, and Daniel Campione. *Los Años de Menem: Cirugía Mayor*. Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2002.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

- Gerchunoff, P., and J. C. Torre. "La política de liberalización económica en la administración de Menem." *Desarrollo Económico* 36, no. 143 (1996): 733-68.
- Germani, Gino. *La Asimilación de Los Inmigrantes en la Argentina y El Fenómeno del Regreso en La Inmigración Reciente*. Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1964.
- Gobierno de Buenos Aires. Centro de Estudios Para el Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano. *El Empleo No Registrado en La Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Tendencias e Impacto Sobre la Población Asalariada, 2003-2007*. Buenos Aires.: El Gobierno de Buenos Aires, 2008.
- Gobierno de Buenos Aires. Centro de Estudios Para El Desarrollo Económico Metropolitano. *La Ciudad de Buenos Aires Durante La Década de Los 90': Un Balance en Términos de Empleo*. By Elina López. Buenos Aires, 2002.
- Gobierno De Buenos Aires. Consejo de Plan Urbano Ambiental. Secretaría de Planeamiento Urbano. *Plan Urbano Ambiental: Documento Final*. By Gobierno De La Ciudad De Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires, 2000.
- Gobierno de Buenos Aires. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos. *Indicador Trimestral de La Construcción de La Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires Primer Semestre de 2008*. Buenos Aires, 2009.
- Gobierno de Buenos Aires. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos. *Panorama Social y Económico: Ciudad de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires, 2007.
- Goldsmith, William. "From the Metropolis to Globalization: the Dialectics of Race and Urban Form." In *Globalizing Cities: a New Spatial Order?*, by Peter Marcuse and Ronald Van Kempen, 37-55. Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 2000.
- Gorelik, Adrian. *Miradas Sobre Buenos Aires: Historia Cultural y Crítica Urbana*. Madrid: Siglo XXI Ediciones, 2004.
- Gorelik, Adrián. "A Metropolis in the Pampas: Buenos Aires 1890-1940." In *Cruelty & utopia: cities and landscapes of Latin America*, by Jean-Francois Lejeune, 146-59. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.
- Gorelik, Adrián. *Buenos Aires En Cuestion: Notas Para un Diagnostico*. Buenos Aires: Contraduria General Comunal, 1993.
- Gorelik, Adrián. *Grilla y El Parque: Espacio Público y Cultura Urbana en Buenos Aires, 1887-1936*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1998.
- Gorelik, Adrián. "Modelo Para Armar: Buenos Aires, De La Crisis Al Boom." *Punto De Vista* 84 (April & may 2006).
http://www.bazaramericano.com/bazar_opina/articulos/gorelik_crisis_al_boom.htm
 (accessed November 24, 2009).
- Guano, Emanuela. *Emplacing Modernity: The Buenos Aires Middle-Class and the Politics of Urban Spectacle in*

- Neoliberal Argentina*. Diss., The University of Texas- Austin, 1999.
- Guano, Emanuela. "Spectacle of Modernity: Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires." *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (May 2002): 181-209.
- Harvey, David. "Monument and Myth." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, no. 3 (September 1979): 362-81.
- Harvey, David. *Consciousness and The Urban Experience: Studies in The History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Harvey, David. "The Right to the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 4 (2003): 939-41.
- Holston, James. "Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship." *Architectural Design* 66, no. 11/12 (1996): 54-59.
- Janoschka, Michael. "El Modelo de Ciudad Latinoamericana, Privatización y Fragmentación del Espacio Urbano de Buenos Aires: El Caso de Nordelta." In *Buenos Aires a La Deriva: Transformaciones Urbanas Recientes*, edited by Max W. Guerra. Buenos Aires: Biblios, 2005.
- Jonas, A., and K. Ward. "Introduction to a Debate on City-Regions: New Geographies of Governance, Democracy and Social Reproduction." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, no. 31 (2007): 169-78.
- Kanai, Juan M. "The In-Between City: Neoliberal Globalization, Inequality and Middle-Class Politics in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2002-2007)." Diss., UCLA, 2008.
- La Nación*. "El 63% de la *clase media* aún no tiene capacidad de ahorro." June 14, 2005. http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=721180 (accessed April 10, 2010).
- La Nación*. "Fuerte impacto de la crisis en la *clase media*." July 16, 2000. http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=24932 (accessed April 10, 2010).
- La Nación*. "Quejas de los vecinos de Palermo." June 3, 2008. http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=1017954 (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Lacarrière, Monica, and Guy Thuillier. "A Utopia of Order and Enclosure: Private Districts and Countries in Buenos Aires." *Espace Geographique* 33, no. 2 (2004): 152-53.
- Larner, Wendy. "Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality." *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 63 (Autumn 2000): 5-25.
- Leichenko, R. M., and W. De. Solecki. "Exporting the American Dream: The Globalization of Suburban Consumption Landscapes." *Regional Studies* 2, no. 39 (2005): 241-53.
- Lofland, Lyn H. *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory*. Hawthorne: Aldine

- de Gruyter, 1998.
- López, Artemio. *La Derrota Del Padre: Pobres Estructurales y Nuevos Pobres en Las Elecciones de Capital Federal y Provincia de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Instituto de Estudios sobre Estado y Participación, 1997.
- Macleod, Gordon. "From Urban Entrepreneurialism to a "Revanchist City"? On the Spatial Injustices of Glasgow's Renaissance." In *Spaces of Neoliberalism Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe (Antipode Book)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2003.
- Mann, Michael. "Ruling Class strategies and Citizenship." *Sociology* 21 (1987): 339-54.
- Marshall, T. H., and T. B. Bottomore. *Citizenship and Social Class*. London: Pluto Press, 1992.
- Mignaqui, Iliana, and Pablo Ciccolella. "Buenos Aires: Sociospacial Impacts of the Development of Global City Functions." In *Global networks, linked cities*, edited by Saskia Sassen. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Mike, Davis,. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Mitchell, Katharyne. *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004.
- Muchnik, Daniel. *Argentina Modelo: De La Furia a La Resignación : Economía y Política Entre 1973 y 1998*. Buenos Aires: Manantial, 1998.
- Muxí, Zaida. *La Arquitectura De La Ciudad Global*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2004.
- Myers, David, and Henry Dietz. *Capital City Politics in Latin America Democratization and Empowerment*. New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.
- Novillo, Pablo. "En Palermo, los vecinos también piden control sobre las torres." *Clarín*, June 3, 2008. <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2008/06/03/laciudad/h-01685854.htm> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Novillo, Pablo. "Seguirá trabada la construcción de torres en una zona de Palermo." *Clarín*, March 15, 2007. <http://www.clarin.com/diario/2007/03/15/laciudad/h-03815.htm> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Olivieri, Sergio. *Debilitamiento de la Clase Media: Gran Buenos Aires 1986-2004*. Thesis, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2007.
- Palermo Despierta* En C5N.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrvqLkx_egg&feature=player_embedded (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Palermo Despierta*. "Material para descargar." *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry.

- <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/06/material-para-descargar.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Palermo Despierta*. "Movilización Interbarrial." *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry. <http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/11/movilizacion-interbarrial.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Palermo Online*. "Vecinos de Palermo protestaron por la construcción indiscriminada. Jaque a las torres." 2006. <http://palermoviejosite.iespana.es/protesta.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Peck, Jamie, Neil Brenner, and Nik Theodore. "Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations." *SAIS Review* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 49-66.
- "Personal Interview with Aníbal, Palermo Resident." Interview by author. September 26, 2009.
- "Personal Interview With Carlos and Elida, Palermo Residents." Interview by author. September 21, 2009.
- "Personal Interview with Marcos, Palermo Resident." Interview by author. September 21, 2009.
- "Personal Interview With Maria, Palermo Resident." Interview by author. September 14, 2009.
- "Personal Interview with Rocio and Anita, Palermo Residents." Interview by author. September 24, 2009.
- Pires, Teresa. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in Sao Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Pirez, Pedro. "Buenos Aires: Fragmentation and Privatization of the Metropolitan City." *Environment and Urbanization* 14 (2002): 145-58.
- Plaza, Diana. "Vecinos al rescate del patrimonio." *La Nación*, January 3, 2010. http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=1225103 (accessed April 15, 2010).
- Podalsky, Laura. *Specular city: transforming culture, consumption, and space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.
- Privitellio, Luciano De. *Vecinos y Ciudadanos Política y Sociedad en La Buenos Aires De Entreguerras*. Buenos Aires, República Argentina: Siglo Veintiuno, 2003.
- "¿Qué Es "Palermo Despierta"?" *Palermo Despierta*. Weblog entry. http://palermodespierta.blogspot.com/2008/05/palermo-despierta_20.html (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Queremos Buenos Aires A (EX BODEGAS GIOL). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJDM6guou1E> (accessed April 2010, 2010).
- Queremos Buenos Aires B (LA RURAL).

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC_RZmLuVh4&feature=related (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Queremos Buenos Aires. "Queremos Buenos Aires - Adhieren y Participan." Queremos buenos aires: alternativa para el Área Metropolitana en emergencia. Web log entry posted June 1, 2008. <http://queremosbsas.blogspot.com/> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- Riessman, Catherine K. "Narrative Analysis." In *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, by A. M. Huberman and Matthew B. Miles, 217-70. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Robinson, Jennifer. *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Rock, David. *Argentina, 1516-1982: from Spanish colonization to the Falklands War*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Rohter, Larry. "Borges's Buenos Aires: A City Populated by a Native Son's Imagination." *New York Times*, May 14, 2006. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/travel/14foot.html> (accessed April 15, 2010).
- Roy, Ananya. "The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory." *Regional Studies* 6, no. 43 (2009): 819-30.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Sarlo, Beatriz. "Buenos Aires, the Peripheral Metropolis." In *Through the kaleidoscope: the experience of modernity in Latin America*, by Vivian Schelling, 108-24. New York: Verso, 2000.
- Sarlo, Beatriz. *Escenas de La Vida Posmoderna: Intelectuales, Arte y Videocultura en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1994.
- Sassen, Saskia. *Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Sassen, Saskia. "Incompleteness and the Possibility of Making: Towards Denationalized Citizenship?" *Cultural Dynamics* 21, no. 3 (2009): 227-54.
- Scobie, James R. *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Shumway, Nicolas. *The Invention of Argentina*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Silvestri, Graciela, and Adrián Gorelik. "Ciudad y Cultura Urbana, 1976-1999: El Fin de la Expansion." In *Buenos Aires, Historia de Cuatro Siglos*, edited by Jose L. Romero. Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2000.
- Smith, Neil, and Peter Williams. *Gentrification of The City*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986.
- Smith, Neil. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." *Antipode* 3, no. 34 (2002): 638-53.

- Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and The Revanchist City*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Smith, W. C. "State, Market and Neoliberalism in Post-Transition Argentina: The Menem Experiment." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 33, no. 4 (1991): 45-82.
- Socoloff, Ivana. "Buenos Aires Bajo el Lente de la Planificación Estratégica: Discursos Sobre la Ciudad Presentes en el Plan Estratégico Buenos Aires 2010." (2007).
- Sosa, Walter, Mariana Marchionni, and Leonardo Gasparini. "Characterization of Inequality Changes Through Microeconomic Decompositions: The Case of Buenos Aires." (2004).
- Sparke, Matthew. "Global Seattle: The City, Citizenship, and the Meaning of World Class." Edited by Richard Morrill and Michael Brown. In *Seattle Geographies*. Seattle: University of Washington press, Forthcoming.
- Sparke, Matthew. "On Denationalization as Neoliberalization: Biopolitics, Class Interest, and the Incompleteness of Citizenship." *Political Power and Social Theory* 20 (2009): 287-300.
- Sparke, Matthew. "Political geography: Political Geographies of Globalization (2): governance." *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 3 (2006): 357-72.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.
- Thongchai, Winichakul. "The Presence of Nationhood." In *Siam Mapped: a History of The Geo-body of a nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.
- Torres, Horacio A. "Cambios socioterritoriales en Buenos Aires durante la década de 1990." *Eure* 27, no. 80 (2001). http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?pid=S0250-71612001008000003&script=sci_arttext (accessed November 29, 2009).
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009*. London: UN Habitat, 2008.
- Williams, Brittany. "Between Polyarchy and Autocracy: The Delegative Democracy of Carlos Menem." *BC Journal of International Affairs*. <http://bcjournal.org/2006/between-polyarchy-and-autocracy/> (accessed April 20, 2008).
- World Bank. Austin Kilroy. 2007. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2009/Resources/4231006-1204741572978/Kilroy2.pdf> (accessed April 1, 2010).
- World Bank. Washington D.C. *Argentina: From Insolvency to Growth. A World Bank Country Study*. By The World Bank Group. 1993.
- Young, Iris M. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Zhang, Li. "Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China." *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002):

Glossary of Spanish Terms

- 1) *Barrio*: Neighborhood
- 2) *Villa Miseria*: Shantytown
- 3) *Porteño*: Buenos Aires resident
- 4) *Tranquilidad*: Calmness, stillness
- 5) *Vecino*: literally, neighbor, though the term connotes a more political relationship with the city based on solidaristic mobilization
- 6) *Ciudadano*: citizen
- 7) *Casa Baja*: Literally, short house. These are the early modern neighborhood structures that I argued embodied Europeanness and middle-classness.
- 8) *Conventillo*: Small tenements for the urban poor
- 9) *Casa Tomada*: A house or living space taken over by poor urban dwellers. The term was popularized in a story by Julio Cortázar.
- 10) *Clase Media*: The middle class
- 11) *Identidad Barrial*: neighborhood identity
- 12) *Patrimonio Urbano*: Urban heritage

Appendix

Document One: Palermo Despierta Points of Unity

¿POR QUÉ NOS OPONEMOS A LA CONSTRUCCIÓN INDISCRIMINADA DE EDIFICIOS Y TORRES EN PALERMO?

- Porque creemos que no es el mercado, sino el Estado, quien debe planificar las inversiones inmobiliarias.
- Porque genera el colapso de los servicios públicos de las casas y edificios vecinos: las torres provocan una crisis de sobredemanda, que se suma a la falta de cumplimiento de las inversiones comprometidas por parte de las empresas privatizadas de servicios públicos. Es así que en la actualidad, se multiplican los casos de falta de gas, agua, luz, e incluso ya han ocurrido derrumbes en los hogares lindantes a estas obras, lo que pone en peligro la vida de los vecinos y de los trabajadores de la construcción.
- Porque afecta a la identidad barrial, pretendiendo imponer el peso del poder económico por sobre el reclamo de muchos vecinos, quienes son los auténticos cultores de la especificidad barrial.
- Porque limita el acceso al sol, a raíz del diseño de proyectos arquitectónicos que culminan privatizando el acceso a este tipo de bienes públicos tan valorados.
- Porque refuerza la asimetría entre el norte rico y el sur pobre de la Ciudad: se construye 50 veces más en la zona centro-norte (Caballito, Villa Urquiza, Belgrano, Palermo) que en la zona sur.
- Porque la construcción indiscriminada de torres, sin ningún tipo de regulación, es la contracara necesaria de una moneda que nos muestra nada menos que a 500.000 habitantes de la Ciudad con problemas de vivienda. Téngase en cuenta que estas torres se destinan exclusivamente para sectores de alto nivel de ingreso económico, o directamente para la lisa y llana especulación inmobiliaria (departamentos que se construyen para quedar vacíos u ociosos).

PALERMO DESPIERTA

¿SABÍAS QUE ?

- Sabías que Jorge Luis Borges es considerado uno de los mejores escritores de la historia ?
- Sabías que Borges vivió en Palermo, barrio al que le dedicó varias de sus letras ?
- Sabías que la casa donde vivió era de estilo Art Nouveau del siglo 19 y quedaba en la calle Borges 2147 ?
- Sabías que en Buenos Aires este estilo de casas fue lo que marcó la historia y la personalidad de la ciudad ?
- Sabías que en los últimos 4 años unas 3000 de estas casas fueron demolidas para construir edificios ?
- Sabías que por cada edificio que se construye sube en promedio 40 veces la cantidad de habitantes en el lugar ?
- Sabías que este aumento de habitantes hace que disminuya el espacio verde por persona año a año ?
- Sabías que Buenos Aires tiene 4.5 m2 de espacio verde por persona cuando en el primer mundo tienen entre 10 y 14 ?
- Sabías que esta mayor cantidad de gente aumenta proporcionalmente el tráfico de transportes ?
- Sabías que Buenos Aires es la cuarta ciudad más ruidosa del mundo ?
- Sabías que el boom inmobiliario construye edificios pero no hace ni escuelas, ni comisarias, ni hospitales, ni plazas ?
- Sabías que a los inversores inmobiliarios no les importa nada de esto, y sólo les importa el dinero a corto plazo ?
- Sabías que todo este egoísmo y desinterés por la calidad de vida va marcando negativamente la fisonomía de la ciudad ?
- Sabías que la fisonomía de una ciudad es la que marca la personalidad de sus habitantes ?
- Sabías que en una ciudad caótica, desorganizada, sin respeto por la historia, sin espacios verdes, contaminada, ruidosa, estresante y desigual provoca que sus habitantes sean también así ?
- Sabías que el principal negocio de algunos políticos, además de la política, es la inversión constructoras o inmobiliarias ?
- Sabías que la Rural era un espacio público y pasó mágicamente a manos privadas por un negocio de 900 millones de dólares ?
- Sabías que con los llamados terrenos de bodegas Giol y ferroviarios linderos están tratando de hacer otro negocio millonario ?
- Sabías que en ambos lugares en vez de hacerlos parques para todos van a construir entre otras cosas torres ?
- Sabías que esa casa de Borges de la que hablamos al principio fue demolida para hacer un edificio de 10 pisos ?
- Sabías que si no hacemos nada al respecto la ciudad de Buenos Aires va a ser inhabitable de aquí a pocos años ?
- Sabías que por suerte hay agrupaciones vecinales que se juntan para encontrarle solución a estos temas ?

Ahora por suerte lo sabes. Somos cientos de vecinos los que nos reunimos todos los lunes en Arévalo 2035 a las 20 hs.

Acercate, entrá en www.palermodespierta.com.ar y vos también ayudá a Buenos Aires.

Map: Chapter Two Route Through Palermo With Carolina

