The Promises of the Free World
Postsocialist Experience in Argentina and the Making of Migrants, Race, and Coloniality
Jenny Ingridsdotter
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Abstract
This thesis investigates the narrated experiences of a number of individuals that migrated to Argentina from Russia and Ukraine in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union. The over-arching aim of this thesis is to study the ways in which these migrants navigated the social reality in Argentina, with regards to available physical, material, and socioeconomic positions as well as with regards to their narrated self-understandings and identifications. The empirical data consists of ethnographic in-depth interviews and participatory observation from Buenos Aires between the years 2011 and 2014. Through the theoretical frameworks of political discourse theory, critical race studies, auto-ethnography, and theories on coloniality, the author examines questions of migration, mobility, race, class, and gender in the processes of re-establishing a life in a new context. The interviewees were not only directly affected by the collapse of the USSR in the sense that it drastically changed their terrain of possible futures as well as retroactive understandings of their pasts, but they also began their lives in Argentina during the turmoil of the economic crisis that culminated in 2001. Central to this thesis is how these dislocatory events impacted the interviewees’ possibilities and limitations for living the life they had expected, and thus how discursive structures affect subject positions and identifications, and thereby create specific conditions for different relocatory trajectories. By focusing on how these individuals narrate their reasons for migration and their integration into Argentine labor and housing markets, the author demonstrates the role Argentine and East European history, as well as the neoliberal restructuring of the postsocialist region and Argentina in the 1990s, had for self-understandings, subject positions, identities, and mobility. Various intersections of power, and particularly the making of race and whiteness, are important for the way that the interviewees negotiated subject positions and identifications. The author addresses how affect and hope played a part in these processes and how downward mobility was articulated and made meaningful. She also examines how participants’ ideas about a “good life” were related to understandings of the past, questions of race, social inequality, and a logic of coloniality.

Keywords: political discourse theory, ethnography, Argentina, race, whiteness, coloniality, postsocialism, social inequality, subject positions, migration, gender, class, intersectionality, ethnography, post structuralism, Latin America, Soviet Union, identities, differentiation, ethnology, economic crisis, mobility, auto-ethnography, colonial settlement, diaspora, humanities, Ukraine, Russia.
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“Por un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos”
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background
A Catalyst Encounter

In May 2008, I had a conversation with a Russian woman who had recently opened a restaurant specialized in Russian cuisine in my Buenos Aires neighborhood. While I sat down over a plate of vareniki – a traditional dish of filled dumplings – she spoke about her longing for everything she had left behind. I was surprised that she spoke so freely, telling me about her disappointment with her husband who had recently gone back to Moscow for work, about her worries for her children and their upbringing in Argentina. It seemed like she had a profound need to talk about her life with someone who shared her foreign perspective on Argentina. At this time, I had been living in the country for quite some years, getting by on various service jobs or loans for studies. As I listened, her complaints aroused something in me that I recognized as nostalgia. I felt close to her even though we were living in Argentina for very different reasons and under very different circumstances.

This encounter awoke a strange feeling of homesickness in me, which I found surprising. All of a sudden I wanted to talk to her about the light shadows of birch-trees and how the smoked fish she served as a side dish tasted just like the one my father makes. It seemed that the geographical proximity of Sweden and Russia gained a meaning of its own in this big city on the other side of the world. I wanted to ask her why she had left Russia, what she hoped for in the future, and why she had chosen Argentina. Unfortunately the doorbell interrupted us, and as she hurried into the kitchen she was swept along by the evening rush. This encounter remained with me and was the trigger for a set of questions about colonial geographies,
mobility in general and this recent migration from Ukraine and Russia to Argentina in particular.

Mobility and International Migration

This dissertation is founded on the fundamental premise that spatial mobility is and has been a constant phenomenon in human history (Castles & Miller 2003:4). People have always moved across space as part of their livelihood, in order to improve their conditions, or perhaps just out of curiosity (Friedman & Randeria 2004:xiv). My starting point is that the ways in which we understand and conceptualize human mobility is always discursively constituted, and thus contextually determined, both historically and culturally.

As Castles and Miller have noted, the idea of humans belonging to sovereign nation-states was born in the wake of the French revolution in 1789. It was only after the world had been organized into nation-states that the concept of international migration became meaningful (Castles & Miller 2003:53). Today, the topic of international migration is extensively researched by social scientists and cultural analysts, often understood as a major force of transformation for both sending and receiving regions. During recent decades, international migration has also been given prominence in political debates and the media at levels claimed to be unprecedented in the post 1945 world. (Tesfahuney 1998:15). "International migration was ranked as one of the “most important factors of global change” at the beginning of the 21st century (Castles & Miller 2003:4).

In the aftermath of wars and conflicts in the 2010s, many countries are currently being faced with great numbers of refugees and migrants. Scholars of critical migration studies have called attention to how, in recent EU policy framework and public discourse, the so-called management of migration has been framed through theories of securitization in which terrorism, trafficking crimes, smuggling, and “illegal” migration have been connected to and constructed as legitimate reasons for anti-immigration policy and militarization of European borders (Anderson 2015b: 644; Bigo 2014).

This investigation approaches migration not as something that simply needs “management”, “control” or “regulation”, but rather as a contingent phenomenon that comes into existence through discourses, policies, public debates, and legal frameworks that construct certain types of subjects along the lines of social differentiation. How we conceptualize mobility across modern international borders and factors conditioning this particular mobility is a result of historical and contemporary political regimes and
configurations of global powers (Castles & Wise 2008:6; Tesfahuney 1998). What does this mean for people in various geographical locations? To write about migration in these terms is to write about space, power and geopolitics (Harvey 2009, Dahlstedt & Nergaard 2013). This study contributes to this field of critical migration studies through its ethnographic scrutiny of ordinary people and their daily life. It seeks to address questions that concern how human beings come to be recognized as migrants in a specific context, as well as what it means for a person to be labeled as “migrant” in terms of his or her possibilities, conditions, and sense of belonging, like my encounter with the Russian woman seemed to awake in both of us.

Postsocialist Migration to Argentina

As a classical country of immigration, Argentina has received several waves of settlers from different parts of Europe, as well as from other part of the world (Castles & Miller 2003:7). It is a country that contains many social contexts and cultural communities. As such, it has been pointed out as a relevant case for examining the particularities of international migration (Jelin & Grimson 2006:9; Gavazzo 2010:6). In this dissertation, stories of former Soviet citizens and their children, who left Russia and Ukraine during the crisis-struck aftermath of the decayed Soviet empire, are analyzed. How are we to understand the postsocialist world that took shape after 1991?

The individuals interviewed are permanent settlers who decided to stay in Argentina, where they had resided for between ten and fifteen years at the time of the interviews. I suggest that their encounters with Argentina reflect local configurations of power that affect migrant life, such as social constructions of race and gender, labor market conditions, and housing – but also to global conditions, not least the neoliberal ideology that has structured possibilities and impossibilities for people all over the globe for a few decades, albeit in different ways.

Another premise for this study is that human mobility is embedded in societal structures and that, as such, international migration is constructed and linked to particular historical settings that organize mobility across borders in contextually determined and historically contingent ways (Prashad 2010:ii-iii; Sassen 1996: 212). My focus is on migration from Russia and Ukraine, where all of my research participants resided when they, for various reasons, decided to leave for Argentina. Attention is directed towards the ways in which their experiences of migration and labor are interlaced with
historical possibilities and positions that were constructed by discourse, for example through roles or identifications informed by race, gender, and class structures.

Postsocialist migration from Russia and Ukraine to Argentina started in the wake of the economic and social crises that followed the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Yet, it was also part of a long tradition of migration to Argentina from this region. In particular Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and Armenian migrants – a large share constituted by Jewish diaspora – have arrived in this vast country in the Southern Cone in different “waves” of migration from Eastern Europe over the course of the last two centuries. This particular wave was encouraged through the Argentine Resolución MI 4632/94. This migratory agreement was established in 1994 between Argentina and East European countries and framed as a program of temporary residence with permission to work. Those who wanted to immigrate to Argentina could, however, turn these temporary permits into permanent residency within a couple of years. Their integration would be facilitated by language courses and assistance in finding housing it was assumed. Seventy percent of the visas within this program were issued in Kiev (Marcogliese 2003:46). The circumstances of this agreement will be further discussed in chapter 2.

The decade of the 1990s has proved to be of great relevance in my empirical material; it is a period of time that all research participants, regardless of generation, related to when they spoke of their lives and experiences in relation to migration. The 1990s brought sovereign independence for the former republics of the Soviet Union, at the same time as it brought economic globalization of neoliberal policies – something that turned out to be of particular importance in the participants’ past and present lives. The 1990s was a decade where drastic changes drove participants, their parents or partners, to make decisions that would change the course of their lives. Many had hoped for political, social, and economic changes, but the rapid transformation of the former societal structure and implementation of economic shock therapy policies resulted in both increasing inequalities and

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1 The term "wave" is employed in most cases by participants of this study and also by scholars of Argentine migration. However, as Satzewich has noted, it might connote that "migrants are an undifferentiated mass who have little control over their circumstances" (Satzewich 2002:26). I however regard a "wave" as a collective movement of individuals that is shaped by structural and individual factors.

2 The affected countries were Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania, Russian Federation, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldavia and Romania.
massive unemployment. Participants spoke about new mafias, of voucher frauds, economic instability, and the inability to provide their children with a reasonable education. Moreover, they also remembered an adventurous sense of wanting to see the world.

Nevertheless, on the other side of the ocean, in Argentina, the 1990s were characterized by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank’s implementation of similar neoliberal policies that deregulated and privatized large sectors of society and publicly owned entities (Stuckler & Basu 2013: 40). In 1991, the Convertibility Plan was established where the Argentine peso was pegged to the U.S. dollar at a fixed rate. This benefited those with economic capital purchasing power and it also resulted in high wages, an attractive factor for migrants. However, as the 20th century came to its end, economic inequality and liquidation increased alongside growing movements of social protest. In 2001, Argentina was struck by a devastating financial collapse and social crisis. The reasons and outcomes of this crisis have been investigated by many (Auyero 2000, Cerrutti & Grimson 2007, Shefner et al. 2007, Villalón 2008).

The persons interviewed in this book set out for Argentina with hopes of achieving a better life for themselves and their children. Nonetheless the situation in Argentina upon their arrival turned out to be similar to the one they had left behind. This is an inquiry of what happened to them and how they make sense out of it. International migration is embodied and lived. During our encounters, participants spoke of the emotions they had felt during their process of unanticipated hardship and downward mobility. Through these narratives they also made me feel things, affecting me as a researcher and as a fellow human being. This thesis is my recollection and analysis of what they so generously shared with me. What had they hoped for, and what conditioned their possibilities or impossibilities?

Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

This thesis investigates the narrated experiences of a number of individuals that migrated to Argentina from Russia and the Ukraine in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union between 1996 and 2001. Specifically, this means that they were not only directly affected by the collapse of the USSR in the sense that it drastically changed their terrain of possible futures as well as retroactive understandings of their pasts, but also that they began their lives in Argentina during the turmoil of the economic crisis that culminated in 2001.
Against this background, the over-arching aim of this study is to investigate the ways in which a number of postsocialist migrants navigated the social reality in Argentina, with regards to available physical, material, and socioeconomic positions as well as with regards to their narrated self-understandings and identifications. To this end, I have developed a theoretical framework building on the discourse theoretical concept of dislocation as well as what I have chosen to call relocatory trajectory. On the one hand, the concept of dislocation helps me to conceptualize both dislocatory events – that is, precisely the kind of radical material, and symbolic breaks in existing social structures that both the fall of the USSR and the Argentine financial crisis entailed – as well as dislocatory experiences – the feelings of, for example, disorientation, confusion or resentment that subjects might experience when such social structures break down. Relocatory trajectory, on the other hand, is a concept that seeks to capture the processes whereby a subject – in this case through migration – has to reposition herself in relation to new political, social, cultural, and material circumstances as a result of being affected by such dislocatory events. By using the interrelated concepts of dislocatory event and relocatory trajectory in understanding the narrated experiences of my interviewees, my objective is to understand how these dislocatory events impacted the participants’ possibilities and limitations for living the life they had expected, and thus how discursive structures affect subject positions and identities, and thereby create specific conditions for different relocatory trajectories.

Moreover, I direct these more precise questions to my material: What role did Argentine history play for self-understandings, subject positions, and mobility for postsocialist migrants in contemporary Buenos Aires? How did the dislocatory events in Ukraine, Russia, and Argentina affect participants and their possibilities? What did participants’ relocatory trajectories entail in terms of self-understanding and negotiations of race, gender, class, and space? How is downward and upward social mobility narrated, articulated, and made meaningful? How is the idea of upward mobility and a “good life” related to narratives about the past, questions of race, and a logic of coloniality?

Theoretical Framework

My overarching theoretical framework is what in recent years has come to be called political discourse theory (PDT), as it was first formulated by political
theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985)\textsuperscript{3} and later developed by others (see Howarth & Torfing 2005; Howarth et al. 2000).\textsuperscript{4} This means that this inquiry rests upon a post-structuralist foundation and, accordingly, the starting point is that there is no “pre-given, self-determining essence that is capable of determining and ultimately fixing all other identities within a stable and totalizing structure” (Torfing 2005:13).

Political Discourse Theory

*Discourse*, as the concept is employed here, can be defined as an exercise of power that both enables and limits understandings of what is possible or impossible, true or untrue, desirable or undesirable. This is a definition close to the way David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis define discourses as “systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects” (Howarth et al. 2000:3f). According to them, discourses order social relations and are “intrinsically political” because of “the constructions of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’” (Howarth et al. 2000:4). I regard discourse as an articulatory practice that constructs and organizes social relations while also constructing materiality. Discourse creates meaning in everyday life; it conditions interpretations of the world, our lives, our selves, and our “others” in accordance with power structures. As such, analyzing discourse helps us to understand

\textsuperscript{3} Given the particular relevance Laclau and Mouffe’s theories have for understanding ideological transformations and hegemonic discourse after the collapse of the USSR, as well as Laclau’s interest in the way discourse organizes social relations in Argentina (2007), his native country, it is particularly interesting to apply PDT to ethnographic material shaped both by the dislocatory events in Eastern Europe 1989–91 and by the social relations in Argentina after the neoliberal transformations of the 1990s. Laclau and Mouffe’s theories of discourse were first formulated in 1985. After 1991, the authors note how the intellectual project they proposed gained striking new relevance as the occurrences after the the collapse of the USSR and the emerging neoliberal world order changed hegemonic orders and discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 2008:21f; Mouffe 1993:3). In 1994, Ernesto Laclau wrote from a time he saw as the “epicentre of a major historical mutation” that the end of the Cold War marked a major shift in the “globalizing ideologies” that characterized half a century (1994:1).

\textsuperscript{4} PDT can be placed within a post structural tradition, influenced by thinkers like Derrida, Lacan and Foucault who radicalized and decentered former notions of structuralism (see Saussure; Althusser; Levi-Strauss), as well as within a post-Marxist critique and development of writings of Marx, Gramsci and Althusser. Like many other poststructuralists, Laclau and Mouffe depart from the traditional Saussurian model where meaning is understood as tied together through a linguistic system. They question the closed character of the Saussurian linguistic model where any social action cannot but repeat a system of already existing meanings and practices (Howarth 2008:118f).
how people make sense of their everyday lives, and enables the ethnographer to inquire how meanings are created, negotiated, shifted, and contingent in discursive orders. In this case, I have particularly focused on discourses of migration, race, modernity, and neoliberalism to understand how they structure relocatory trajectories for a number of postsocialist migrants.

Dislocation and Contingency

The concept of dislocation is crucial for this study, and also for the ontology that guides the inquiry. Introduced by Laclau in his later work, dislocation captures how certain events that cannot be symbolized within an existing discursive system disrupt the order of signifying practices and entire worlds of meaning (Howarth 2007:127). For example, the capitalist world previously constituted the constitutive outside of the socialist discourse, and vice versa. By defining certain phenomena as capitalist or socialist and thus desirable or not, these two world orders were constructed and maintained (Gerber 2011:17). The implosion of the USSR dislocated local and global structures of meaning, rupturing a discursive structure that affected not only the countries and citizens of the former East, but also changing how Western countries regarded themselves, the world and their role in it.

For the participants in this study, the implosion of the Soviet Union was a tremendous historical shift in their lives, and after their arrival to Buenos Aires they also experienced the Argentine crisis of 2001, its prelude and aftermath. Furthermore, they experienced enormous personal changes as their life worlds were transformed by their mobility through spatial and social spaces. Some expressed that their everyday life had become a constant coping with economic and politic crisis. A dislocation is not just an ordinary change or personal transformation, but should be understood as a radical break with the symbolic order – the brute contingency of the discursive becomes visible when former worlds cease to exist and phenomena can no longer be represented within the past order (Laclau 1990; Howarth 2007:127). The ever-present contingency presupposed by PDT means that things could always have been in a different way – historical laws do not exist, but contingent results of practices do (Laclau & Mouffe 2008:159).

In contrast to studies of displacement, where individuals have been taken out of their context, the concept of dislocation has been used in empirical studies where the context in itself is transformed in such a way that people need to reconstitute their positions, categories, and identities, as for example in ethnologist Sofi Gerber’s work on former East Germany (Gerber 2011:18).
Dislocation is a concept that apprehends “the process by which the contingency of discursive structures is made visible” (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:13). A hegemonic discourse “becomes dislocated when it is confronted by new events that it cannot explain, represent, or in other way domesticate” (Torfing 2005:16).

Given that discourses are political and social constructions, their contingent character means that social formations, historical processes or ideologies, are temporary fixations of meaning in a field that can never be complete (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:3). The radical contingency inherent in the social means that there is always a constitutive outside, threatening to destabilize social order. In a world constantly under construction, one could argue that everything already is more or less dislocated. However, I take dislocations and dislocatory events to be major political and societal transformations that make the brute contingency particularly manifest, such as the demise of empires, revolutions, or wars that totally change societal orders (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:4).

Dislocatory Events and Experiences

As mentioned above, in my application of the concept of dislocation, I distinguish analytically between dislocatory events and dislocatory experiences. In order to make the concept applicable to my material, consisting of a number of individual stories that revolve around major political dislocations, the concept of dislocatory events seeks to capture the drastic ruptures in societal, material, and symbolic structures that characterized the participant’s everyday life after 1991 and that over time made migration the only option participants saw as possible. This concept is related to what best can be referred to as dislocatory experience, a term that I use to empirically understand the participants’ individual narrations of their own affectively charged memories from these events and their aftermaths. This draws on David Howarth’s definition of dislocatory experience as something that entails renunciations of various identities and losses that perhaps cannot be compensated for by the new discourse (Howarth 2000:176). On a subjective level, dislocation can be understood as “a moment when the subject’s mode of being is experienced as disrupted” (Glynos & Howarth 2007:110).

One of the starting points for understanding my use of this concept is the potentiality of freedom that Laclau places in dislocation. When one directs attention to possibilities and limits of discourse, it might seem that the role of individuals to influence and shape their lives is underplayed, yet Laclau
points towards how dislocation brings about possibilities, as it is “the very form of freedom” and as such “the absence of determination” (Laclau 1990:43). Research participants were left in both a material and subjective abyss by the dislocatory events as societal structures and identities disassembled around them after 1991. Some described this as an experience of liberty, yet at the same time frightening as positions and trajectories were altered.

According to Laclau, dislocation is both a threat and a possibility for something new to arise since dislocation creates “possibilities of historical action” (Laclau 1990:39). Dislocatory events thus throw the subject into new orders as they give rise to new historical actions; social agents can change and create new identities. However, this sort of freedom is not the one we speak of in everyday life, where stability and maintenance of status quo often is what people usually strive for. For Laclau, freedom is not uniformly positive, rather it comes with ambiguity: “Freedom is both liberating and enslaving, exhilarating and traumatic, enabling and destructive” (Laclau 1996:19). In many ways this resembles the way research participants described the initiation of their migration. Even if they all had varying reasons for their decisions, in the wake of the breakdown of social and material structures they were driven towards, and perhaps some were even enthusiastic about, the idea of migration.

Materiality

While often assumed to be of mental character, Laclau and Mouffe presuppose that discourse has a material character (Laclau & Mouffe 2008:162). As the research participants speak of their past and present they talk of the material structures surrounding them. They mention houses, apartments, workplaces, and actual sites of education, manifesting the importance of materiality – a materiality that is part of the political and economical system it is the co-creator of.

Laclau and Mouffe suggest that all social formations are meaningful, it is the systematic sets of relations – linguistic as well as material – that they denominate as discourse. They clarify this through philosopher Ludvig Wittgenstein’s example of two persons engaged in building a brick wall. When person A asks person B for a brick and then puts it in place, linguistic and non-linguistic elements are not only placed side by side but the act also constitutes the differentiated and structured system of positions that Laclau and Mouffe defines as discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 2008:163; 1990:100). It is
important to note that Laclau and Mouffe do not deny that there is a world outside of our minds. They do not question the existence of for example a rock, but rather they direct our attention to how the specificity of this rock is created by humans who according to the discursive field in which they operate can perceive this rock as a weapon, or a brick to build a house. The rock is a mere physical object, it exists in the world, yet its ‘being’ is decided “within a determinate system of social relations” (Laclau & Mouffe 1990:101). Objects thus acquire different meaning depending on the discursive totality (Laclau & Mouffe 1990:109).

This is important for my work where materiality had a crucial effect on participants and the possible routes they could take after the dislocatory events. The materiality of discourse manifests for example in possible or impossible positions of employment, and also in the different meanings ascribed to different bodies. The way bodies are understood and constituted is of great relevance in this study. I regard the body as both an object and subject of discourse; it is positioned and made sense of by discourse and actions directed towards it. Subject positions, psyches, and bodies are interconnected and constituted through discourse. As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, racialized, classed, or gendered subject positions are important parts of how bodies are constructed in this empirical field and the possible and impossible routes these bodies could take after the dislocatory events.

Subject Positions and Identities

In this study I will use the terms subject positions, identities and identifications as interrelated concepts linked to relational and contingent constructions of meaning produced by discourse. Laclau and Mouffe argue that all objects and actions acquire meaning through a system of difference (Laclau & Mouffe 1990; 2008). Consequently, all objects and practices are “contextual, relational, and contingent” (Howarth 2005:317) and cannot be made meaningful outside of the discursive structure of meaning. How does this kind of relational meaning-making affect participants’ everyday life and the way they make sense out of their experiences? I suggest that dislocatory events and experiences, as well as relocatory trajectories, like the ones I study here, make the contingent character of subject positions, identities, and identifications particularly visible.

As suggested by ethnologist Anna Johansson, little attention has been paid to bodies in ethnological applied discourse theory (Johansson 2012:68).
The concept of *subject positions* describes the forms in which social agents are positioned and created within a determined discursive field. Mouffe has argued that all social agents must be understood “as constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’ that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences” (Mouffe 1993:77). An individual can thus be positioned in many different ways within discursive structures (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:13). As the reader will see, a participant might be positioned, and position him or herself, as a migrant, an Argentine citizen, a Soviet being, a Russian citizen, a cosmopolitan being, a professional, or unemployed in the same interview. Mouffe’s definition is useful for me because it underlines how subject positions can be constructed by various discourses, “among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a constant movement of over determination and displacement” (Mouffe 1993:77).

Discursive structures establish systems of relations between objects and practices, while providing subject positions for social agents (Howarth 2007:118). What then is the role of the lived experience ethnographers strive to analyze? Is there room for agency in this theoretical framework, or are we all just determined by our subject positions? Laclau and Mouffe have used the analogy of a game of football to explain the role of the subject in relation to discourse: “the same system of rules that makes that spherical object into a football, makes me a player” (Laclau & Mouffe 1990:101). This means that they emphasize the significant impact of discourse in providing the rules for the game, while also acknowledging the role of social actors in shaping identities and their possibilities in changing structures (Howarth 2007:124). In their critique of the Althusserian deterministic understanding of subjects being interpellated through ideological practices, they make a distinction between subject positions and political subjectivity, a concept they use to refer to the ways social agents act (Howarth 2007:124f). Through this concept they demonstrate that the discursive structure does not determine the subject, and instead emphasize the role of social actors in shaping identities and changing structures, but without granting them total liberty from structures (Howarth 2007:124). An individual might be conditioned by its place in various subject positions dependent upon contingent discourses. This very contingency is what grants the subject the possibility to act (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:13). This presupposes the concept of dislocation and how it makes the contingency of the structures visible.

Another related concept that I will use is *identity*. In PDT, objects and subjects do not have inherent essences; rather they are constructed in relation
to each other within the larger discursive systems. Rather than identity being a set of inherent qualities that develops throughout a life course, identities are thus seen as shaped by discourse. As I will return to, the act of identifying with different discourses is done through affective investments (Glynos & Howarth 2007:145; Sjöstedt Landén 2011:293). My material entails a field of multiple identifications in relation to past, present, and future lives and geographical locations, the interviews span multiple shifting positions depending upon whom they address or from where they speak.

The most suitable way to define identity for analyzing this material is Mouffe’s suggestion that identity is “always contingent and precarious” and “temporarily fixed at the intersection” of the subject positions available for an individual and the possible forms of identification (Mouffe 1993:77). Furthermore, identity is created in a relational process where “the condition of existence of every identity is the affirmation of a difference” (Mouffe 1993:2). This means that processes of identification are part of constituting “others” and assigning difference in accordance with discourse. This is important for understanding how participants relate to other social actors, such as Latin American migrants, for it has repercussions on how the world and society are constituted.

Relocatory Trajectory

Affect

The initial designs of this research project did not include theorizing the notion of affect. Rather, this need emerged out of the empirical material. An increasing focus on affect and emotions in social and cultural studies has recently been called the “affective turn” (see e.g. Gregg & Seighworth 2010; Wetherell 2012). As has been pointed out, feminist literature has long engaged with theories of emotion and affect (Gorton 2007). Scholars like Abu-Lughod (1986), bell hooks (1989) and Audre Lorde (1984) were early in working with feelings and emotions in relation to women’s lives and work, even if they did not work specifically on the theoretical concepts as such.

There are various ways to theorize affect and emotion; some draw a clear distinction between the two concepts (see e.g. Probyn 2005) while others do

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Based on the archeological writings of Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe argue that discursive formations are constituted by connected elements alike linguistic and social systems where all identities are relational and of necessary character (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:106; Howarth 2007:118).
not (see e.g. Ngai 2005; Wetherell 2012:19f). For analytical purposes, I use them interchangeably throughout this thesis. There is also an ongoing debate as to whether emotions and affect are best understood as a social or physiological phenomena when examining emotion in migration studies (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:73). Drawing on Sara Ahmed, I am interested in what affect does rather than what it is (see Ahmed 2014:4 [2004]). For my purposes, I use the concept of affect in its most literal meaning defined by the Oxford Dictionary in the following way: “1. Have an effect on; make a difference to. 1.1 Touch the feelings of; move emotionally”. I regard affect as part of the discursive meaning-making process and I approach the concept with Laclau’s assertion that discursive formations “would be unintelligible without the affective component” (Laclau 2005:111). Given this, affect here is seen as intrinsically part of social practice and the construction of subjects. People invest in signifying operations with the force of affect (Laclau 2005:110). Therefore I combine my analysis with theories of narrativity.

Narrativity

An interest in oral story telling or narratives is central to European ethnology and its tradition of folkloristic studies. In Swedish ethnology this can be seen in studies of different kinds of narratives (Arvidsson 1998; Drakos 1997; Lindqvist 1991; Marander-Eklund 2000; Palmenfeldt 2000; Wolanik Boström 2005; Woube 2014). In this study, this tradition is furthered developed through PDT where discourse is seen as the overarching structure, and narratives as genre-bound articulations of discourse. This means that what I here refer to as stories, can both be understood as reflections of a person’s life world, and as an embodied social practice (see Jackson 1996:39; Pink 2009).

Narrativity is a way to invest affectively, to move oneself and the listener. As such, I understand narration as both a linguistic and a material act of articulation. When participants spoke of their experiences it affected their bodies as well as mine, at the same time as it constructed the world in accordance with or in opposition to different discourses. In this way, the stories they told and the affect, with which they invest in discourse, have material agency – articulations of discourse do indeed transform physicality. I approach the participants’ stories as partly genre-bound narratives that become articulatory practice. Repetitions and genres of speech are important for the affective dimensions of discourse and its sedimentation. To narrate is

to act in the world and thus to articulate, in this the affective compound is important for understanding how and why people invest in discursive formations.

Narratives follow conventions, stories of personal experiences of migration can be expected to follow certain orders – there is a particular way to tell migration stories that become meaningful. What happened before and after the moment of the journey are examples of this (Nylund Skog 2012:73). We could also consider that these scripts follow certain logics in relation to different geographical places and how migration destinations then are understood, for example, in relation to geographical hierarchies. Charlotte Linde has argued that we strive to create coherence through the stories we tell about our selves and our lives (Linde 1993).

As social subjects other people expect us to have a story about ourselves that explains what we are and why that is. These life stories however are necessarily characterized by discontinuity rather than continuity (Linde 1993:27,152). The contingent character of the world we live in thus demands of us that we constantly revise our life story – perhaps dislocatory events like the ones described in this thesis call on us to revise and reconsider our stories, or more ordinary situations in everyday life call for different stories and causal explanations. I do not work with life stories as such, but drawing on Linde, I regard the stories of the participants as fragments of life stories narrated in order to organize and make meaning out of the present, the past, and the future in line with available discourses. This approach to stories opens up a space where subject positions becomes visible, through narratives characters are created – persons located in certain subject positions, how they can act and are assigned meaning is then possible to analyze.

Relocatory Trajectory

Recently, scholars of migration and mobility have started paying attention to the role of affect in migration processes, arguing that mainstream research focused on either economics or matters of cultural identity have downplayed the role of emotions, placing the affective realm as something private and thus separate from economic factors or mobility patterns (King & Mai 2009:297). Scholars have demonstrated how migration processes involve transformations of self and others in multiple locations and in various ways, it is a process that entails “re (negotiations)” of subjectivities, beliefs and changing prospects of the future (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:75; Rafaettá 2015).
In order to address the narrated experience of dislocatory events and various ways of coping affectively with its consequences, I have elaborated a theoretical concept I call *relocatory trajectory*. The notion of contingency is crucial for understanding the participant’s negotiations of their positions and new orders through this concept. How were their understandings of past, present and future possibilities and impossibilities changed and renegotiated? These are questions that concern mobility in spatial and social terms as well as social positioning; something the concept of relocatory trajectory helps me capture.

This concept is related to the concepts of dislocatory events and experiences. Dislocations make the contingent character of discursive orders visible; leaving subjects in a void thus forcing individuals to embark on relocatory processes (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:13). As Laclau indicates, dislocations threaten identities, but are also “the foundation on which new identities are constituted” (Laclau 1990:39). This suggests that after having experienced dislocatory events, such as the collapse of the USSR one has to relocate oneself in relation to a new set of dominant discourses. This is of course a process that affects different subjects in particular ways. Therefore the concept of relocatory trajectory also includes an affective dimension. Subjects, who after having invested in discourses that were dominant in their pasts – but no longer are – were forced to carry out major emotional work to relocate themselves. To tell the stories of these events, like participants did in interviews, can also be seen as part of this emotional work.

Scholars investigating the role of affect in migration processes have noted how migration processes entail crucial transformations along one’s life course, “involving the transmission, reproduction, and evolution of emotions in relation to belonging, identity, and ‘home’” (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:74). Drawing on Ahmed, ethnologist Annie Woube argues that in migratory processes the need to establish feelings of belonging can have the effect of reorientation. Woube regards the shaping of belonging “as a process and aspiration over time, which starts with having an orientation and a direction toward something that attracts our attention, which leads to acting upon practices of finding one’s way, by establishing one’s direction” (2014: 17). In my material this is seen not only in a search for belonging, but also in the various ways participants negotiate hindrances and problems in everyday life. Migratory processes do of course entail reorientation of one’s life and possible trajectories in relation to social structures of power that make possible or impossible which positions we can inhabit. Migration scholar Sara Ahlstedt has drawn attention to how expectations of the world and the
feelings related to it in processes of migration affect subjects differently according to social lines of differentiation (Ahlstedt 2016:20). In this study I look at the intersectional axes of race, class, and gender, focusing particularly on racialized positions.

The theoretical concept of *relocatory trajectory* thus addresses life after having experienced dislocatory events and the present negotiations of positions, ideals, self-understandings, emotions, past world, and future possibilities. It captures how ruptured life trajectories are understood, and how the search for new identities, positions, and identifications are articulated. Relocatory trajectory has a spatial, an affective, and a life biographic dimension. As a theoretical concept it makes the relation between dislocation and directions, visible, in terms of the economies of expectancy. Since it entails perspectives of narrativity it also presupposes that part of the quest for coherence or causal relations for the routes chosen in relocatory trajectories was created in the moment of interview, as part of a renegotiation of self and the relation between researcher and interviewee (Linde 1993). By directing attention to discourse, affect and trajectories in these particular cases I suggest that this work is not only about migrant experience as a category, but rather about a human condition in a more broad sense (see Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:75).

Race, Critical Whiteness, and Coloniality

One premise for this investigation is that structural power relations, in this particular case race, class, and gender, cannot be analyzed separately and apart from each other; rather they are interconnected and impact individual and collective subjects, positions, and identifications in various ways. They can be articulated together or separately, or, as Anne McClintock puts it, “they come into existence in and through relation to each other” (McClintock 1995:5). The experience of one category alters the meaning of another as one particular intersection creates particular effects (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992).

Intersections of Power

The concept of intersectionality is an important instrument for an inquiry of this kind of interlaced power structures (see for example Brah 1992; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Anthias & Yuval Davis 1992; de los Reyes, P. & Mulinari, D. 2005). First theorized as an epistemological critique of Anglo-Saxon white feminist inability to include black women’s racialized and
classed experiences of oppression in their analysis and practices, Kimberlé
Crenshaw used an analogy of road intersections to describe the simultaneous
making of manifold oppressions to which a black woman could be subjected
(Crenshaw 1989:149).

In the Swedish academic context, Paulina de los Reyes, Diana Muliniari
and Irene Molina have advocated the need to theorize how racism and
ethnicity play crucial roles in the social structuring of privileges and sub-
ordination (2002). In discussion with Nina Lykke’s understanding of gender
as a privileged category within intersectionality (Lykke 2003) for example, de
los Reyes and Muliniari have argued that gender must be understood as a
category characterized by and made in relation to race and class oppression
(2005). They have called for an intersectional understanding of how cate-
gories like gender or race are made, always, in relation to each other and in
relation to social inequality and cultural ideas about race, class, national
borders, or geographical hierarchies (de los Reyes & Muliniari 2005:7–11).

Power relations are central for my understanding of the relation between
discourse, subject positions, and self-understandings; through looking at
contingent subject positions, such as the relations between being positioned
as a migrant or a mobile professional, and the emotions that being assigned
to the wrong category might cause, one can understand how power, ideology,
and inequality are linked to individual or collective possibilities (Mouffe
1993:77; de los Reyes & Muliniari 2005:16). In my understanding, subject
positions are created in the intersectional and relational making of meaning.

The way I use intersectionality can be outlined along the lines of the
definition provided by de los Reyes and Muliniari: a theoretical approach that
makes visible how historically and contextually determined power relations
are made through social inequality, hierarchies and articulations of race,
class, and gender (see de los Reyes & Muliniari 2005:24). The interlaced
making of various power structures and formations of identity, which is
central for the concept of intersectionality, can be compared to Laclau and
Mouffe’s idea about the over-determined social field (Gustavsson 2008:19).
As Mouffe has argued, an individual positioned in the social field and in
various subject positions can “be dominant in one relation while sub-
ordinated in another” (Mouffe 1993:77). When I initiated this study I began
investigating gendered relations, but soon found out that racialized subject
positions and identifications seemed to be dominant categories in the
empirical material, therefore the main focus of the intersectional structures
in this study is the making of race and whiteness.
As de los Reyes and Mulinari have pointed out, exercise of power and inequality are linked to hierarchical orders where reality is represented in dichotomies: women and men, natives and immigrants, young and old, and so forth (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:24f). This resembles the relational meaning-making processes suggested by Laclau and Mouffe. In this study I look specifically at how intersectional makings of race, class, and gender are made relationally through articulations that are constitutive for coloniality. Race, class, and gender are constructions that are simultaneously lived and made meaningful, contingent categories differently constituted and intersecting in varying historical settings (Butler 2006:3). Scholars have for example indicated that historically, whiteness has been connected to categories such as class, where workers have been racialized as less white or deprived of their whiteness in certain conditions (Roediger 2005; Jacobson 1998; Ignatiev 1995; Dyer 1997).

Race and Whiteness

Ideas of race, and perceptions of certain racialized subjects’ supposed inferiority or superiority over another, can be traced back through human history (Graham 1990:2). The scientific concept of race and the institutionalization of whiteness as a superior category were made through eighteenth century development in scientific classifications of people (Graham 1990:2). This has created a particular racialist thinking, not necessarily dependent upon a racist intention.

In my understanding, and following the general consensus in critical studies of race, race is to be understood as a discursively constructed category that, to varying degrees, conditions people’s everyday life influencing actions and processes of meaning-making. In my material race plays a major role for the relocatory trajectories participants were able to invest in. Differentiations on

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8 The works of Carl von Linnaeus and Charles Darwin are examples of scientific production that laid grounds for an assumed scientific foundation for racism (Graham 1990:2).
9 Race is a term that has been reluctantly used in a Swedish academic context as it connotes historical ideas of biological differences between people. It is however an analytical term frequently used in Anglosaxian scholarship, as well as in the Argentine context. Scholars agree that there is no such thing as race other than as a social construction (Goldberg 2009; Molina 2005). This means that there does not exist phenotypically characteristics or genetically differences between people that is accountable for cultural differences (Molina 2005:103).
the basis of the social construction of race can be seen as a social practice conditioned by discourse (Goldberg 2009; Molina 2005: 103).

As recently claimed within the Swedish academic context, regardless of the rejection of race as an explanatory biological fact, the idea of race and stereotypes related to the way people look is still present and it affects contemporary social practices10 (Hübìnètte et al. 2012; Hübìnètte & Tigervall 2009; Lilja 2015; Lundström 2007; Motsieloa 2003; Schmauch 2006). As will be discussed in depth throughout this thesis, contingent social constructions of race have had an impact on how participants have relocated themselves in Argentina and in the way they and others create meaning out of their situation. This makes race – and particularly meaning-making that is related to personal appearance or where one is positioned for example in labor markets – an important analytical concept for understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion. As Ruth Frankenberg has argued: “Race, like gender, is ‘real’ in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experience and life chances” (Frankenberg 1993:11).

Race is not a fixed category, but something that is constantly constructed in social processes. Racialization is usually employed as a perspective to denote the processes in which racial categorizations, tropes, and associations that make hierarchies between individuals and groups appear as natural are made (Hübìnètte et al. 2012:15; Molina 2005:96). Through the process of racialization, as Robert Miles has put it, “the representational process whereby social significance is attached to certain biological (usually pheno-typically) human features” social difference is created (Miles & Brown 2003:100). However, in order for racialized subject positions to make sense, certain ideas of race have to be constitutive for how social relations and institutional societal life is structured (Molina 2005:97). It is thus pertinent

10 Ethnicity is another term often used to describe processes connected to the making of similar identities and social boundaries (Hylland Eriksén 1998). It is widely used in critical cultural and social studies also in conjunction with race as a category (Brah 1996; Butler 1990; Adib & Guerrier 2003) This concept however has been critiqued for obscuring specific processes of segregation and exclusion related to the way people look (Lundström 2007; Molina 1997). Furthermore, in the Swedish context ‘ethnicity’ has become a term often used to describe “others” in Western society, for example migrants from the global South are “ethnic” while Westerns are not (Eriksson et al 1999). To direct focus towards racialization processes where the making of whiteness is part of power structures both at intra-individual and societal level, it is more suitable for my understanding of social identities and processes of meaning-making as contingent and laden by power, to work with the concepts race, racializations, and whiteness.
in the usage of race and racialization to inquire how and why notions of race are constructed and what consequences racialized social meanings carry within determined political and socioeconomic circumstances (Molina 2005:104). How did processes of racialization affect participants after arrival in Argentina and what can that tell us about power structures in their particular case?

In order to examine how race is lived and made meaningful in these particular cases I use whiteness as an analytical concept. Whiteness can be understood as a hegemonic norm in Western societies, something that is constructed by discourse, performed and acted upon in daily life. Like Ruth Frankenberg noted in her classic study in the field of whiteness studies, “white people are raced, just as men are gendered” (Frankenberg 1993:1). The use of whiteness as an analytical concept varies within the field; it might be used to describe subject positions, societal norms, or social practices. My understanding of whiteness corresponds to Frankenberg’s definition: “whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (Frankenberg 1993:6). This definition allows for an analysis of how practices and subject positions might be racialized (Frankenberg 1993:7), which is crucial for understanding the role of race in the participants’ relocatory trajectories.

Catrin Lundström has called attention to how race and whiteness are not commonly explicit concepts in studies of migration; rather migration and whiteness appear as a paradox (Lundström 2014:1f). Similarly, I posit that it is valuable to view white migration as any other migration shaped by “historical and contemporary racial hierarchies and ‘racial formations’ within the ‘host country’” (Lundström 2014:6). The concept of whiteness, with all its implications of naturalized power (Dyer 1997), is probably best

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11 Culturally constructed ideas on Swedishness constitute a classical object of investigation in Swedish ethnology. The study of whiteness in association to understandings of Swedishness, however, is quite new for ethnology. Some examples are how Anna Lundstedt used Ghassan Hage’s theory of white governmentality to analyze the Swedish colonial context seen through a textile-project for migrant women in an urban marginalized setting. Another example is Maria Bäckman’s investigation of how young white girls negotiate classed, gendered, and racialized understandings of Swedishness in a marginalized urban setting (2009). And also, how Anne Woube used whiteness as an analytical concept in order to scrutinize the constructions of belonging among Swedish migrants in Costa del Sol (Woube 2014).
Anthropologist Galen Joseph has argued that this local construction of European-ness is always ambivalent and created in negotiation with constructions of whiteness elsewhere in the world (Joseph 2000). Joseph’s study is one of few on whiteness in the Argentine context. Thus whiteness, and its privileges, is not static, it varies in time and place, intersects with other constructions of power and is probably best analyzed as a structural privileged position formed in interaction between local and global power structures (Frankenberg 1993; Lundström 2015; Lilja 2015). Whiteness is not always hegemonic and it is important to keep an eye open for counter narratives in constructions of whiteness. What does social constructions of whiteness tell us about a certain setting or determined historical period (Lilja 2015:29)?

When writing about whiteness there is of course always a risk of essentializing whiteness, indeed it is problematic that a critical undertaking risks becoming part of its own object (Ahmed 2011:125; Dyer 1997:10; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:98). As Ahmed has noted, this is however implicit in any project that sets out to deconstruct or challenge invisibilized privileges linked to certain categories. Ahmed directs attention to the making of whiteness – it is important to study what it does rather than to perceive it as an ontological fact. According to her, whiteness can be regarded as a continuum, a story still in the making that directs bodies and influences the size of space they are allowed to occupy. Likewise, Richard Dyer has pointed out that as long as race is something only brought up in relation to non-white people, whiteness functions as a human norm. “Other people are raced, we are just people” (Dyer 1997:1). Directing attention to how whiteness is a racialized category, linked to a colonial past, constructed and maintained through social practice, also sheds light on the contingency of whiteness and how inclusion into that category varies with social, historical, and geographical contexts (Bonnett 2000).

Coloniality

This study follows scholars who argue that colonial relations and former discourses on race are still present in our societies, constituting a colonial

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12 This can be compared to the related positions between whiteness and Swedishness in the Swedish context, where these subject positions are linked and play a part in the process of exclusion and inclusion (Mattsson 2005; Lilja 2015:27)

13 See also Bastia & vom Hau (2014) for a discussion on whiteness, race and nation-building in Argentina.
logic that permeates Western modernity and shapes possible subject positions and identities (see for example Lugones 2007; McClintock 2005; Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012). As has been demonstrated, the ‘post’ in post-colonial studies does not indicate a rupture with colonial systems and discourses, but rather serves to describe the linkages between former discourses and the present (Loomba 2008:22). My entrance into this field, and the approach of my theoretical framework as a whole, is inspired by the extensive scholarship of postcolonial feminism that accompanied my undergraduate years (see e.g. Ahmed 2011; de los Reyes et al. 2011, 2006; Mohanty 2003).

Recently scholars have discussed the relations between the “postcolonial” and the “postsocialist” (see e.g. Chari & Verdery 2009; Grabowska 2012; Moore 2001; Suchland 2011; Tlostanova 2012). There are both differences and intersecting similarities between these fields. Routed in postcolonial epistemologies, my empirical material has directed me towards scholarship shaped by Latin American and postsocialist realities (Tlostanova 2012; Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012), and a number of scholars who work with de-colonial theories. As Tlostanova has suggested, I have found that the de-colonial approach can “serve as a bridge between these theories” (Tlostanova 2012:171).

First formulated in the late 1980s by sociologist Aníbal Quijano, the concept of coloniality of power links hegemonic ideas of rational European modernity with the colonial project, capitalism, and contemporary global orders (Quijano [1992] 2007). According to Quijano, the coloniality of power developed with the conquest of the Americas, an event that initiated the constitution of a new world order. Quijano argues that even if the colonial

14 Many de-colonial scholars place themselves outside of the European rationale of postmodernism from which post-colonial studies emerged (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012). For example Mignolo writes: “The de-colonial shift, in other words, is a project of de-linking while post-colonial criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy” (Mignolo 2007:452). I do however work with a post-structural framework, incorporating perspectives from de-colonial studies.

15 Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova have theorized the colonial matrix of power that emerged in the 16th century, as based upon four interrelated spheres: First, the quest for economic control i.e. seizure of land and natural resources, or in exploitation of labor; Second, “the struggle for the control of authority”, i.e. governmental, financial or legal systems; Third, “the control of gender and sexuality”, the colonial quest also brought with it an imposition of Christian sexual normativity and dual gender relations, as María Lugones has pointed out was lacking in Quijano’s first theorization (2008); And finally, “control of knowledge and subjectivity through education and colonizing the existing knowledges”. This final sphere was part of the imperial control over colonies and, Mignolo
period has ended, particular modes of domination and categorizations still prevail, such as those derived from the centrality of race for the colonial project and capitalist expansion (Quijano 2007). Various de-colonial scholars have since developed Quijano’s theories further (see e.g. Escobar 2010; Grosfougel 2011; Lugones 2008; Mignolo 1999).

I have chosen to work with what Walter Mignolo has called a logic of coloniality, where the concept of coloniality is closely linked to the idea of modernity (Mignolo 2007; 2011). Mignolo argues that modernity is a complex European narrative upon which Western civilization has been built and where the constitutive impact of the colonial project has been hidden. “Coloniality”, Mignolo suggests, “is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality” (Mignolo 2011:3). Together with Madina Tlostanova, Mignolo has argued that coloniality started as “a specific set of processes” with the Spanish and Portuguese colonial missions (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012:39). They argue that the contemporary world is “a consequence of the ‘colonial revolution’ rather than the French or the Industrial ones” (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012:39). This has an impact on how we understand, “not only the West and its colonies, but also the rest of the world, particularly Eurasia, which was later mentally colonized by the discourses of modernity” (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012:40). As Tlostanova has noted, the spaces and people of the postsocialist world are still, even after 1989, made into “others” through temporal and colonial ideas about modernity (Tlostanova 2012).

When writing about postsocialist migration to Argentina it is thus important to look at contemporary conditions through a lens of coloniality that captures both historical eras of migration, and also contemporary global conditions that characterize contingent processes of how race, class, and gender were and are made. Modernity is also a concept that can be linked to hope and aspirations for better futures. The Soviet Union strived for its version of utopian modernity, likewise global capitalism nourishes its promises of modernity (Pine 2014). I propose that different understandings of modernity, and its colonial backside, affected possible routes and identifications in participants’ relocatory trajectories.

and Tlostanova argue is what makes domination still possible (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012:44).
Method and Material

As an ethnologist my main interest is lived experience and everyday life. In order to answer the research questions, qualitative ethnographic methods such as interviews and observations are employed. Engaging with discourse theory affects methodological and analytical choices; it is indeed a “package” as suggested by Winther Jörgensen and Philips (2000). However, this is not a ready-made toolbox, but, rather, each researcher puts the package together according to the problem of the inquiry (Gerber, Gunnarsson Payne & Lundgren 2012). Therefore I have constructed my own analytical toolbox, fitting the theoretical concepts described above with the methodological choices that will be discussed here.

Throughout the research process I have asked the interviewees what their lives are like, and what they find important in terms of their migration and life in Argentina. With a focus on understanding the kind of discourses that made their expectations, frustrations, and dreams possible or impossible, we have discussed their past lives, their relocatory trajectories in Argentina, and their present. The process has been guided by a desire to understand the participants, and throughout the analysis my searchlight has oscillated between theory, material, and methods. This is a flexible methodology that stays faithful to the problem and the material, and as such it is related to the ethnological practice of flexibility in choice of methods in relation to research objectives and the character of the field16 (Kaijser & Öhlander 2011).

Research Participants

The general pattern of the postsocialist migration to Argentina was that of family-migration, however the amount of single mothers migrating with their children stands out from other contemporary migrant patterns to Argentina (Marcogliese 2003:51). I have interviewed fourteen individuals, eight men and six women, who have settled permanently in Argentina. They were all at different stages of their life when they initiated the process of migration with their families (13) or alone (1) to Argentina during the period between 1996 and 2001. My criterion for selecting participants was that they had arrived in Argentina with the MI 4632/94 resolution on immigration from former Soviet Republics, between the years 1994 and 2001. In order to

16 Certainly, the alternating movement between literature searches, theory, field observations, and writing that led up to this finished text also stems from a hermeneutic qualitative tradition traditionally employed by the ethnologist (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:42).
ensure their anonymity I have changed their names (see more about this is the section on ethical considerations). There is a list of participants in the section “References”.

The participants do not constitute a homogenous group; rather they arrived at different stages of their life, with different experiences, backgrounds, and from different geographical settings. With the oldest born in the late 1950s and the youngest in the early 1990s there is a great span of experiences in my material, and one should keep in mind that they all set out with different expectations and feelings about their migration. In my material it is possible to identify working class and upper middle class positions, both before and after migration. The interviewees’ self-understandings, and the subject positions they identified with when they left the post-Soviet crisis, affected the way they narrated their memories, and the way they remembered who they were during the first years in Argentina. It is also important to note that participants arrived at different times – some years before and some directly during the Argentine crisis. Their memories from these dislocatory events and the way they conditioned them necessarily differ. However, as will be discussed in this thesis, they seem to share a common narrative about these events.

There are, of course, generational differences between the interviewees, both in terms of their experiences of the USSR and the dislocatory events after its collapse, as well as in their level of integration into Argentina through for example the public school system. I have interviewed six individuals born in the late 1950s or 1960s who became adults during late socialism and already had professions, careers, and children when they decided to migrate. Then there are five participants who were born in the late 1970s and early 1980s, who all came to adulthood in independent Ukraine or Russia; most of them had just started a career when their parents or spouse decided to migrate. Finally, three participants were born in the beginning of the 1990s; they had arrived with their parents and passed through the Argentine education system from the beginning.

All, but one participant, reside in the city or province of Buenos Aires, which is the province they first arrived at. Their levels of education range from university studies and technological expert knowledge to more manual trades. Their employment and material situation at the time of the interview varied quite significantly. There were cultural workers, self-employed, semi-skilled and white-collar workers in different situations of informal work, or on formal work contracts with all social benefits.

The results of this investigation are based upon interviews and observations from meeting with these fourteen individuals. This is, admittedly, a
rather small number of interviews. However due to the heterogeneity of the group I do find it relevant to underline the many features and conditions shared by participants from different backgrounds. The fourteen individuals can be regarded as witnesses of shared dislocatory experiences. My contribution is the ethnographic in-depth understanding of their experience and an analysis of the micro processes at play in a larger historical process.

Why Russia and Ukraine
I initiated this project in the fall of 2011 and my choice of Russia and Ukraine was solely due to the fact that these participants were the easiest to locate. Most of them had links to both of the countries, for example a Russian and a Ukrainian parent, and many had also lived in both countries during Soviet times. Very few spoke of differences between Ukrainians and Russians, and some said that they were all the same according to the former narrative of brotherhood between the new independent nations.

However, two years into my project, Ukraine saw massive protests as current president Victor Janukovitj turned down a trade agreement with the EU. The Maidan protests in the fall of 2013 led to the fall of his government, and he was replaced by Arsenij Jatsenjuk. In 2014 Russia invaded Crimea and claimed it as Russian after a referendum. In the eastern parts of Ukraine many protested against Jatsenjuk’s government and its legitimacy. These events sparked a civil war between government forces and separatists supported by Russia. As my fieldwork progressed we would speak about the situation in Ukraine, but after expressing their anger or sadness for such “unnecessary war” between “brother nations” they preferred to speak of their daily lives in Argentina instead. Thus the dramatic events occurring in Ukraine, also affecting Russian politics, had little influence on this fieldwork.

Interviews
Interviews constitute the main material for this thesis. The interview is a well-recognized method for ethnographers in search of knowledge about people’s self-understandings and life worlds (Gray 2002:71). The recordings range between 40 and 180 minutes. They were conducted during four different periods of fieldwork: February 2012, November and December 2013, November 2014, and December 2015. I have met with some of the participants several times. One of the interviews was conducted through Facebook in a long series of messages translating into over twenty pages. Some interviews were also followed up through Facebook Chat.
Locating Participants for Interviews

During my first fieldwork period in 2012, I interviewed two women whose names and phone numbers were given to me by friends and acquaintances in Buenos Aires. I was hoping to snowball my way to new participants after meeting them, but it turned out to be quite difficult. Both women said that they did not associate with anyone else who had arrived with the same program. “I like Argentines better”, one of them stated referring back to what she had said in the interview of how the other postsocialist migrants were “stuck in time”.

With time, the difficulty in accessing the field became a particular issue for this investigation. Like the first two participants, some said they did not associate with other Ukrainians or Russians, and those that did have acquaintances would often report back that their friend had said they were too busy to meet with me, or too “ashamed of their situation”. When asking interviewees why it was so difficult to get others to participate, many said it could be due to mistrust. “Perhaps they escaped from bandits over there and do not want to be found” one participant told me. Another said my Spanish was too Argentine – perhaps if they heard me over the phone they would not be able to tell if I was actually an Argentine government spy. “This is not a Swede, she’s pretending” someone told me they had thought while first talking to me over the phone. In some ways, my physical appearance could also suggest that I was a person sent from Russia or Ukraine, assigned other tasks than the ones I claimed I was working with. Race, national belonging, and participants’ past experiences thus played a role here.

During my second period of fieldwork I decided to make a Facebook event with some information about my project. I considered the ethical implications of this (Ulmer & Cohen 2016), but given the difficulties in finding participants it was truly the fastest and most effective way to access and benefit from my whole network. Indeed, I received many responses and the event was shared in different forums. Still, the first person whose name and number had been suggested through Facebook was reluctant, and in her hesitation I could sense that same mistrust. After similar reluctant encounters, and faced with a major issue of lack of time – participants worked around the clock in various subsistence jobs while sometimes also studying full time – I realized I had to change the way I presented my research.

At this point a man, here called Vadim, wrote to me on Facebook that he had arrived in Argentina from Russia in 1997 and he wanted to participate in my investigation. I thanked him and asked for his number in order to call him and tell him some more about the research project. He answered in the
typical manner, which conveyed both lack of time and mistrust: “I work in the afternoons and I study in the morning, there is no time in the day that I can attend a telephone call. It is better and faster if you write me here and tell me more about your project”. While reading his message, I remembered a small comment made by one of the women interviewed during the first fieldwork. “Why would anyone from Sweden be interested in this?” she had wanted to know when my friend asked her to meet with me. Up until this moment, I had obviously not found a compelling way to present a proper motive for my study.

Thus, trusting my instinct, I wrote to Vadim saying that I was interested in knowing about postsocialist migrant experience in Argentina because it seemed that it was an unknown part of history in the world, a lost piece of human experience that no one knew about. This was accurate, for one initial aim of my research had been to turn Western-centered ideas of migration around, and direct attention to other routes and destinies. Yet at the same time this implicated that I wanted to be able to tell the story of these individuals – which was a subtle wish to give them a voice (see Spivak 2010; Tlostanova 2014:159).

This approach worked. Vadim answered that my cause was “noble and just” and therefore he “would help me even if he actually lacked time”. From that moment I started to explain my interest in the topic in this way, and it proved easier to get people to participate. This, of course, has implications for the knowledge produced and presented here, as interviews sometimes turned into testimonial situations where participants voiced how they had been wronged or neglected by various societal bodies. Feminist researchers have discussed this kind of dilemma involving trust, power, and transparency towards participants in the process of fieldwork. For example, Frankenberg adopts a “dialogical” approach in her interviews, meaning that she steps out of the “blank-faced research persona” explicitly positioning herself as involved in the field in order to secure interest and commitment (1993:30f). In her difficulties in accessing her field she describes a similar process of reformulating her approach in order to establish trust so that women participated in interviews (Frankenberg 1993:34f).

The Interview as a Co-construction of Knowledge
Interviewing as a method poses certain ethical considerations. Some have pointed out how the constructivist epistemology of discourse analysis may stand in contrast to how interviewees apprehend the interview situation (Hammersley 2014). I approached the interviews, both in the moment of
performing them as well in the analysis, as discursive events created by the participant and the researcher from the first contact until the moment of the interview (Gray 2002:95).

The interviews were semi-structured around a wide range of topics related to migration and issues related to practices of settling into a new place. Special attention was directed towards themes that could be related to participants’ understanding of the past, their current life, and their hopes for the future. I initiated each interview by asking the participants to speak about themselves, where they were born, and in which year. The interviews usually then took on the form of why and how they arrived in Argentina and stories of what had happened to them there. The semi-structure left space for the participants to add things they thought important in relation to their migration and their present life in Argentina.

Some interviews transformed into quite personal accounts of sorrows and problems. This was indeed often related to the initial way I had presented my interest in this particular migration, but it also occurred in interviews where I had not stated that my interest was related to the invisibility of this particular migration. At times, my participation was limited to emotional expressions of understandings, such as “that’s terrible” or “how awful”. However, finding it unethical not to get involved when someone spoke of their hardships, and also as a way to overcome initial mistrust, I did share with participants examples of my own personal difficulties and emotions in relation to life in Argentina.17 Positioned as a participant in the field, in my own experience of being a privileged white migrant in Argentina, but also in having lived in a former social-democratic welfare state,18 I could draw on my own experiences of life in Argentina or memories from for example communal child-care facilities as a source of identification for establishing trust (see also Frankenberg 1993:36).

17 See Wolanik Broström (2005:36) for a discussion on biographical narratives and the impossibility and unethical aspects of maintaining an “intellectual distance” and not getting involved. Or see Ries (1997:109) for an understanding of how her responses to interviewees’ stories were necessary for the “flow of litanies” she found in Russian Perestroika time conversations.

18 There are indeed many differences between the Nordic welfare states and the Soviet states in the early 1980s, however, from an Argentinean perspective participants born in the 1980s and I shared many similar childhood memories, such as communal childcare, summer camps or state-organized culture events for children.
1 – INTRODUCTION

Insider and Outsider Positions
During interviews, I experienced a constant shifting between different insider and outsider positions. For example, during a conversation with two Ukrainian women at a classic porteño pizza place, one of the women suddenly opened her bag and showed me a piece of dill she had worked very hard to find. “Those of us that were born in the Soviet Union go crazy for this” she explained to me. However, the herb dill is very much part of traditional Swedish cooking and as we leaned forward to smell the green leaves, food preparations also from my childhood materialized. Thus, talking about recipes that seemed to have a lot of commonality, we created a distinct “us” in comparison to the Argentine atmosphere surrounding us.

Many times the insider’s position was created by references to physiognomies. Most participants and I shared a racialized white position and similar experiences, both positive and negative, of being a privileged white migrant in Argentine public and private spaces. For example when one woman spoke of being harassed on a public train for being blonde and foreign, I recalled a similar incident from the time I commuted to the city from a Buenos Aires province. We shared the experience of being othered, a sense of fear and an inability to defend ourselves properly through verbal language in that situation. Still there were of course many circumstances from which my more privileged position had protected me. My identification as a woman constructed certain insider positions in interviews with women where we could share experiences of sexual harassment, but also presented certain obstacles when interviewing men. However often included in a shared position of Europeanness or Nordicness, I also experienced being placed outside of a distinctive “Slavishness”.

Ethnographers always struggle with insider and outsider positions, this being an issue that raises questions of one’s position in the field and its effect on the material, particularly in contexts when one carries out research in a community one can be ascribed as belonging to (Farahani 2010; Fröhlig 2013; Wolanik Boström 2005:17; Wolanik Boström & Öhlander 2011). Ascribed belongings, such as nationality or ideas of race played a part in the creation of this book. In this case the Argentine space and racial constructions

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19 The clear distinction often made in Sweden between Nordic and Russian/Slavic is not always so clearly defined in Argentina. I have come across many situations where “Nordic” and “Slavic” has been combined. This can also be seen for example in official discourse, i.e. a book on Russian immigration to Argentina where Swedish-speaking Finns, although during Tsarist times, are included in its scope (See Ehrenhaus & Garrido 2012). My intention in pointing this out is not to indicate that this is mistaken, but rather to show the contingencies of constructions of belonging, racial as well as national.
approximated us, producing more insider-position than would have been possible if we had met in Sweden or Russia where we would have been placed in other categories. In the particular setting of Buenos Aires, we shared a position of being European migrants. Although we were living under very different circumstances, we could nevertheless be placed in certain positions vis-à-vis each other and through determined relations. This can be compared to Catrin Lundström’s discussion about how her interviews with Swedish migrant women were characterized by whiteness as it shaped histories of proximity and distance between her, the participants, and “others” (Lundström 2014:39).

Nevertheless, aside from the similarities created during interviews, the migration regulations that had led participants to Argentina also positioned me as an outsider to their struggles with migration regimes, and them as outsiders in relation to European belonging. Apart from migratory regulations this can also be understood as part of the colonial notions of the divide between Western Europe and its “othered” Eastern counterpart (Tlostanova 2012). Sometimes Sweden and the participants’ restricted access to Western European space came up in our conversations. For instance, Vadim said he loved Sweden and had actually passed through the airport outside of Stockholm on his way to Argentina. An airport that according to him was “sealed off” during transit, so “that none of us Russians could escape into Sweden”. Stories like that were brutal manifestations of what migration regimes do to bodies and self-understandings, we were alike in so many ways, but the different passports we held was a physical and symbolical border, limiting our possibilities.

Another position I could occupy or be placed in during fieldwork and interviews was that of the Argentine. When this study was initiated it had been more than seven years since I first arrived in Argentina and after living there for another five years my knowledge of Argentine social codes was helpful in finding participants. Interestingly, the Swedish community in Buenos Aires and, as it turned out, its member’s many alliances with Slavic migrants also turned out to be a great resource.

Interviewing in a Foreign Language
All interviews were conducted in Spanish, a language neither the participants nor I had as native language, but nevertheless a language all of us had spoken on a daily basis for over a decade. I believe that this shared second language of ours worked in both connective and distancing ways. Sometimes we were foreigners sharing similar experiences of the encounter with the linguistically
carried worlds of meaning of Argentine Spanish. We could stop and search for correct words together, or we compared accents or ways of pronouncing certain combinations of letters. We established trust as we laughed together at language errors that in the past had resulted in comical situations and complemented each other’s linguistic abilities or peculiar accents. Yet, on other occasions, one of us spoke more naturally than the other, thus creating different kind of idiomatic power-laden positions.

This can be compared to how ethnologists discuss how the lack of a shared native language might increase certain types of knowledge production. Agnes Ers discusses for example how this lack transformed her and interviewees’ shared English or French as second languages into a linguistic ground for encounters (Ers 2006 35f.). Similarly, Karin Lindelöf suggests how other means of interpretation than shared language might call bring about other positions in a constantly shifting field. Even though she did not share nationally specific cultural references with her participants, Lindelöf found other insider positions, such as being an educated urban young woman (Lindelöf 2006:40). The type of knowledge produced here, and the type of participants I could have accessed, would of course look different if I had carried out interviews in Russian or Ukrainian. However, not sharing a common national belonging creates another type of knowledge. As Malewska-Szalygin has pointed out, to share “the same native language only creates an illusion of having something in common” (2012:71).

Consequently, in each interview various acts of translations – between Russian or Ukrainian, Swedish and Argentine Spanish – spanning different local histories and systems of meanings took place. In each revision of the material yet another layer of such acts of translations have been added since I have transformed the quotes from the interviews into English, many times at the loss of local expressions and sense of insider or outsider positions in vernacular language. The quotes are as close to original as possible, however, when the interviewee spoke poorly some transformation has been done to provide more readable text. To facilitate reading of the quotes, my system of transcription and arrangement of quotes for reading is as follows:

- Shorter pause: ...
- Maximum three words cut out: /.../
- Sentence or more cut out: //...//
- Sounds: (Laughter)
Approaching the Field Through Fiction

Before and during the first period of fieldwork I wrestled with a sense of not being fully able to grasp the world participants had come from. As an ethnologist I had been trained to study everyday life and to problematize the objects, actions and notions we take for granted. The only problem was that I had no idea what was taken for granted by a generation born for example in the 1960s USSR. I was also very aware of not entering my field as a Westerner looking to study the peculiarities of “Eastern Europeans” as the “others” of Europe (Wolff 1994).

In one of her books, Belarusian writer Svetlana Aleksijevitj reflects upon how one of her interviewees once told her that only a Soviet being could understand another Soviet being (2013:11). Does it take a shared past to fully understand someone? Perhaps not, for if so, then most ethnographic endeavor would be in vain. Rather, Aleksijevitj’s texts are a good example of writing with the power to transcend these boundaries. At an early stage, Aleksijevitj’s work and the manifold voices speaking from Soviet and post-Soviet times through her pen guided the research process to questions and assumptions that would otherwise have been impossible to formulate (Aleksijevitj 1992; 2012; 2013; 2014).

When well written, literary pieces might capture not only the micro social relations ethnographers seek to comprehend, but also the serendipities and aching hearts of human existence (see e.g. Gottlieb 2016; Narayan 2012). Accordingly, as part of my ethnographic methodology I have allowed literary works guide the research process to questions and assumptions, experiencing the Russian and Ukrainian present and past through the eyes of contemporary and historical writers from the region. Many are thus the experiences that led me into my field and to the design of questions related to pasts and futures that sometimes coincided, or seemed utterly distant, from the Argentine present where we met.

Participatory Observations and Auto-Ethnographic Observations

Participatory observations give the ethnographic researcher another type of insight than interviews do (Öhlander 1999b). The participatory observations made in this inquiry can be understood as a way to contextualize the

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One such example that is best captured through observation might be the discrepancy between what people say in interviews and what they then do or how they act in professional situations (Silow Kallenberg 2016; Öhlander 1999). In the case of this research, participatory observations took place at cultural gatherings organized by the Russian embassy and other Russian or Ukrainian cultural associations and restaurants in Buenos Aires. After, or sometimes during, observations I would write down feelings, analytical thoughts, ideas, places, people, quotes, smells, and all sorts of factors that captured the social world I was partaking in, and that may later be important for understanding my material (Gray 2002:88).

I also took classes in Russian with one research participant to get a better understanding of her working life. These observations provided me with useful insights into her daily working life in public places. My observations included listening in on jokes with waiters she had known for quite some time, being introduced to many of her acquaintants, being told how to dress, behave and speak correct Spanish without slang, and having conversations about everyday happenings and news in our surroundings. This was all very informative for the interpretation of my material. The participative act, being there engaged with my body and speech, also positioned me as a person in the same field I was investigating.

Cultural analysis and observations are not objective processes that take place without subjects and bodies; rather, all research is embodied and situated. However, the post-colonial and feminist critique of Western claims of objectivity and universality in knowledge production, does not mean that nothing and everything can then be called science. Instead, feminist theorists have called for positioning as a responsible research practice, that takes into consideration how all knowledge is situated and embodied (Haraway 1988; Frankenberg 1993). Likewise de-colonial scholars have called attention to the researchers’ locus of enunciation and how the subject of Western science tends to be hidden and taken out of the analysis. Ramon Grosfougel has noted that by “delinking ethnic/racial/gender/sexual epistemic location from the subject that speaks” Western science constructs a myth about the “Truthful universal knowledge” that obscures the subject that speaks, as well as “the geo-political and body-political epistemic location in the structures of colonial power/knowledge from which the subject speaks” (Grosfougel 2011:4). Likewise, Gayatri Spivak has called for alteration in locations, arguing that there is a radical possibility in problematizing positionality (1990).

This text is a product of an encounter between participants, a researcher and academic discourse. Shorter fieldwork was carried out between the years
2012 and 2015, but the years that I spent living in Buenos Aires and the many journeys back and forth after returning to Sweden in 2009 do indeed influence how this investigation has been approached. Who I am, where I come from, how I look, and my own experience of moving through time and space has an impact on the topic I have chosen, how I conducted fieldwork, the questions I asked, the interpretations, the analysis, and the subsequent process of writing up the results (Saukko 2003; Malagreca 2007). To account for this embodied knowledge, and not to conceal the epistemic locations from where I speak, I have used *auto-ethnographic participatory observation* as part of my methodology.

There is no way out of discourse; the researching subject is just as entangled as the participants or the reader. However, to mitigate this problem somewhat, auto-ethnographic methods can be used to deconstruct the experiences that constitute the researcher and the researched. Auto-ethnography can serve as a tool to analyze how one’s own experience is discursively constituted and thereby imagine and act towards the world differently (Saukko 2003:84). I propose that auto-ethnographic observation is just another way of seeing how discursive formation creates subjects, positions, and identifications, and as such it enables the researcher and the reader to understand how the field was constituted. The very intersectional structures that are the focus of my research are embodied and felt affectively – also by me. Therefore, I have chosen to let some of my own feelings in certain situations be part of the auto-ethnographic mode of writing. As postcolonial and de-colonial scholars have pointed out, production of knowledge and academic structures are also part of unequal power relations (de los Reyes 2005:16). Auto-ethnography has helped to contextualize the reality mirrored in the fieldwork. For example, at a cultural event organized by the Russian embassy I observed the following:

The street outside the theater building is almost empty, but in the entrance some blonde-haired ladies are gathered. An older lady addresses me in Russian and I feel both ashamed for not being able to answer her and simultaneously relieved that I blend in, that my bodily presence is not questioned in this space. Another lady comes along and gives me a flyer for a neighborhood event, it is all written in Russian. It is difficult to find anybody to make contact with, but an Argentine couple responds to my initial small talk. They introduce me to their Russian friends who say they believed I was Russian when I arrived. I try to get the Russian friends interested in my work, but they keep avoiding the issue of interviews. We walk into the theater where a choir from St. Petersburg is about to sing, the Russians disappear in the darkness while the Argentine couple invites
me to take a seat beside them - they are like my cicerones; the Argentine culture my mediator.

In this way, positions and practices in a field of racialized and national belongings was crystalized through my own participation in the field. Throughout the research process, my own experiences of living like a privileged white migrant\textsuperscript{21} in Buenos Aires during the years 2005 to 2009 has directed the work and helped me to contextualize situations observed and stories told by participants. bell hooks has written about how we can see the world differently by shifting locations. In line with her work, I intend to regard the world from a location of embodied whiteness (hooks 1992:177).

I have been inspired by anthropologist discussions on expectations on certain social performances and belongings depending on one’s physical appearance (Kondo 1990; Viladrich 2005). Dorinne Kondo suggests in her auto-ethnographic work on Japan that investigating the specificity of the researcher’s experience of the field is a way to enact and embody theory. “That is to say, the so-called personal details of the encounters, and of the concrete processes through which research problems emerged, are constitutive of theory; one cannot be separated from the other” (Kondo 1990:24). I have tried to write this thesis in a manner that does not conceal the geo-political and body-political location of myself as a field-working researcher, theorist, and analytical writer. The disciplinary inherent divide between the researching subject and the objects of any ethnographic study is difficult to circumvent (see Quijano 2007:174). Yet my intention has been to direct a set of questions to a world that I partake in, not as a detached observer (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012:7), but as an invested ethnographer and a fellow human being.

\textsuperscript{21}This placement of myself in a “migrant-category” is an analytical categorization that draws upon Catrin Lundströms’ question “what kind of queries can be formulated if we think about transnational migration in terms of whiteness” (Lundström 2014:3). With this term I refer to the years when I lived in Argentina before initiating this investigation. This is not an attempt to downplay the hardships and exposure migrant life usually entails, but rather I use the term “privileged white migrant” in order to point towards how mobility is a possibility for some and a restricted need for others, as in for example lifestyle migrants and vulnerable labor migrants – the latter intertwined with the first through a division of global labor (Lundström 2014:4). With the word “privileged” I want to underline that one of the main differences between myself and the research participants was that I had been living in Argentina under different conditions, remaining a citizen of a Nordic welfare state.
Processing the Material

In the transcription stage of this thesis, a first rough thematic scheme was made through analytic processing of the interviews (see Klein 1990). All sorts of relevant issues were mapped out, including aspects that I initially thought would not be interesting. As the body of material grew, themes were assembled; contradictions and similarities were drawn out. Eventually certain themes outgrew others as I started to see relations between different parts of the experiences participants had shared, and joint narrative points appearing in many of the interviews could be identified (see for example Farahani 2013:150).

Throughout the entire process the thematic mapping gradually transformed as certain themes and their internal relations were rearranged. Between periods of fieldwork, I spent many hours listening to the interviews, re-experiencing distant interview situations. Visual memories, smells, and feelings from Argentine parks or kitchen tables would return and provide new insights and deepened understandings of how and why someone had said something at a certain time. Sarah Pink has called for ethnographers to allow senses to be part of emplaced and embodied field working practice and analysis (2009). I regard sensatory perceptions as part of discursive sense making. Through reminiscence of a feeling or the memory of how someone looked when saying something, one can touch upon what was possible to understand or say at a certain time, and thus how the impossible, likely or desirable structured conversations of understandings of the world at a given time. Over time, particular parts of the material out-shadowed others and some of my initial interests were replaced by other themes that needed attention. As the content is now presented, it has indeed transformed from what was initially imagined through a process of problem-driven analysis and recurrent emic narratives,

Locating the Research Spatially

This research took place in the city and province of Buenos Aires where all but one of the participants resided and where all the interviews were conducted. This research is thus an accounts from a specific local place, which, even though it is the political, economic, and social capital of the nation, might have little bearing on circumstances in other provinces or cities in Argentina, or in the Southern Cone region (Gavazzo 2010:9). The experiences analyzed here are outcomes of a particular urban setting, and as such, the analysis accounts for a particular postsocialist migrant experience in
Buenos Aires. Nonetheless it also speaks of a larger global postsocialist experience, as the participants of this study are positioned both in local and global terrain. Russia, Ukraine and Argentina are different national scenes; yet their locally situated similarities and differences are linked to each other through global policies, monetary exchanges, mobility of goods and people, as well as transnational imaginaries.

In the 1990s, globalization theories became prominent in social science debates. Recent changes in world politics and technological developments had created a more interconnected world where ethnographers needed new methods for analyzing transnational belongings and lives. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson urged for ethnographers to move beyond culture as a spatial localized phenomena, in order to posit how space was re-territorialized in a world where distances could be bigger between the wealthy and the dispossessed within a country than between countries (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). At this time, scholars argued that ethnographers of migration needed to surpass methodological nationalism and regard local places as echoes of global places and vice versa (Basch et al.. 1994). In the wake of this scholarly work on transnationalism, Georg Marcus argued that there was a shift in ethnographic methodology; ethnographers had started to conduct what he called multi-sited ethnography (1995). Nina Glick Schiller has argued for the importance of thinking transnationally, claiming that “many day-to-day social processes extend across state borders so that the local is not only mediated by transnational processes: the local is transnational” (Glick Schiller 2006:8).

Relational thinking in the transnational paradigm perhaps comes readily for ethnologists, trained as we are to move between time and space in order to make sense of our material. In this project all places are regarded as a mixture of interdependent global and local conditions, this makes my fieldwork not multi-sited, but rather a study of a locality within a global field. Local conditions and national policies are important for the study of migration, different social structures burgeon distinct opportunities and obstacles. Yet, global processes are equally influential in people’s everyday lives, and if migration is located within the dynamics of global capital accumulation, and contemporary and historical paradigms of mobility, its link to dispossessions in various forms can be addressed.

In her later work, Glick Schiller has called for a global power perspective on migration that abandons methodological nationalism, embraces new perspectives, and directs attention to the contemporary neoliberal terrain and its human costs: “We need a new scholarship that can build on our understanding of global processes, and highlight them, so that we can
actually document how migrants live their lives as constitutive actors in multiple social settings” (Glick Schiller 2012:55).

Researcher’s Impact on the Process of ‘Writing Up’

As noted above, an epistemological presumption in this investigation is that the researcher cannot be located outside of the phenomena she examines; to investigate is to create embodied and situated knowledge (Haraway 1988). This means that any ethnographic account is always determined by multiple contexts, including the contexts of the participants, the site, and the researcher. The post-modern questioning of scientific objectivity within social science and cultural studies has resulted in an imperative for reflexivity in ethnology: to scrutinize the subjectivity of knowledge production and the role of the researcher in the field and impact upon the data is customary practice (Ehn & Klein 1994:10). Much of my discussion above has consisted of reflections on how my role as an embodied researcher might have impacted the production of the data. Here I would also like to bring attention to the process of writing up, and the power invested in researchers who, in a sense, always get the last word as they type up their results (Frankenberg 1993).

Scientific production is an act of constituting reality and therefore it has consequences for society at large. Departing from a PDT standpoint, I follow the argument that the scientific community has a responsibility for the reality that we are part of creating through our knowledge production (see Howarth 2007:80f). Thus, I understand the process of research is co-constitutive for the field and what happens there. Just as the combination of theoretical concepts is an articulation that changes the meaning of each concept, so does the choice of theory have consequences for the interpretation of empirical material, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{22}

Given this, the process of writing up has resulted in a number of technical concerns, especially related to the tense of writing, which descriptive labels to use to describe the research participants, and, which descriptive label to use for the geographical and cultural space the interviewees had left. First, the initial writing was done in the present tense. However, as time went on, I realized that descriptions of interview encounters and observations were not

\textsuperscript{22} To combine political discourse theory with concepts and ideas derived from other traditions, such as those mentioned above, can be understood as an articulation. Within discourse theory the concept of articulation proposes a constitutive change of other concepts or the field as such. The combination of concepts and how they affect each other should thus be discussed (see Howarth & Torfing 2005; Gerber, Gunnarsson Payne & Lundgren 2012; Lindqvist 2004).
part of an ever-ongoing present. Instead, the interviews were products of a determined setting and time, and the present tense created an illusion of stability – as if the participants would still be sitting at the kitchen table where I had left them. As Johannes Fabian has suggested, the present tense often used in ethnographic writing is more than just a mere literary style, but it is rather a question of power relations between an ethnographer and the creation of othered research objects (Fabian 2002). In the final version of this thesis, I therefore decided to write in the imperfect tense when describing the situations surrounding the quotes or observations.

A second concern was how to write about the people who have participated in this investigation. To denominate is to articulate power and construct certain logics and thus I have struggled with troublesome terms such as “migrants”, “immigrants” or “emigrants”. As Saskia Sassen has suggested, these are terms that might create illusions of fixed subject positions (Sassen 1996). To conduct research on this particular topic clearly constructs a determined subject position for participants as migrants. The participants themselves used “emigrant”, “immigrant” or “foreigner” to describe their migratory condition in Argentina. Sometimes one person intermixed these categories depending on the topic and probably dependent upon what they believed were my expectations. After considering various options, I have chosen to use the term “migrant”, as it does not denote a one-way trajectory and more truthfully describes the contingent, crisscrossing, characters of global and local mobility (see Basch et al. 1994; Ahlstedt 2016:30).

Another concern has been how to write about the region the participants left, how should terms such as “eastern Europe”, “postsocialist” or “post-Soviet” be used and with what effects? As Larry Wolff has stated (1994), the idea of an “eastern Europe” was part of an orientalization process during European enlightenment where Europe successfully was divided into two parts, where the “east” came to constitute the “other” of modernity. When addressing this particular migration I could have chosen to call it post-Soviet rather than postsocialist because it refers to a particular timespan with its focus on the dislocatory events of the 1990s (see Cervinkova 2012:156). This investigation does however form part of a field of ethnographic work on the lived realities of the aftermath of the USSR that is usually known as postsocialism.

The term postsocialism was first used as a temporal designation by Western anthropologists who studied everyday life in central and east Europe after 1991 (Chari & Verdery 2009:10; see also Burawoy & Verdery 1999; Hann 2002), However, anthropologist Petr Skalník (2002) for example, has
contested the assumption that socialism was achieved in central and eastern Europe, suggesting post-communism as a more accurate term and criticizing western anthropology for dominating the conceptual models used to study central and east Europe. Likewise, anthropologist Michal Buchowski has argued that western scholarship ignores local ethnographies or theories and hegemonically defines the paradigms (2004). Similarly, within feminist scholarship, Redi Koobak has critiqued the hegemonic discourse of western feminist theory that in a similar manner to other scholarship, “positions Eastern Europe as its ‘belated copy’, producing a ‘lag’ discourse that is framed by imperialist progress narratives” (Koobak 2013:35). This way to regard the former Soviet space and its people through a lens of coloniality has also been discussed by Madina Tlostanova (Tlostanova 2014).

As discussed above, in some ways Argentina provided a neutral ground where participants and I could meet as European migrants with various “insider” positions. Had this investigation taken place in another setting it would have been more likely that discursive differences between East and West or, for example, hierarchies of whiteness would have been made meaningful. I have not strived to find differences in how racial constructions affected us differently as subjects from Eastern or Western Europe, but rather it seems we shared many aspects of performing European whiteness in Argentine public space. Nevertheless, migratory regimes and national citizenships constituted the grand divide between us, since these institutions regulated our spatial and in a sense also our social mobility.

Ethical Considerations

During the course of this research process I have been allowed insight into deeply personal and emotional stories. This calls for an elaboration on some ethical considerations that have characterized my work. The Swedish Research Council makes a distinction between research ethics and professional ethics (Vetenskapsrådet 2011:16). In terms of professional ethics, my discussion of reflexivity and how the material for this work was created, rather than collected, is a way to be transparent with my starting-point for the ethnographic craft itself. As has been noted by many ethnologists, the creation of data in a research project is a co-construction between researcher and participants (see e.g. Rinne 2016; Lundstedt 2009; Sjöstedt Landén 2012a).

Throughout the fieldwork and writing up of the results I have also ensured that I have adhered to Swedish Research Council principles for research
ethics. This means I have made sure to protect the anonymity of the individuals that participated, as well as their personal integrity, to the best of my ability and in line with research ethics and current research codex (Vetenskapsrådet 2011:21). Participants’ names have been changed, and instead of providing the exact year they were born and the city or region I have chosen to give approximate figures.

The translation of Spanish interview quotes into English furthers the degree of anonymity since a person’s particular vernacular cannot be traced (see Sjöstedt Landén 2012:29). Before the interviews, all participants were informed about the kind of study being conducted, the terms of their participation, the confidentiality, and how the material was to be used. After the interview I also provided them with my contact details in case they wanted to withdraw from the investigation or ask me anything afterwards. With some participants I have also discussed parts of my analysis and my quotations in order to make sure I had understood correctly.

Sometimes during my fieldwork I encountered situations that called for ethical considerations with regards to straightforward racist statements being made. Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergaard have discussed how fieldwork in Buenos Aires often presented them with similar ethical challenges. Where does one draw the line between being an interested researcher and a responsible citizen when listening to strong racist opinions or articulation of dehumanizing racializations? Are there situations when one’s silence results in legitimating such statements? They reflect upon having returned home after interviews, with the feeling of having said too much or too little (Mulinari & Neergaard 2011:60). Indeed, I wanted to know more about how the interviewees understood for example the liaison between racial constructions and class, but in those situations I remained silent in order neither to intervene with the research process nor to encourage such speech when the interviewee apparently searched for my approval to continue with similar statements (see Vetenskapsrådet 2011:42).

Previous Research

This dissertation can be placed within three major fields of research. First, it is a product of Swedish ethnology, a broad discipline within which it directly relates to previous research with PDT as theoretical framework, but also with former work on power. Second, it can be inscribed into a field of ethnography investigating the complexities of postsocialist societies and everyday life.
Third, it also draws upon scholarship in the field of migration studies with a particular focus on critical scholarship as well as emotions in migration processes. Below, I will briefly describe how I draw upon these fields.

Needless to say this work also draws upon scholarship from Latin American studies, particularly on how historical constructions of race, eurocentrism, and coloniality impacts upon Argentina today. This will be discussed further in chapter 2.

Political Discourse Theory in Swedish Ethnology

Discourse theory is not novel in Swedish ethnology; rather, its introduction to the discipline rests on a tradition of post structuralist approaches in inquiries on how everyday life might be circumscribed by power and Foucauldian regimes of knowledge (Drakos 1997; Farahani 2007; Hörfeldt 2009; León Rosales 2010; Ristilammi 1994). Thus, this thesis can be positioned in an ethnological tradition of critical perspectives of power.

Discourse theory as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, was introduced to the discipline in the beginning of the 2000s and has since been applied to a wide range of empirical fields. It can be found in examinations of feminist media production (Gunnarsson Payne 2006), in studies on discourses on girls’ non-suicidal self-injury (Johansson 2010), or in analyses of men’s violence against women (Nilsson 2009). Discourse theory has also been used in dissertations of how individual life and subjectivity is affected by economic systems or state policies (Martinsson 2006; Lundstedt 2005; Hertzberg 2003). These are studies that share similarities with my work; as do dissertations where discourse theory has been used to scrutinize discursive constructions of professional identifications or subjects (Sjöstedt Landén 2012a; Åberg 2008). Contributions from ethnologists working with discourse theory and postsocialism (Ers 2006; Lindelöf 2006) are particularly close to my work. Sofi Gerber’s work on material articulations in East Germany before and after the wall came down (Gerber 2012, 2011) is of particular interest for my work.

This emerging field has seen some scholarly debate and suggestions on how political discourse theory and ethnology can mutually contribute to further theoretical, empirical, and methodological insights (see Payne et al. 2012; Lindqvist 2004, 2010; Gunnarsson Payne 2013, 2012; Johansson 2013, 2012; Lindelöf 2012; Lundgren 2012, 2011; Martinsson 2012; Sjölander & Payne 2011; Sjöstedt Landén 2012b). My contribution to this field is two-fold, first I contribute to the development of the discussions on discourse and
materiality, directing attention to processes of materiality and labor, as well as to how bodies are constructed and positioned by discourse. Secondly, my elaboration of an analytical model where dislocatory events and experiences are related to the concept of relocatory trajectory, with its focus on spatial and social mobility and affect is my contribution to this field. However, this particular employment of PDT on ethnographic material is also a contribution to the field of PDT itself and to the research on any lived dislocatory event and relocatory experience.

Postsocialist Ethnography

There is a small and growing field of contributions to postsocialist ethnography in Sweden. Beatriz Lindqvist and Mats Lindqvist’s study on how globalization and neoliberalism23 affect local communities in the Baltic Sea area (Lindqvist & Lindqvist 2008) is related to my investigation of neoliberal terrains. Likewise, Mats Lindqvist’s study on how global capitalism is lived in the Baltic States, with particular focus on the Swedish forest industry’s colonial relation to Latvia (2012) and postsocialist negotiations of Latvian identity (2003), has been of relevance for my study. Sofi Gerber’s work on how people who grew up in the former German Democratic Republic relate to East and West in unified Germany has been inspiring, not only for the theoretical connections to my project, but also for its empirical dimensions. This is also the case with Agnes Ers’ work on a Swedish aid organization in postsocialist Romania (2006), as well as Karin Lindelöf’s ethnography of young women in “transitory” Poland (2006). Another inspirational source for my study is Katarzyna Wolanik Boström’s work on how Poles with higher education narrated their present identities and societies in postsocialist times (2005).

My work has also been guided and inspired by anthropologists or political scientists who have carried out ethnographic research on the complexities of postsocialist societies and postsocialist migrants (Bloch 2011; Croegaert

23 Neoliberalism is one of those terms used to address a wide range of phenomena. I use this concept in the same manner as scholars who critically address neoliberal political hegemony; not only in the economic sphere, but also the way it influences all societal levels and subjectivities (see for example Berlant 2011; Harvey 2005; Kalb 2011; Fahlgren et al 2016). Like David Harvey, I thus regard neoliberalism both as an economic theory (traceable back to the 1940s and implemented in politics in the 1970s by for example Thatcher and Reagan, or the military regime in Argentina), and also as a social reality – neoliberalization of societies shares traits worldwide, however is lived and experienced differently according to subject positions and spatial locations (see Harvey 2005; Grimson & Kessler 2005:145).
2011; Lemekh 2010; Solari 2010; Kuehnast & Nechemias 2004; Humphrey 2002; Pesmen 2000; Ledeneva 1998; Verdery 1996). The anthology “Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World” edited by Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery (1999) lay the ground for much ethnographic work on the postsocialist context as it contested the idea that the changes taking place after the collapse of the USSR and state socialism were to be understood according to predictable models of “socialism” or “capitalism.” Burawoy and Verdery’s critique of the idea of a “transition” between worlds brought attention to how the changes occurring in the region were part of a myriad of novel adaptations of past and present, rather than legacies of something old.

Another of the early postsocialist ethnographies that inspired my work is Nancy Ries’ piece, “Russian talk: culture and conversation during Perestroika. (1997). In her descriptions of what she calls litanies and laments of “the discursive art of suffering” I found strikingly many similarities to my material that helped put parts of my more emotionally laden material in a context. Another ethnography that has broadened my understanding of my empirics is Alexei Yurchak’s “Everything Was Forever, Until It was No More” (2006), on the paradoxes of Soviet life during the period of Late Socialism. His analysis of how discourse, ideology, language, and ritual transformed during the 1960–80s enabled a more profound understanding of what the participants born in the 1950–60s had experienced in terms of dislocatory events.

In Jennifer Patico’s “Consumption and Social Change in a Post-Soviet Middle Class” (2008) I also found relevant links to my material. Patico examined professionals who seemed to be dealing with very similar feelings and claims after their formerly respected professions could no longer sustain a dignified lifestyle. Michelle Parsons’ “Dying Unneeded. The Cultural Context of the Russian Mortality Crisis” (2014) also provided much insight on the difficulties of postsocialist societies and individuals in coping not only with increased inequality and poverty, but also with the collapse of social networks. Parsons argues that the exchange of goods and favors within personal social networks, under Soviet times a way for individuals to create a sense of limited freedom, was eroded by the political changes and then replaced by a new deadly freedom where particularly men found themselves unneeded. Likewise Kristen Ghodsee’s work “Lost in transition” (2011) provided valuable insight on how to understand the impact the dislocatory events after 1989 had on ordinary people’s lives in the postsocialist region.
With regards to postsocialist migration, Halyna Lemekh’s *Ukrainian immigrants in New York: Collision of Two Worlds* (2010) has served as an interesting source of comparison as the participants in her study arrived in the same historical period, yet encountered different conditions. Most previous research on postsocialist migration has centered on migration to Western countries (Cvajner 2012, Hellerman 2006, Hormel & Souhtwort 2006, Remennick 2007, 2012, Solari 2010, Tolstokorova 2010). Permanent migration, whether to North America, within the former USSR, or to Israel, naturally differs quite substantially from temporary labor migration to countries in Europe (Solari 2010).

Together these scholars have provided a relevant backdrop for understanding the postsocialist context and participants’ experiences of dislocatory events. My contribution to this field is an examination of postsocialist life and experience beyond the actual region, stretching the concept of postsocialism into a Latin American reality. Sometimes it was surprising to see how many similarities I found in these studies on postsocialism and participants’ everyday life in Argentina.

**Migration Studies**

This thesis is also a part of migration studies, a vast field of scholarship from many disciplines with their different angles and perspectives on migration. There is, however, no space to relate to an extended body of migration studies literature here. For the purpose of my investigation I focus specifically on the ways in which global and local economic configurations affect people’s lives and construct subject positions.

My work can thus be placed within a tradition of critical perspectives on how migration is related to social processes and power in society (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2013). Stephen Castles and Mark Miller’s *The Age of Migration* ([1993] 2003) is a classic piece in this field in which the authors argue that people’s movement across space and time has been a constant in human history, and as such has had a major role in societal transformations of all kinds (Castles & Miller 2003:278). My understanding of the relation between migration and coercive elements of labor in capitalist modernity is drawn from their work (Castles & Miller 2003:50f). Central to critical perspectives on social processes related to migration is also the arena of labor markets, where intersectional structures of power are crucial both symbolically and materially (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2013:21).
Mekonnen Tesfahuney’s dissertation, with his perspective on how migration discourses are interlaced and made meaningful through former and current political and economic relations, has been an inspiring source for me on how to understand migration (1998). Tesfahuney examines how racism, colonialism, and hegemony “are central to the interrogations of dominant migration discourses” (Tesfahuney 1998:9). Likewise, Saskia Sassen’s writings on how economic systems affect mobility have guided my approach to this field. Her *Guests and Aliens* (1996) provides important insights on how migration is not something that just happens but rather how patterns of mobility are part of larger structural processes and specific historical phases. Sassen argues that there is a geopolitics of migration, current politics of migration thus cannot be discussed only as factors of family reunification, border control, risk, naturalization, or citizenship, but should be seen as part of processes that are constituted by economic and political systems (Sassen 2000:12). In her work on global economic forces at play in current economic, political, and social structures, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (2014) she examines current socioeconomic and environmental dislocations alongside increasing inequality and displacement. Sassen argues that “the move from Keynesianism to the global, era of privatization, deregulation, and open borders for some, entailed a switch from dynamics that push people out” (Sassen 2014:211). Her focus on this shift has been important for my understanding of the specific historical shift that the participants’ migration and lifestyle were characterized by, their condition being that of expulsion rather than incorporation.

In line with my theoretical understandings of the contingent nature of all discourse, my work also draws on scholarship on historical migration. As will be discussed in chapter 2, part of my method is to contextualize migration historically in order to analyze how power structures are imbued with notions of race and coloniality. Historian José Moya’s (1998) work on Spanish emigration to Buenos Aires, *Cousins and strangers: Spanish immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930*, is important for the way structural conditions and dislocatory events are understood to impact individual agency. The migrant Spaniards in Moya’s work were not only reacting to poverty and the impossibility to subsist, their journey overseas was part of a structural transatlantic migration made possible by migration policies, means of transportation, and a multitude of actors involved in promoting Argentina as a destination (Moya 1998). Likewise, the participants of my study and those who travelled to Argentina with the MI Resolution 4632/94 were conditioned by local contemporary and historical circumstances and thus formed part of
a structurally shaped mobility just as much as they were individuals acting in
the ways they could.

Likewise, scholarship on historical constructions of race in relation to
migration has been highly informative for my purposes. Noel Ignatiev’s How
the Irish became white (2009) has helped my comprehension of how
racialized social hierarchies affect labor inequalities. Similarly, David R.
Roediger’s The wages of whiteness: Race and the Making of the American
Working Class ([1991] 2007) has been a good source of comparison.
Furthermore, Matthew Frye Jacobson’s Whiteness of a Different Color:
European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (1998) has been particularly
relevant because of its focus on racial articulations in contingent politics and
culture. Unfortunately, even though they provide important insights to race
and labor, none of these studies look specifically at how gender plays into this
picture. For this, Catrin Lundström’s studies on white migration have been
particularly helpful (2014), as well as other studies of white migration to the
global south (Knowles 2005; Knowles & Harper 2009).

Of particular interest for my work has also been research done on the
recent migration of East Europeans and their integration into Argentine
society (Pacecca 2000; Pacecca & Courtis 2008; Marcogliese, 2003; Texidó,
2004; Masseroni y Ponisio, 2005; Masseroni & Rodríguez de la Vega 2010).
In particular, Identidad Soviética y Entidad entre Migrantes recientes en
Argentina edited by Susana Masseroni and Lía Rodríguez de la Vega (2010)
about postsocialist lives in metropolitan Buenos Aires has been of relevance.
There are indeed many similarities in the stories told by the participants that
figure in Masseroni et al.’s work and those in this study. I do however employ
a different theoretical approach to the experience of postsocialist migration
to Argentina.

Susanne Nylund Skog, an ethnologist working on identity formations,
subject positions, affect and structural positions in processes of migration,
has also been a source of inspiration for theorizing my material. In her work
on Jewish women in Sweden, Nylund Skog employs a combination of
poststructuralist theories and folkloristic methods to examine life narratives
and directions (Nylund Skog 2012:12f). Nylund Skog’s combination of these
theories into an analytical approach where these ways of orientating oneself
are both enabled and conditioned by cultural conventions, norms, and
actions, has been helpful for the way I think about relocatory trajectory in
migration and how participants cope affectively with the loss of educational
and social investment, for example.
Finally, the inclusion of affect into my theoretical framework means that this study can also be placed within an area of recent development within social science and anthropology where attention is given to the role of affect in processes of migration (Ahlstedt 2016; Conradson & McCay 2007; González-Fernández 2016; Pine 2014; Rafaettá 2015). There has been a tendency to overlook the role of affect in migration studies where economic and political analyses are dominant (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:73; Mai and King, 2009: 297). My work thus brings together political and economic conditions with the emotional factors. Therefore, this investigation is a contribution not only to this developing field within migration studies, but also to political discourse theory as it brings novel ways to combine PDT with ethnographic research on affect.

Outline of the Dissertation

This thesis takes the narrated experience of migration as its point of departure, and is structured according to a chronological and thematic order that emerged from the empirics. The content is further detailed below, but as an overview, the text can be divided into two related parts. All research participants had either lived through, or been closely affected by, major changes in political and economic systems. The first two empirical chapters, therefore, examine the impact that these dislocatory events had on subject positions and possible identifications in a chronological order, looking first at the impact of the USSR’s demise followed by an examination of the economic crisis in Argentina in 2001. The following two chapters then examine the aftermath of these dislocatory events and the effect it had on participants’ lives, possibilities and self-understandings. Important themes derived from the empirical material are discussed here, such as participants’ ways of coping with new conditions, and social mobility and the construction of subject positions in relation to aspects of labor markets and worker identities.

Chapter 2, “Background: Immigration to Argentina” provides a background of some of the relevant contexts for understanding contemporary Argentina and participants’ insertion into local economies of varying kinds. In this chapter I address the historical background of international migration to Argentina, its colonial history in relation to this, and the background of Russian and Ukrainian diaspora communities. I posit that the historical context of migration in Argentina, as well as some aspects of its present social stratification in relation to internal and external migrants, is crucial for
understanding participants’ constructions of meaning and their possibilities and impossibilities as migrants in Argentina. This examination of relevant historical conditions is part of a contextualizing method derived from the importance of contingency in PDT, and is described in the beginning of the chapter.

**Chapter 3,** “*We could not stay after the changes*: Leaving the post-Soviet crisis” deals with the dissolution of the USSR and participants’ narratives of the reasons they had for leaving the region. It addresses the implosion of the USSR and its rapid transformation into something where research participants for various reasons could not see a future. Through contextualizing participants’ narratives with these dislocatory events, focus is directed towards how discourse created possible and impossible subject positions and identifications. The chapter is structured around the relation between these dislocatory events and the identification with “change”, as well as the notion of achieving a “good life”. It addresses questions of hope in relation to upward mobility. This chapter also examines the MI 4632/94 resolution and the rumors circulating in participants’ experiences of this migratory agreement. Furthermore it addresses participants’ relationship with diaspora organizations, and historical and contemporary constructions of what a migrant is supposed to be.

In **Chapter 4,** “*We struggled to survive*: The first years in Buenos Aires“ attention is directed towards how the participants’ way into Argentine society was conditioned also by dislocatory events in Argentina caused by the neoliberal crisis that culminated in late 2001. Various local conditions, such as deregulated labor markets, substandard housing, informalization and precarization of livelihoods are addressed through an examination of participants’ narratives of what it was like to arrive in Argentina. Here, emotions related to encountering the unexpected economic crisis and the experience of being placed in the subject position of a migrant are central to the research participants’ recollections. The chapter evolves around aspirations of upward mobility and participants’ narratives about ruptures in their hopes and imagined trajectories. It also draws attention to the material affects of vulnerability inflicted upon bodies. The chapter also scrutinizes how space is constructed in relation to coloniality.

In **Chapter 5,** “*‘We are Professionals’: Downward Mobility and Professional Identities*” two key interviews have been selected to illustrate a number of practical and affective issues related to social downward mobility. The chapter centers upon a tense relationship between the two subject positions ‘migrant’ and ‘professional’, as well as on cultural and social expectations tied
to these positions. Through longer empirical quotes from interviews with two physicians and the family of one of them, the narrated affective experiences of not having titles accredited while having expected a different trajectory is analyzed. The analysis brings to the fore issues of contingent educational qualifications, dislocatory experiences, and narrative ways of coping with the dislocatory trauma of downward mobility. It addresses how downward mobility is articulated and made meaningful through the signifier “professional” and the idea of education.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter 6, “‘We are a working kind’: Racial Economies and European Exceptionality” centers upon ideas about upward mobility through labor. Participants’ narratives of how they were self-made and tough due to a cruel history and a Slavic belonging are analyzed through a focus on local and global constructions of race and whiteness. I examine how identifications are created in relation to coloniality, historical conceptions of whiteness, and Argentine racialized discourses on urban poor and migrants from bordering countries. Furthermore I analyze how the idea of upward mobility is connected to questions of race. The chapter is structured around participants’ identifications with being good “workers” and Russian or Ukrainian in this particular context, and in their struggles for decent positions in labor markets or housing. Furthermore, the chapter addresses participants’ narratives about “making it” by oneself and how these are related to ideas about modernity and past and present ideologies, such as a socialist past and capitalist present.

In the final chapter, Concluding Discussion, the findings are summarized and conclusions are drawn.
CHAPTER 2

Background:
Immigration to Argentina

In November purple flowers fall from the jacaranda trees and sprinkle the sidewalks of Buenos Aires city. I was coming back from posting information about my project at some Russian cultural associations and, lifted by the approaching summer and fresh winds of a project in the making, I smiled happily when I met my landlord. ‘What is it you are doing now?’ he asked when he saw the folders in my hand. Middle-aged, a man employed at a large company, he had the privilege of leading a middle class family life in a house with a garden in one of the ‘upcoming’ residential parts of town. I told him that I wanted to research Ukrainian and Russian migration to Argentina and saw his face change from polite, yet indifferent, interest to genuine contentment. “It is really good that they came here, that you come here. Argentina needs European immigrants” he said and nodded his head in an appreciative manner.

Notes from field diary, November 2012.

It is no easy task to write about Argentina for an audience that might not be familiar with the country. It has seen many violent social and economic changes, and it also contains many different social worlds and experiences. This is however not the place to give a full account of Argentine modern history; rather in this chapter I will examine some historical aspects that are relevant for understanding my empirical material. I will address the historical background of international migration to Argentina, its colonial history in relation to this and the background of Russian and Ukrainian diaspora communities.

I propose a historical contextualizing method as part of my application of political discourse theory on ethnographic material. As Torfing has suggested, “We can develop the characterization of discourse theory by highlighting its relationalist, contextual, and ultimately historicist view of identity
formation (2005:14, italics in original)”. The way migration has been conceptualized and regulated by the state is crucial for understanding the social processes that impact the participants’ lives in contemporary Argentina (Pacceca & Courtis 2008:5). I posit that this also accounts for the makings of race, class, and gender in relation to postsocialist migration to Buenos Aires. This chapter addresses some crucial background information for understanding the analyses that I make in the empirical chapters. I argue that a historical contextualization helps us understand how global economies affect locally lived lives and create conditions for mobility and certain subject positions.

In the Colonial Rear-View Mirror

“The Argentines believe they are all descendants from the ships” Mexican writer Octavio Paz once joked. As suggested by anthropologist Alejandro Grimson, perhaps Argentina’s main national myth is that it is a European enclave in the Latin American continent (Grimson 2013:31f). Argentina is indeed marked by its large-scale immigration from Europe, yet also characterized by its location in the Southern Cone. As such it forms part of a particular geographical setting, a pre-Colombian history and a historical configuration of colonial and post-colonial global economies – the Creole elite and the European immigrants did not arrive out of chance to this imagined vast space.

When talking to acquaintances or strangers in Buenos Aires about this research project I often found that they, similar to my landlord, differentiated between postsocialist migrants and other migrant groups. A particularly striking comment came from an upper-class porteño man who, when he heard about my topic, told me “Oh those are good people that Argentina need, a race superior to the Peruvians or Bolivians.” As the reader will see, this comparison characterizes much of my material. I propose that the logic that a comment like this entails is linked to coloniality, particularly through the advent of the modern nation of Argentina and discourses of settler colonialism. As discussed in the theory section, this research takes as a starting position that colonial pasts are anchored to the present, something that can be seen manifested in for example buildings, street signs or statues1, or as will

1 See Faulk for a discussion on how meanings of the past are connected to the present through materiality in the Buenos Aires urban landscape (Faulk 2013:35).
be demonstrated, also in constructions of meaning that position human bodies vis-à-vis other bodies in certain ways in given situations.

“To Govern is to Populate”

With the 1810 May Revolution, the process of liberation from the Vice-royalty of the Río de la Plata was initiated. In 1816 independence was declared and the Spanish crown that had first arrived in 1516 had to withdraw from the territory today called Argentina. The retreat of the Spanish crown did not necessarily mean that colonialism had ceased, rather it took on another form when creole elites, men born of Spanish descent in the Americas, embarked upon a project of state building and settler colonialism. The first period after independence was characterized by many civil wars and the state’s endeavor to expand and establish its borders. In the 1850s a process of so-called western modernization was initiated (Romero 2013:2). Argentina actively sought ways to be inserted into the global economy and when the first elected president Hipólito Yrigoyen assumed office in 1916 the country had become wealthy.

After independence in 1810, Argentina established trade ties with Great Britain and from 1850 these relationships were strengthened. Argentina became a large producer of wool simultaneously with British intensified industrialization (Romero 2004:4f). During the years of cooperation, Great Britain progressively took on large costs of state building in Argentina. Historian Luis Alberto Romero has noted that after the 1880s, Britain which had started to feel the opposition from its imperial antagonists, Germany, then followed by the United States, sought shelter in its empires as they assured a return on investment and profit without any particular risk. Romero writes that from 1880 up until 1913, “British capital in Argentina increased twentyfold” (Romero 2014:5). The British had traditionally invested in trade, the banking sector, and public sector loans. This however meant that they further invested in “utilities such as gas, and investment in transport such as streetcars and especially railroads. These investments proved enormously profitable” (Romero 2014:5).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Argentina had one of the ten highest per capita incomes in the world, even superior to that of France and Germany (Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín 2014:300–3). The centennial Argentina had become a nation of booming exports – wool, cereal, and beef – and with its urban centers and industries developing, the country needed labor force (Romero 2014:6). In 1821, the first initiative was taken to endorse the state to organize transportation for “industrious European families” to settle in the
new nation (Moya 1998:49). Like in other Latin American countries, the elite hoped that European immigration would bring economic and social development, assuming the migrants would help increase agricultural and livestock production, and also that they would bring discipline and work habits. This was then followed by many policies endorsing European immigration to the country and finally implemented into the National Constitution of 1853 and the law of Inmigración y Colonización (Ley 817 de 1876). With these frameworks, migrants who entered the country with the requested documentation were given residence and the same civil rights as the citizens. In addition, they could also work freely (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:41).

The 1876 immigration law also included several economic subsidies for the journey, free stay in Buenos Aires when arriving, passage to one’s final destination – those often being agricultural colonies, possible access to low-priced land, and seeds. The Argentine state also actively promoted Argentina as a destination through funded agents and migration offices in big European cities (Cook-Martín 2008; Bastia & vom Hau 2014:478). However, migrants from Asia or Latin American bordering countries were not eligible to apply for these colonization programs. Rather these policies were specifically aimed at European immigration (Bastia & vom Hau 2014:478). These legislations then framed mass emigration between 1880 and 1930 (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:9). In the centennial Argentina one third of Argentina’s population had been born overseas (Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín 2014:300).

As is discussed in more detail below, historians tend to agree that immigration was instrumental as a means for progress in the new nation (Moya 1998:389; Romero 2013:6). In his work on the history of Spanish emigrants in Argentina, historian José Moya has argued that the early period of capitalist modernization saw five main movements that created circumstances for emigration and immigration: “demographic expansion, liberalism, the commercialization of agriculture, industrialization, and advances in transportation” (Moya 1998:44). These five developments, Moya finds, tied Argentina to global movements and established it as a country of immigration:

The agricultural revolution that displaced peasants in the Old World demanded agricultural workers in the peasantless but fertile plains of the New World. The industrial revolution that displaced artisans in the Old World increased the demand for Argentine commodities and thus the Argentine demand for European labor. It also fueled British capital accumulation and the investments and loans that proved essential for railroad
construction in both Argentina and Spain. The railroads that took emi-
grants from the European hinterlands to the departing ports, and from
Buenos Aires to the Argentine provinces, also took the pampa’s cereal to
Buenos Aires. The steamers that made mass emigration possible also
allowed profitable transportation of the bulky or heavy commodities with
low value per mass or weight that made up Argentina’s exports. (Moya
1998:58f)

In this elegant manner, Moya ties together the factors that combined to make
Argentina a country of immigration in a global network of capital accumu-
lation where bodies and commodities moved through interlaced patterns. As
others have demonstrated, this particular period of mass migration in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth century was characterized by a growing
demand for labor in countries undergoing intense capital accumulation
(Satzewich 2002:31; Miles 1987).

In 1869 Argentina had 1.8 million inhabitants, yet in 1914, the population
had increased to 7.8 million (Romero 2014:10). Mass immigration and the
economic progress did of course impact Argentine society, indeed
transforming it (Romero 2014:10). This change was particularly evident in
the city of Buenos Aires, where in 1895, two out of three residents had been
born overseas. Romero notes that in 1914, “by which time many foreigners
had Argentine-born children, half the population was still foreign (Romero
2014:11). In some provinces, 70% of the population had been born in Europe
(Bastia & vom Hum 2014:479). In 1932, only the United States had seen more
European migrants disembark at its shores (Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín
2014:302).

Argentina is thus a classical country of immigration and the Argentines
portrayed in Octavio Paz’ joke are indeed partly right in saying that most
inhabitants descended from a ship (Castles & Miller 2003:7). However, like
with many nations, the modern republic of Argentina is founded upon a
space that was violently conquered through a “systematic attempt to
eliminate, silence, or assimilate its indigenous populations” (Gordillo &

Dispossessions

The indigenous populations, perceived as obstacles to modernity, were virtu-
ally annihilated by the Argentine state at the end of the 19th century
(Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002:525). Military campaigns dating from the latter
part of the 19th century were aimed at places called “deserts”, not because of
geographical characteristics or lack of human inhabitants, but because they were discursively constituted as “waste lands”, in accordance with prevalent colonial logics, perceived as lacking state control, capitalism and western civilization (Gordillo & Hirsch 2004:4).

The extermination of those who inhabited the territories the new state wanted to conquer was made through a violent othering of groups whose bodies were constructed as obstacles to a future capitalist agrarian economy (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003). Moya has demonstrated how this affected not only humans living in the areas the new state seized, but also flora and fauna. After European settlers had pushed indigenous groups out of the Pampa grasslands, “European cattle, sheep, goats, asses, pigs, rabbits, dogs, cats, chickens, bees, and rats drove back the native Patagonian rabbits, guanacos, and rheas” (Moya 1998:48). As the indigenous bodies were brutally excluded from the new national territory, the European body – that is, those who behaved in accordance with the desires and needs of the Argentine elite – came to embody the desired future of the nation (Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002:525).

The considerable European immigration to Argentina thus stemmed from a convergence of various factors, such as the internal political situation, global conditions, and military expropriation of land that made “large-scale agricultural exploitation possible” (Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín 2014:303). Since 1853, Article 25 of the Argentine constitution – still in force – has instructed that the federal government should foster European immigration. It cannot in any way restrict foreigners who come with the purpose of working the land, improving the industries, or to introduce and teach the sciences and the arts. The Article, which was initiated by intellectuals and politicians and inspired by liberal ideas of state building, transformed the call for European immigration into a formal function of the state; in addition to the mere need for labor force, the state builders also strived to populate the country with immigrants from what they considered to be more “developed” European countries (Grimson 2013:31).

Migration Policies and Race

As will be discussed throughout this thesis, processes of racialization have thus marked the modern nation of Argentina – just as in other places of the
world. Theorizing the logic of coloniality and how whiteness operates within this logic is thus central to analyzing how intersecting power structures come together in the everyday life of the research participants. During the process of state formation, the elites of in-migration countries often debated the instrumental use of immigrated labor force. Diaspora scholar Vic Satzewich has argued that considerations of whether different migrant groups fitted into western racial cosmologies determined how their social and economic capabilities were evaluated, resulting in state policies that “entailed complex processes of inclusion and exclusion” (Satzewich 2002:31).

Others have also noted how throughout the Americas, migration policies of the 19th and 20th century were related to racialist thinking (Graham 1990:4). As 19th century Argentine intellectual Juan Bautista Alberdi’s famous words “to govern is to populate,” indicate, and as demonstrated above, the development of the independent modern Argentine nation implied populating it with certain types of bodies while invisibilizing or erasing others. One of the founding fathers Domingo Faust Sarmiento (1811–1888) is illustrative for these ideas of progress interlaced with racialist thinking. He was a statesman and an educator who believed race was a major factor behind Latin American problems.

Historian Aline Helg argues that Sarmiento was torn between “an evolutionary vision of race and a faith in immigration and education as the solution to Argentina’s modernization problems” (Helg 1990:39). In accordance with European and North American social Darwinists of his time, Sarmiento held that races were at different levels of development, where the “slowest” were indigenous people or blacks, while the “Anglo-Saxon and Christian United States was the very incarnation of the most civilized race” (Helg 1990:39). José Moya has indicated that populating the newly born nation with the right kind of subjects became a top priority for the liberal generation of Alberdi and Sarmiento. For them the question of population was not quantitative, but rather it meant “doing so with ‘people of better quality,’ with ‘the civilized races of Europe,’” Moya quotes their vernacular (Moya 1998:49).

Hence, immigration was seen as a way to progress and modernize the young nation. The preamble to the constitution of 1853, still cited in the present constitution, declares that it should be applied to all those in the

3 “Gobernar es poblar”
world who want to inhabit Argentine soil4 (Faulk 2013:32). Processes of state building, migration policies, and ideas of race and modernization were interlaced in this. Sociologists David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cock-Martín have demonstrated how this can be seen as whitening strategies, that is, a determination to whiten a country’s population. From 1816 and for a century onwards, more European immigrants arrived in Argentina than any other Latin American country. As a consequence, “Argentine elites increasingly conceived of the population as a white, European outpost” (Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín 2014:300).

Thus, in 1992 when president Carlos Menem proposed that Argentina would allow migrants from former USSR to travel freely to Argentina with temporary residence and work permits that could later become permanent, it was a decision taken in accordance with this long history of migration policies fostering European immigration following a logic of coloniality where traits of civilization and modernity were believed to be embodied by certain subjects5.

Desirable Europeans?

However, the bodies that are considered desirable or not is a factor that fluctuates with historical transformations. The discursive field can hold no absolute fixity; contingency is always present (See Laclau & Mouffe 1985:111ff), thus the favorable position of one type of body can always change, over time it might be articulated as not “white enough”6 or not “Argentine enough” depending on how it is regarded and from which position. Local elites had varying preferences for which groups they desired, Anglo-Saxon and Germanic immigrants being at the top of the list.

However, the majority of those that arrived were from Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as the Middle East (Moya 1998:389). By the beginning of the new century, the Argentine population had almost doubled, yet those who had arrived were not the ones the elites and legislators had envisioned.

5 For a discussion on how Argentina was the first country in the Americas to have a preference for European immigration in its constitution, while at the same time the only country not to pass explicit ethnic discriminatory quotas limiting Chinese or African immigration, as did other countries throughout the Americas, see Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín (2014).
6 For a discussion of constructions of varying whiteness among European immigrants in the USA see for example Ignatiev (2009); Jacobson (1998); Roediger (2007).
By the 1920s, the upper classes of Argentina “had turned increasingly nativist and even xenophobic” (Moya 1998:389). Immigrants in Argentina have been racialized, characterized as better or inferior by the Argentine elite based on their origin. As Moya has argues, Spaniards have been mocked, and treated both as cousins and strangers – however, the less desirable groups at the beginning of the 20th century diminished the “otherness” of Spaniards (Moya 1998:361).

The idea of whitening the nation that impelled the migration policies of the late 19th century gave way to complex social processes and the positive reception of mass immigration was to change in the beginning of the 20th century as local elites found that mass immigration not only brought about cheap labor, but also socialists, anarchists, and union organizations. While the intellectuals and legislators of the 19th century debated how the European whitening of the country would lead to progress, a concern of the 20th century’s politicians was how to turn the new heterogeneous population into a homogenous nation. Foreigners did indeed enjoy certain privileges, but at the same time they were also likely targets of political persecution and subjects of stigmatizing mechanism such as ethnic jokes.

The State started to impose strict integration policies in order for European migrants to obtain an Argentine style and culture (Grimson 2005:26; Bastia & vom Hum 2014:480f). Measures taken by the State to assimilate migrants included the wearing of a white dust coat that covered private clothes in public schools, prohibition of indigenous languages, universal conscription, and prohibiting naming babies with foreign names (Grimson & Kessler 2005:120). At this time nationalist thinkers also promoted the gaucho, the archetype of the Pampa grassland cowboy, as an Argentine icon. Bastia and vom Hum argues:

The supposedly European origins of the gaucho also provided a convenient way to maintain the idea of Argentina as a white nation while rejecting contemporary European migration as the only path towards whiteness and cultural progress. The main difference to the mid-nineteenth century was thus that the whiteness of Argentina was taken for granted. Official nationalist discourse depicted the nation as already white, since its colonial origins (Bastia & vom Hum 2014:481).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Buenos Aires was a center for much anarchist activity; with two daily anarchist newspapers and “a multitude of social, cultural, and political organizations” it was the single largest anarchist center of the world at that time (Jensen 2015: 446). After two assassination
attempts on Argentine presidents, and a murdered Chief of Police – acts of retaliation for brutal repression on worker strikes – the Residency Law was passed in 1902. Particularly aimed at anarchists, it allowed deportation of dangerous foreigners. A decade into the 20th century, 300 foreign-born anarchists, often described as “Jews” or “Russians”, had been expelled from Argentina (Moya 2004:23)

In the interwar period, immigration was restricted in several ways, yet while those migrants considered “subversive” were mainly targeted, the European agricultural colonization was still promoted. However many the attempts to change the migratory framework, the 1853 constitution, with its explicit call for European migration and the 1876 Colonialization Law, remained intact (Bastia & vom Hum 2014:481). The state, however, initiated a process of selection, requiring passports with photo, health certificate, and a spotless police record. When the U.S. imposed strict nationality quotas on immigration in 1923, the Jewish exodus from Eastern Europe became a major concern for the Argentine ruling class who did not perceive this group neither as fit for agricultural activity, nor to be white enough (Bastia & vom Hum 2014: Moya 2006). In the 1930s, the costs of visa were increased and work contracts were also required.

In the mid 1930s Argentina embarked upon a model of industrialization with import substitution promoting domestic industry, and thus attracting migrants from rural provinces to the industries in the cities (Pacceca & Courtis 2008:10). During the initial period of Peronism in the 1940s, legislation was still encouraging European migration, perceived as “constitutive of the country’s modernity”. Perón wanted to encourage a large influx of European migrants for agricultural reasons. Unlike previous politicians he did however target Catholic and Southern Europeans as most desirable for the nation7. Simultaneously, new requirements, for literacy certificates for example, were introduced, a measure targeted at migrants from neighboring countries (Bastia & vom Hum 2014:482).

The Peronist period constituted a reworking of official discourse and conception of nationhood, where the working class was included into official political discourses and to the city of Buenos Aires – the nation’s political heart. Many scholars have noted how Peronist followers degradingly were

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7 Much has been written of this political movement that emerged after general Juan Domingo Perón and his wife Eva Duarte had won the support of large segments of the working class and the rural migrants as Perón took command of the Ministry of Labor in 1943. Perón was elected president three times, in 1946, 1951, and 1973 when he returned from exile in Spain (James 2000:273).
called “cabecitas negras”, little blackheads, and scorned by local elites in the city of Buenos Aires (Joseph 2000:355). Bastia and vom Hum argue that the Peronist reconfiguration of official State discourse, and the inclusion of dark-skinned workers from interior provinces in the national community, challenged the hegemonic idea of Argentina as a white nation (Bastia & vom Hum 2014:482). However it also promoted the idea of Argentina as a “crisol de razas”, the melting pot, and thus “perpetuated the myth of a homogeneously white Argentina” as this melting pot was defined by its Spanish and not its indigenous or black legacies” (Bastia & vom Hum 2014: 483).

With the Peronists’ arrival in Argentine political discourse, the idea of a hard-working European immigrant – earlier the source of frustration among the Argentine ruling class – was idealized as part of the nation’s progress (Grimson 2013:31). It is often claimed that internal migration from interior provinces to Buenos Aires, stimulated by construction of public housing and other means, constituted the bulk of the emergent Peronist movement that was disdained by the elites. One of Argentina’s leading sociologists, Gino Germani, framed the emergence of the Peronist movements as a “new” working class constituted by internal migrants from “traditional” peripheral provinces that migrated into the “modern” city with its European working class (Germani 1962; 1973:466). However, using statistics from INDEC8, Alejandro Grimson has argued that the majority of the workers who supported Perón were in fact not internal migrants. Rather a heterogeneous working class, many among them of European descendent, constituted the emergent Peronist movement. Yet from the white Europeanist perspective these workers were like internal migrants and transformed into “cabecitas negras” (Grimson 2016:21).

Racializations of bodies and social types might thus vary according to the needs of ruling elites and states. Argentine discourse has constructed different segments of migrants as either constitutive for modernity and progress or as burdens constitutive of social or economic problems. As discussed above, it is not entirely clear who was to be placed where in these categories. Rather racialization processes are contingent and change when hegemonic discourse does. As Bastia and vom Hum have argued, this can be understood as part of a context of nation making where tropes of whiteness have informed policy making, thus emphasizing the interconnection “between migration policy and discourses about race and nation” (Bastia &

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8 “Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos”: Argentina’s National Statistics and Censuses Institute.
vom Hum 2014:487). What is perceived as desired or unwanted is contingent, constantly changing with hegemonies and discourses.

European migrants still constitute a large share of foreign-born residents in Argentina. This is however an elderly population, previously larger in numbers – over 2 million between 1914 and 1960 (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:10). The latest census indicates that the remaining population born in Europe is down to about 300,000, the majority of which is from Spain and Italy. Around 90% of this population segment arrived in the country before 1991, indicating that it is the final remainder of overseas migration9.

Previous Russian and Ukrainian Communities in Argentina

Transnational relations and diaspora are concepts often theorized to analyze how migrant relations reach across space (Glick-Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1995; Vertovec 1997; Brah 1996; Farahani 2012). One thing that stands out with the individuals interviewed in this study is their apparent non-participation in transnational activities and economies. Most had not been able to afford to travel to visit relatives or friends in Ukraine or Russia, they claimed that they did not follow news, they were not involved in remittance economies, nor did they nourish a diasporic “myth of return” (Anwar 1979). Some had tried to “go back”, but had rapidly returned to Argentina. Others said they had no desire to “go back” and some even expressed that Ukraine was a dead-end for them. Many said they did not follow news or try to remain updated10. Thus, they did not easily fit into transnational extended spatial relations per Appadurai’s concept of trans-locality (Appadurai 1995). Neither did they fit into Nina Glick Schiller’s argument that migrants at the time of globalization lead lives that “cut across national boundaries” in terms of social relations (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992:1). Further, they were not engaged in the kind of circular migration that characterizes postsocialist labor mobility from contemporary Ukraine to EU countries (Triandafyllidou 2013).

The interviewees did not have much of a relationship with peers who had arrived at the same time as they had from Russia or Ukraine, and many expressed mistrust for former diaspora groups. Regardless of their reluctance


10 This stands out from studies of postsocialist Ukranian migrants in the U.S (Lemekh 2010:7).
to form community along the lines of national, territorial or ethnic belonging, they did relate to a transnational space and the history of former migration from Ukraine and Russia to Argentina. In this section I contextualize these references through a look at the historical background.

Ukrainian Communities in Argentina

According to figures discussed by Vic Satzewich, an estimated 220,000 persons of Ukrainian heritage lived in Argentina in the 1990s. This can be compared to the approximately one million residing in Canada (Satzewich 2002:20). These are, however, just estimations. Numbers vary according to different national sources and how one defines heritage or what it means to be Ukrainian. Another problem of defining the size of Ukrainian diaspora is of course related to the geopolitical history and the many redrawings of borders throughout the 20th century (Satzewich 2002:22).

The first Ukrainian migrant to set foot in Argentina did so in 1897, part of a modest arrival of some 10,000 Galician’s in this first wave between 1897–1914 (Satzewich 2002:56). Those who arrived with the first wave entered the country with Austrian or Russian passports; some were farmers with the intention of settlement, and others were itinerant laborers who planned on staying a few years before returning to Europe (Cipko 2011:xvi). The second wave came after World War I and as political borders had shifted various times, they originated from four jurisdictions: Soviet, Polish, Romanian, and Czechoslovakian. This wave was quite large and varied, consisting of migrants representing different political tendencies who formed various associations in Buenos Aires with nationwide reach.

In the 1920s more restrictive immigration policies implemented in North America diverted many migrants to countries like Argentina (Satzewich 2002:49). About 70,000 Ukrainians are estimated to have arrived with the second wave, making Argentina one of the leading receiving countries of Ukrainian migration. Diaspora scholar Serge Cipko has indicated that at this time there were more Ukrainians migrating to South America than to North

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11 As Satzewich has pointed out, most in the first wave of emigration from Ukrainian territory around the turn of the century probably did not perceive themselves as Ukrainian, rather they developed a sense of being Ukrainian once in diaspora (Satzewich 2002:27). The concept of diaspora has a particular history in the Ukrainian case. For example, Ukrainian emigrants in the period after World War II did not use the term diaspora; rather this concept was employed by Soviet administration that wanted to discredit nationalist emigrants. According to Satzewich, the emigrants however did not feel offended by this label and with time came to embrace it as an identity for the community (Satzewich 2002:8).
America. Argentina saw an ever-increasing number of migrants from Eastern Europe. During the period 1931 to 1941 the arrival from Eastern Europe for example outnumbered settlers from Italy and Spain (Cipko 2011:xvii).

It was during the second wave in the 1920s that Ukrainian cultural centers such as Prosvita were founded in Misiones and Buenos Aires (Méndez 2010:154). The inception of Ukraine as a socialist republic of the Soviet Union gave way to the first disagreements in the Ukrainian community of Argentina. In 1939, those who took a strong nationalist stance against the socialist republic and wanted to fight it politically, and those who preferred the Ukrainians in Argentina to organize around their culture and not get involved in home-land politics, separated into two blocks that are still evident today in Ukrainian associations in Argentina (Méndez 2010:155). These splits within Ukrainian diaspora according to political or religious identifications are also seen elsewhere in the Western Ukrainian diaspora (Koshulap 2013:44; Satzewich 2002).

As the third wave arrived after World War II, there was already an established network of Ukrainian organizations, it is estimated that about 6 000 of the migrants were Ukrainians. Serge Cipko writes that they emigrated from Displaced Persons camps as refugees and they were highly politicized: “their influence on the existing community – a significant portion of which was or had turned Sovietophile during the war – was far out of proportion to their numbers” (Cipko 2011:xviii). According to Norberto Méndez many of these migrants were professionals or specialized workers, others had survived Nazi German work camps and a few were Nazi collaborators (Méndez 2010:156).

The Ukrainians of these waves settled all over Argentina. Some in the northern province of Misiones, where there were agricultural opportunities. Others established communities in the provinces of Chaco, Mendoza, Formosa, Córdoba, Rio Negro, and Entre Ríos (Satzewich 2002:56). According to Satzewich half of the newly arrived migrants stayed in and around Buenos Aires "where they formed part of the emergent working class” (Satzewich 2002:56). As I will demonstrate, this historical context plays a part in the self-understandings and possible subject positions for participants in the study.
Russians in Argentina

According to historian Igor Andruskiewitsch there have mainly been three influxes of migration from Russian territory to Argentina. One is part of the Jewish diaspora, the second is constituted by the Volga-Germans: populations that were not banned from emigration during tsarist times. The third is made up of farmers and it is the descendants of this group that constitute the “Russian” community in Argentina today (Andruskiewitsch 2012:3).

The first Volga-German Russian colonists moved from Brazil in 1877, where they were not satisfied with the conditions. Subsequently, more arrived who settled in the province of Buenos Aires and Entre Ríos where they worked the land in a collective manner. At the turn of the century more Volga-German also settled in central and northern provinces (Ehrenhaus & Garrido 2012:7f). In 1910, about 45,000 German migrants from Russia resided in Argentina; many of their descendants today express feeling part of the German community in Argentina (Andruskiewitsch 2012:4).

In 1885, diplomatic relationships were established between Argentina and Russia and in 1888, through tsar Alexander III, the first orthodox community in South America was founded, a request from orthodox migrants: Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, Romanian, Yugoslavian etc. The first church was a modest apartment and among its followers few acknowledged themselves as Russians. At the turn of the century a priest sent from Russia purchased some terrain in the southern part of the city and in 1901, the Russian church was inaugurated (Andruskiewitsch 2012:3). This is the very same church and terrain where one participant of this study, Ekaterina, found a precarious shelter during a period of unemployment.

The majority of Jewish migrants in Argentina came from the Russian empire, but some also arrived from Western Europe and the Middle East (Ehrenhaus & Garrido 2012:17). It has been estimated that 250,000 Jews

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12 During the first phases of migration, Russia was still a tsarist empire that was multi-ethnic and multi-confessional, therefore those originating from here were not necessarily “Russian” (See Andruskiewitsch 2012).

13 An interesting detail here is that one of the motivating factors for the Volga-Germans to travel to Argentina was the initiation of mandatory military service in Russia in 1874. Thus many took advantage of the new migratory law of 1876 and escaped. In Argentina conscription started in the beginning of 20th century and was removed in the middle of the 1990s. All males born in the late 70s or 80s that participated in my study also pointed out how the need to evade obligatory military conscription in Ukraine was part of their parent’s decision to migrate (see Andruskiewitsch 2012:3f).

14 According to a German ambassador, there are about one million German descendants living in Argentina today. Some of the Volga-Germans have also been granted German passports (Andruskiewitsch 2012:4).
arrived to Argentina between 1880 and 1940 (Moya 2004:21). The initial phase of Jewish migration took place between 1860 and 1885, destined for urban cities and constituted by Sephardic Jews from Alsace Lorraine, France, and Western European. With the second wave, 1889–1914, the majority arrived from Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Morocco, and Turkey (Ehrenhaus & Garrido 2012:17). They were fleeing persecution and pogroms, and an agricultural endeavor seemed more attractive for them than a future as industrial workers in the U.S.A (Ehrenhaus & Garrido 2012:19). In 1914, around 100,000 Russian Jews resided in Argentina, many in organized agricultural colonies. They habitually called themselves Russians because they had arrived with Russian passports, however today their descendants do not consider themselves part of the Russian community (Andruskiewitsch 2012:4).

The bulk of Russian migrants, about 141,000, arrived between the beginning of the 20th century and the outbreak of WWI (Moya 2004:21). Of those who arrived in the beginning of the 20th century, many were seasonal workers and farmers from the western part of Russia. Due to the revolution in 1917 and the outbreak of WWI, seasonal workers who had planned on returning stayed in Argentina. Andruskiewitsch has suggested that their descendants do not participate in the Russian community of today either (Andruskiewitsch 2012:4). Among these migrants were socialists and anarchists, and many Russian worker’s unions and organizations were formed. The Residency Law passed in 1902 was specifically aimed at foreign anarchists, a tenth of those forced to leave the country were Jews with Russian passports, a disproportionate number since they only made up less than 3% of the city’s total population (Moya 2004:38)\(^\text{15}\). José Moya has discussed how, in descriptions of events of anarchist violence directed towards the police, the terms “Jew”, “Anarchist”, and “Russian” were conflated in Argentine public discourse (Moya 2004:36f).

\(^{15}\) One of the most famous Russian anarchists was Simon Radowitsky, born in a shtetl in the Kiev province; he had worked as a smith and mechanic in Russia until he was ten years old. He participated in the 1905 Revolution in Russia where he had been shot, arrested and spent half a year in jail. Like many of his peers, Radowitsky migrated to Argentina in 1908 where he worked in a Jewish-owned metal shop (Moya 2004:34). He became part of the vibrant anarchist environment and later assassinated Buenos Aires’ Chief of Police, Ramon Falcón, an act of retaliation for brutal repression where many workers had been killed. Being a minor, Radowitsky could not be sentenced to death, but was sentenced to lifetime imprisonment, from which he escaped, returned, and was finally pardoned in 1930. By then he had become a symbol of the working class struggle; something Moya argues helped include Jewish migrants in Argentina as anti-semitism was kept at bay by the strong presence of Jewish migrants in the workers movements (Moya 2004:41).
After the 1917 revolution, Argentina received Russian exiles from the white side of the civil war. Andruskiewitsch writes that about 1000 people organized themselves in different social and cultural associations (Andruskiewitsch 2012:5). After the World War II, more political exiles from the white side arrived to Argentina and they constructed a diaspora community with churches, newspapers, editorials, theater groups, Sunday schools, sports clubs, etc. some of which are still functioning today (Andruskiewitsch 2012:5,10).

The Postsocialists’ Relations to Diaspora

In other research about postsocialist migrants in Argentina, ethnically framed tensions, such as anti-Russian tendencies, is manifest, especially among migrants originating from central-Asian republics (Escoffier & Seller 2010:131ff). This has not been the case in my material, where only one person expressed strong Ukrainian nationalism and anti-Russian opinions. The majority of participants in my study originated from the Ukraine, although some of those identified themselves as Russian, others had one Russian parent. Most of them, however, did not want to differentiate between Russian and Ukrainian. There are only two participants who arrived from the Russian Federation.

There seems to be a tendency to not organize around common necessities in national or ethnic terms in ways former diaspora societies did in Argentina, the so called mutual-aid societies. Rather it seems that each interviewed participant appeared as a free-floating satellite, claiming their independence and their non-need to look for diaspora groups, nor postsocialist allies. Some felt they had been burned by struggles among postsocialist migrants for resources and did not trust their peers or the diaspora communities. Others said they only socialized with Argentines because the post-Soviets “were stuck in time” or only “complained”. Other studies demonstrate that the postsocialist migrants did not identify with former Ukrainian communities and expressed having been rejected or not offered help by former communities.

Norberto Méndez has noted that the Ukrainian embassy reported that few had reached out to it for help and acknowledged that there was a lack of cooperation between former migrant organizations and the newly arrived migrants (Méndez 2010:176f). This, Méndez argues, has to do both with the Ukrainian descendants’ lack of language skills, and can also be attributed to the identification of the newly arrived with the Soviet Union (Méndez 2010).
In an un-published master thesis on the Ukrainian community in Argentina, Louise Baker interviewed members of the Ukrainian diaspora organizations in Buenos Aires. Her material points toward a "values clash" between newly arrived and former members of diaspora. This was due to their assumption that the postsocialist migrants embodied the ills of the Soviet era and tainted their nostalgic notions of a homeland (Baker 2011:3). This animosity has also been noticed in the context of Ukrainian diaspora in the U.S. where newcomers were identified with the USSR (Satzewich 2002:198; Lemekh 2010).

Latin American Immigration

Since the relational identification with Latin American migrants has such an impact upon participants’ self-understandings, a discussion of the history of Latin American immigration to Argentina is needed in this contextualizing background.

Much Argentine research on migration has focused on the European mass immigration of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, migration from the bordering countries of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary mobility in this region dates back to before the foundation of the nation states. Yet, Latin American immigration to Argentina is relatively absent in historical studies of international migrations in Argentina – rather scholars have focused upon the European arrivals and their different ways of becoming Argentine (see e.g. Baily 1999; Balán 1995; Devoto 2003; Pacceca & Courtis 2008:16). There is however an increasing field of literature on Latin American migration to Argentina and its social aspects in society (see e.g. Benencia & Gazotti 1995; Ceva 2006; Grimson & Jelin 2006; Grimson 2006, 1999; Sassone 1989).

According to the 2010 census, 1.8 million people born abroad reside in Argentina, the majority being Latin American migrants of whom about 1.2 million originate from bordering countries, followed closely in numbers by Peru. The Paraguayan community is the largest, followed by the Bolivian and the Chilean (Gavazzo 2010:13). These groups have different patterns of mobility to and within Argentina. Migration from Paraguay dates back

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16 Due to the lack of empirical research on the reception of this particular group, I use Baker’s master thesis as an empirical source.
already to the aftermath of the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) and over the 20th century has been spurred by economic and political factors (Gavazzo 2010:13). Bolivian migrants have arrived in different waves. Before the 1960s most migrants were concentrated in the border regions, but as the agriculture sector demanded manpower they spread throughout the country. When the construction and textile industries in Buenos Aires also demanded more laborers the population grew, constantly increasing since the 1980s (Gavazzo 2010:15). The Chilean community has a large concentration in Patagonia and has also experienced several stages, the first between the 1940s and the 1970s when many un-skilled workers migrated to work in the industries of Buenos Aires. This was then followed by a politicized migration after Pinochet’s coup d’état. Following the return of democracy, Chilean migration consisted of many semi and high skilled workers and in the 1990s many returned (Gavazzo 2010:16).

Up until the 1960s, migrants from bordering countries mainly moved in and out of border provinces mostly for agricultural seasonal work: Bolivians in the northwestern provinces, Paraguayans in the northeastern and Chileans in the south (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:21). However, the migratory framework for a long time mainly focused on overseas arrivals rather than those that entered the country by land (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:11). With administrative governance focused upon surveillance of maritime routes, Argentina had a more relaxed attitude to territorial entrance of citizens of bordering countries. Even after this changed in the 1960s, there was little control of tourist entries from bordering countries, giving way to an extensive population of migrants that were hindered from regulating their residency in Argentina and thereby forced into precarious conditions of labor, housing, education and sanity (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:11).

Pacecca and Courtis show that between 1949 and 1992, amnesty decrees were implemented to formalize their stay in the country and simplify the process of documentation. They suggest that this demonstrates the fragmentation and lack of systematic integral state policies regarding migration in Argentina (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:12). They argue that this also indicates how social inclusion and exclusion, implying also access to rights, are linked to historical dimensions of policies (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:5). From the 1960s this frontier mobility extended into urban industries and the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, thus transforming this migration from seasonal to settling (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:21).

When the former migratory framework was revised, particularly from the 1960s, rules for entrance and permanence for migrants from bordering
countries became stricter, for example through distinctions of illegality, specified rules of admittance, disjoined categories of residence type, or requested documentation of bureaucratic processes – labor contracts formally verified by public notary, personal documentation with official stamps, etc. Pacecca and Courtis note that simultaneously with the introduction of these regulations an increasing presence of law enforcement by police was noticed in association with the administration (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:42).

Pacecca and Courtis bring attention to how this framework was the result of a fragmented series of rules dictated by the executive power and approved outside of the regular parliamentary order. The Ley General de Migraciones y Fomento de la Inmigración Nº 22.439, known as the Law of Videla, stems from this framework (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:41f). Pacecca and Courtis posit that this law, in force as a debt left by the dictatorship twenty years after the return of the democracy, violated fundamental constitutional rights, and furthermore placed the majority of the migrant population in a highly vulnerable position18 (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:42).

In 2003, the Peronist government of Nestor Kirchner (2003–2007) approved a new framework, Ley de Migraciones, Nº 25.871. This law represented a new paradigm in the Argentine migratory framework as it contained a human rights perspective and a regional focus (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:43). Based on non-discrimination principles this law granted rights to education and social services regardless of legal status in the country. Argentina was also the first amongst “receiving” countries to ratify the International Convention of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families in 2007 (Bastia & vom Hum 2014: 486).

Social Inequality

Buenos Aires is a spatially and socially separated city divided into different districts. At the time of participants’ arrival and subsequent struggles to integrate, the city of Buenos Aires had about 3 million inhabitants and the highest middle income. Being the federal capital of the nation, the city is often represented and lived as a European, middle class, and elite urban space. The

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18 It distinguished between illegality of entrance and illegality of permanence and had the categories of permanent, temporary, and transitory residents defined, where only the permanent were granted constitutional rights. Furthermore, it introduced an obligation, which particularly affected physicians, teachers, notary publics, public employed etc., to report any foreigner lacking a permit of residence to the migration authority. It also prevented children that lacked permanent or temporary residence to attend school (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:42).
suburban metropolitan district – the conurbation – had about 8 million inhabitants at this time (Cerrutti & Grimson 2007:297). The spatial organization of the city coincides with socioeconomic groups; the middle and upper classes tend to live in the northern parts of the city and its outskirts while the southern parts of the city and the conurbation have lower income and higher destitution levels (Grimson 2008:504). As anthropologist Alejandro Grimson has indicated, a person from the middle-class can spend months or even years without seeing a shantytown if it is located outside of his or her everyday circuit (Cerrutti & Grimson 2007:297).

The neoliberal transformation of Buenos Aires meant a reorganization of space. The number of people living in shantytowns within the federal capital went from 39,897 in 1987–1990, to 59,977 in the years 1993–1995. Simultaneously the number of luxury departments in the city quadrupled during this period and the elites also moved out into gated communities in large numbers.19 During the last decade of the 21st century, 44% of all private investment in the Mercosur region went to development of gated communities (Libertun de Duren 2009:319). This spatial reorganization is part of an international tendency where global cities have undergone profound changes from public to private (McKenzie 1994, Blakely & Snyder 1997, Low 2003, Svampa 2008). The crisis and decentralization of the state, the deindustrialization process, increased urban fear of insecurity, and the increased chasm between favored and excluded sectors has led to a formation of similar landscapes in Latin American cities during recent decades (Libertun de Duren 2009:317).

Grimson and Kessler have demonstrated how transformations of labor markets leading to precarious livelihoods and increasing social inequality stemming from the impoverishment of the middle class, are connected to organization of space and urban fears (Grimson & Kessler 2005:108). This material transformation is part of a discourse articulated through legal frameworks, transformed policies, and government official discourses (Gavazzo 2010:17). During this decade of transformation, persistent tropes of racism took new forms. In the media, migrants from bordering countries were associated with various delinquent activities, such as street crimes and trafficking. This level of discursive violence in the media has been described by Pacecca and Courtis as a pogrom; constructing migrants from bordering countries and Peru as rivals for labor and like “invaders” of public services.

19 In 1994 only 1,450 families lived in gated communities, but as the end of the 1990s there were about 35,000 families residing in these closed off spaces (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:298).
They note that even if these discourses were no longer hegemonic some years into the new millennia, Latin American migrants were still associated with situations of conflict and social anomalies (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:37).

There was no actual increase in the number of border migrants entering Argentina during this period, nor did socio-demographic figures support the claim that they had increased the crime rate (Grimson & Kessler 2005:117). Hence, during the 1990s, Bolivian, Peruvian, and Paraguayan migrants were constructed as scapegoats for societal problems. They were blamed for unemployment, insecurity, and drug trafficking, and nationalist rhetoric constructed clear borders between an Argentine “us” and a wrong kind of foreigners (Gavazzo 2010:7; Albarracán 2005:30ff). It is important to recognize how this happened at a time of economic austerity.

However, with neoliberal transformation of urban and social space, visibility of ethnicities and racializations also changed. Whereas migrants from neighboring countries – especially Bolivians and Paraguayans – previously had been conceived not as “foreigners” but “part of the undifferentiated mass of cabecitas negras” and thereby as part of the racialized working class, conceptualizations of ethnic visibility changed when official discourse targeted migrants for increasing economic and social problems. Grimson and Kessler suggest: “In the past, ‘diversity’ had been rendered invisible, but by the 1990s, difference was increasingly highlighted, or ‘hypervisibilized’” (Grimson & Kessler 2005).

They argue that this phenomena stems from migrant organizations’ struggles for rights and legal status. This visibility challenged the Argentine elite’s image of Argentina as a European stronghold in Latin America. With the consolidation of the neoliberal model in the 1990s and the impoverished middle class, the idea of Argentina as exceptional – as having a large middle class and striving for ideals of social equality – was challenged. The increasing inequalities were discursively framed as the “Latin Americanization of Argentina” (Grimson & Kessler 2005:97). In this way we can see how space can be assigned social meanings related to ideas of geographical hierarchies. One function of these discourses, they argue, was the articulation of the migrants from bordering countries and their marginal position in society as a sign of Argentina’s entrance into the “First World”: “Germany had Turkish immigrants, the United States had Mexicans, and Argentina had Bolivians” (Grimson & Kessler 2005:117). What roles could the postsocialist migrants play in this complex puzzle?
CHAPTER 3
“We Could Not Stay After the Changes”:
Leaving the post-Soviet crisis

I was to meet with Alexei at his office in a posh neighborhood of Buenos Aires city. After ringing the doorbell of a bulletproof metal door I looked around the street with its many designer stores. A buzzing signal opened the door and Alexei greeted me in an almost shy way. He had a friendly smile and agreed to leave the open space office where his co-workers were listening in on us. We went to a cafeteria where he ordered an espresso. Some nicely dressed school kids passed by the window and our looks were drawn to them. The capital seemed far from the city Alexei had arrived in together with his parents and a group of ten Ukrainians in 1999. In this part of town, thirteen years after the Argentine crisis, people were shopping and drinking coffee as in any other thriving metropolis. The social and economic cityscape thus appeared very different from what it did at the time of Alexei’s arrival, as did his own life and future. The story he was about to tell me was different from the ones I had heard before – his story being one of upward mobility and success. Yet, like all others I had interviewed, Alexei was to return to the 1990s and speak of the impact the events that unfolded during that time had on his life and mobility.

Note from field-diary, November 2014.

In all my interviews, the decade of the 1990s was mentioned. Regardless of the age or place of birth of the interviewee they referred to the 1990s as a turning point in their lives. Some talked about the impact it had on them, their possibilities and mobility, others on how the events had impacted their parents’ lives and thus themselves. They spoke of it as a time when “everything changed”, not only in their lives, but also in recent world history. Indeed, this decade saw tremendous shifts – the aftermath of the disintegration of the socialist states in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991.
In this chapter the dislocatory events brought about by the implosion of the Soviet Union and how they affected participants are examined. I discuss participants’ stories through a contextualization of the historical processes they talk about. This does not mean that I take either their words, or the factual circumstances, to be the truth of what happened. Rather, I am interested in how discourse interacts with our personal narratives and constructions of meaning. When we speak of our lives and who we are, we tend to look back to find causal relations, answers to how it came to be that we are the ones we are in this certain moment and why we are located in the place we speak from (Linde 1993). Through a reconstruction of the past participants could construct identifications in the present and locate a direction for the future.

Living Through the Shock-Therapy Years

In my material there are two different filters through which participants remember the 1990s and the dislocatory events that unfolded at that time. There are those who lived it as children or young adults and thus remember how it affected their parents and indirectly themselves. Then there are those who lived it as adults and remember it through an adult’s narratives. One thing these perspectives have in common is that they are told from a present that is different from what was lived then.

The 1990s for the Children and Young Adults

Born in the early 1980s, Alexei was a teenager during the 1990s and told his story from an economic and social position in the present that other interviewees did not share with him. However, the events he identified as dislocatory were the same as others described. Like two other male participants, Victor and Kyrylo, who arrived as children or young adults, he said one of the reasons for his parents’ decision to migrate was in order to avoid the military service and its high mortality rate for young men. Another reason was economic “because it was very difficult to work in the sector you wanted to work in”. He then continued:

At that moment, in the 1990s Ukraine, it was all basically about buying and selling stuff. Everyone ended up in some open-air market where they bought and sold stuff. They tried to bring in stuff from Turkey, China, or

1 Jelena, Victor and Ivan.
2 Yulia, Kyrylo, Ekaterina, and Alexei.
3 Myroslav, Alina, Evhen, Natalia, Igor, Valentyna and Vadim
some other country and they sold it there. And of course that is not the future you want for your children. You want them to develop, for them to progress. So that was another of the reasons /…/ We had our house, we had cars, after all we were pretty well off but … my parents wanted a better future for us.

The desire to provide their children with a better future is a theme that appears in all the interviews, and some mention it as the main reason for migration. Since only men spoke about how their parents wanted to spare them the military service this also had a gendered dimension. To make sure one’s children live in a safe environment and the ability to provide them with an education is of course an important motivation for migration. This can for example be found in the classical “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America” where migrants in search of a better future say “if not for ourselves, at least for our children” (Thomas & Znaniecki 1918:192). Ethnographic studies from this time also entailed people’s fears and hopes for their children (Pilkington 1997; Pine 1998, 2002). Unlike refugees who flee wars, disasters or persecutions, migrants mainly choose their mobility. They decide on migration in order to improve their lives, find work or education⁴.

Alexei’s parents decided to migrate for various reasons, yet all those reasons were aimed at one goal – the ability to achieve a better life for themselves and their children. They did not see that this possibility fitted in the place and circumstances they were living. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries of Eastern and Central Europe went through radical changes. Former structures were dismantled and removed, while neoliberal economist and policy-makers recommended a “shock-therapy” of privatization and marketization (Bridger & Pine 1998; Burawoy & Verdery 1999; Likic-Brboric et al. 2013:267). The turmoil in the wake of the demise of the USSR, and of these changes are what I refer to as the first dislocatory events that participants experienced. Policy makers presumed that growth would come through economic reforms and that the countries that were changing from planned economy would follow a linear path to market economy. However, a decade later, poverty and inequality in the region had increased in an unanticipated way (World Bank 2000). All research participants spoke about their own memories of these structural changes. Alexei’s recollection of how “everyone ended up” in wholesale in open-air markets reflects this period of time and the economic transformations underway. Already during

the Perestroika years the strict regulations on international trade and travel were loosened and after 1991 all citizens could take part in international trade⁵ (Humphrey 1997:23).

Like Alexei, those who were born in the 1980s remember in similar ways how their parents struggled to make ends meet with a myriad different informal ways of work. Born in the early 1980s, Kyrylo came to adulthood in an urban environment of independent Ukraine. At the time when his parents initiated the migration process he was studying marketing in a private school and when the moment came to leave, he had just managed to secure employment at a magazine. He did not want to go, yet had to conform to his parents will.

Over the phone Kyrylo asked me to meet him in a car park in the city. A couple of years back he had left Buenos Aires for another province and was thus the only one of the participants residing in a rural setting. He was in town to do some business and had parked his pickup truck at this car park. I felt a bit uneasy, being a woman waiting for a man I did not know in a parking lot. The guard in the entrance kept giving me long looks that I ignored. Then Kyrylo appeared, a tall blonde man wearing a flannel shirt. My immediate thought was that he looked just like someone I could have known back home. Surprised, I noticed that feeling of closeness the encounter with the Russian woman in the restaurant some years before had given me. Was that an outcome of racialized positioning?

We got into his truck, and as we cruised down Avenida Corrientes, Kyrylo turned out to be talkative person. In perfect Argentinean Spanish he shifted between jokes, flirtation, and serious narratives of hardships endured, his gestures like those of any other porteño. He challenged me: why had I decided to write about this, what could I possibly gain? And most importantly – what was my own experience of living in Argentina? I could tell he wanted to test me, to see if I was someone worthy of his story. As Amy Schuman has argued, narratives are “interactive, intertextual, and dialogic“ creations (Schuman 2016:136). Not everyone is qualified to listen to a story. In a playful manner Kyrylo wanted to see if I was someone he found worthy to hear his stories, or perhaps which kind of stories could be told to me. Like Schuman suggests, “Negotiations of positioning, tellability, and ownership occur at the intersection of narratives as texts and narratives as interactions (Schuman 2016:136).

⁵ See Humphrey 2002 for an analysis on postsocialist extra-legal economies during the 1990s.
I told Kyrylo my reasons and parts of my personal background in Argentina. I was still puzzled by my initial reaction to his appearance and as I spoke my body reacted to feelings the memories I told awoke in me. I blushed or my eyes filled with tears. The authenticity created by the emotions seemed to please him. While driving he told me of all the trouble they had had due to his lack of passport. Upon arrival in Argentina he had been “inscribed into his mothers’ passport” and they had gone through a myriad bureaucratic procedures for him to have his own documentation, finally ending happily when he presented a big smile and flowers to the female clerk in the migration office. He laughed a lot when he told me about this and seemed to monitor my reactions. Finally we stopped beside an outdoor lunch place in the Costanera harbor area. “Let’s go have a beer,” he said, “I have a lot to tell you”. It seemed I had passed his test.

He had arrived in Argentina in 1998 together with his parents. He was nineteen years old at the time and knew nothing of his new country – only that it was supposed to have “exotic women and spectacular paychecks”. With a smile he said that only the latter proved true. “The 1990s was a fucked up decade,” he then added. “So what did your dad do?” I asked and he answered:

He had a construction business over there. Furniture. It was going pretty good /…/ Then from one day to the next, the bank, without notifying changed the interest rate from 10% to 150% … /…/ that was it, he had to file for bankruptcy /…/ The thing is that here the laws are more or less humane, not there. Over there they just close your account, they leave you skinned bare, naked, that’s it. They take your house, the car, everything. So he took the decision, sold the house and all of it. Why Argentina then? Because my dad is crazy (laughs).

From there he went on to tell me episodes from Argentine history that, despite the distant relation to Argentina he partly seemed eager to create, indicated he really had studied the country’s history. I wanted to know more about his family and asked him about his mother:

My mom was a qualified engineer. And when it all fell apart … she worked selling stuff at the market … you have to survive on something /…/ those last years in Ukraine we had really hard times, very hard. … Let me tell you what it was like to come home from school and the only thing there was to eat was some flour and water and some synthetic honey that was left over from my dad’s resale. Nothing else, that was it.
The structural changes transformed whole life worlds and in this way the dislocatory experiences were interwoven with personal memories in participants’ narratives. A couple of weeks before my encounter with Kyrylo I had met Jelena through a mutual friend at a social event organized by the Russian embassy. She came across just like any other young Argentinean, a global citizen in a world of *mestizaje*, with her perfect Spanish and Argentine gestures her belonging to the city of Buenos Aires was not something she had to dispute. Squeezed into a corner of a global coffee chain shop Jelena told me how she navigated her invisible borders and of the sorrows it had meant for her to leave her childhood friends behind (see Anzaldúa 1999; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:42). It had hurt her to realize that with each visit to Ukraine she was regarded as belonging less

Jelena was born in the late 1980s in eastern Ukraine and as we met for the second time to carry out an interview she recalled how her mother, born in the late 1960s, turned to petty trade as a form of subsistence in the turmoil of the post-Soviet economic collapse. She brought clothing items from abroad to sell in Ukraine, but when outrivaled by larger international enterprises, she started selling clothes for others in an open-air market. Then she got a job at a fish-stand “*But those were really bad conditions, she worked in winter time and had to stick her hands into iced water. She didn’t like it at all, no one would like that, so I think that was one of the things that motivated her to move on and think of a better future herself and for me*” Jelena told me at a crowded coffee shop in downtown Buenos Aires.

Those who had arrived with their parents were the ones who described in the most detail the way their parents tried to pull through the havoc after the dislocatory events in the post-Soviet crisis. The adults spoke of how it all came apart but they did not give details of what they did in order to survive before opting for migration. Perhaps it was too painful to remember. Or had other events come in between, making that struggle more distant than the more recent ones? It is also possible that those were stories repeated so many times in the family that the children had a script to follow when making sense of their parents’ decision to leave (see Langellier & Peterson 2004:33ff, 109). Those scripts all indicated the aspirations of achieving a better life.

The 1990s for the Adults

Among the research participants who had left as adults with existing careers and family lives, the majority were highly educated. Nonetheless, even if they had university diplomas and qualifications, they found it hard to subsist in
recently independent Ukraine or Russia. The drastic structural changes of the postsocialist countries led to a rapid increase in unemployment throughout the region. Between 1991 and 1999 the reported national income in Ukraine declined by about 60 percent while former social protection systems ceased to exist (World Bank 2001:8).

Nonetheless, unemployment was just one of the reasons for leaving they mention. Some also speak of how they wanted to get away from an environment polluted by the Chernobyl accident of 1986. For example, two physicians, born in the 1960s in central and western Ukraine, spoke of the consequences of the radioactive pollution on their patients’ and their own health, and mention their children’s health as a reason for leaving when the possibility finally presented itself. This correlates with other interviews with postsocialist migrants in Argentina who mention social and economical crisis, conflicts such as in Chechnya, insecurity, and environmental disasters like for example Chernobyl, as motivating factors for their migration (Marcogliese 2003:54, Masseroni 2008:122). The emphasis on economic distress, crisis, and conflicts also corresponds to the literature on transnational postsocialist migration to other parts of the world (Montefusco 2008; Lemekh 2010).

During an interview with the former physician Evhen and his wife, Valentyna, formerly a bookkeeper, they talked about the many factors entangled in their decision to leave Ukraine:

Valentyna: Ukrainians say that it was not immigration but an evacuation. This wave was called evacuation. Jenny: Evacuation? Because of Chernobyl? Evhen: Because of anything Valentyna: Because of Chernobyl, some fled from bandits, others from famine, because yes, people were hungry, they didn’t get paid … there were no plants, it was all terrifying, so they rounded everything up and sold their houses or apartments for pennies and they fled.

Valentyna and Evhen were born in central Ukraine in the late 1960s and early 1960s, respectively. They arrived in Argentina in 1996 together with their son. I met them in their house in a suburb in the Buenos Aires conurbation. First I had interviewed their son who had invited me to their house. We sat at the kitchen table and the conurbation dogs howled from the backyards outside the kitchen window. The television was on in another room and Evhen had recently entered the room to join our conversation. He told me he had worked as a surgeon in a state clinic at the time of the dislocatory events. When their son Ivan was born he had a nutritional disorder, probably caused
by the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, and could not eat anything other than special formula. Evhen told me:

My monthly paycheck wasn’t enough even for three cans (of the special baby food he had to eat). So I left and we set up our own clinic /.../ We started to install new technologies, installations, all professional stuff. She (Valentyna) was helping me, we worked every day until 2 in the morning … But they didn’t like this … The mafia didn’t like it that we appeared without their consent, we didn’t pay anyone /.../ Ivan: Tell her the details, when they started to enter the house Evhen: Then the trespassing in our house started. I bought a shotgun, we lived with a weapon, well, it was like, you know, it was like war. Like a hidden civil war, if you have not lived through that you don’t know Valentyna: If you had Evhen: (interrupts) I had a house and they demolished it, they didn’t give me any replacement. I was left with nothing so… That’s what it’s like over there.

After living through the dislocatory events and experiences Evhen and Valentyna behaved in accordance with the transition paradigm; they started a private health clinic, an investment they were able to make with the support of German aid. This meant they were re-positioning themselves in the new social terrain, initiating a relocatory trajectory. However, during Perestroika, crime levels increased in the USSR, and the economic crisis in the aftermath of the demise of the USSR made it worse (Pesmen 2000:21). Valentyna said that the “post-Perestroika times” were really dangerous and they started to tell me of an event when their tire punctured when they were coming back with their car and a caravan from “the last vacation we ever made in Ukraine”:

Valentyna: I had a premonition and I told him, “take Ivan with you” when he went to the closest town to get a new tire. It was in the middle of nowhere, only wasteland and the road. I told him ‘I’m staying here with the dog’. He went with Ivan. A car drove by, some trucks. Then another car stopped 40 meters from me. A guy gets out and he starts shooting, he shoots trying to kill the dog, I’m not sure. I took the dog inside, I had a shotgun … I was ready to shoot /.../ They were drunks, drunk bandits … for him (her husband) maybe it’s all forgotten but I had panic attacks for ten years. Jenny: I can imagine that Valentyna: Panic attacks! Evhen: She was alone, on the empty road, with only three cartridges (laughs nervously).

This is a story of social and economic changes that altered the lives of Evhen and Valentyna in an increasingly violent way. It is also a narrative that can be read as part of their family story, the way Ivan encouraged his parents to tell
me the details of the events indicates that this collaborative storytelling was part of a narrative performance they had done many times before and as such could be labeled family storytelling (Langellier & Peterson 2004:33ff, 109). This kind of repetition is part of a narrative meaning-making that maintains a discourse of what it was like in the post-Soviet crisis. Storytelling is a way to sustain, but also change, how certain events are remembered or experienced.

This is thus a family narrative that tells the experiences of a particular family, but it also a typical post-Soviet story, related to similar stories that circulated in Russia and Ukraine during these years. Seated at a kitchen table in the Bonarense conurbation, Evhen, Valentyna and Ivan were telling me how they made sense out of experiencing the dislocatory events former citizens of the USSR experienced during the Perestroika and post-Soviet years. Things did not go as expected for Evhen and Valentyna and they were subjected to gradually brutal and dangerous situations. Evhen summarized the dislocatory events further worsened by their son’s Chernobyl-related illness: “It was a social situation, you know, the profits were divided between the mafias, the parties, and I don’t know whom the hell more. Everyone wanted to get hold of something. It was an awful disturbance. With all of this we had no hope”.

Paolo Boccagni and Loretta Baldassar have emphasized that the affective side of migrant lives and conditions is still understudied (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:73). Affect is part of how we make meaning out of our lives and trajectories, regardless of whether we are migrants or not. Boccagni and Baldassar argue, “mixed and contrasting emotions and feelings such as hope and nostalgia, guilt and ambition, affection and disaffection, to name but a few are an integral part of the life experiences of migrants” (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:73). Hope is something participants spoke about from different perspectives. When making sense out of the dislocatory events of the 1990s, hope and aspirations were related as an important factor in their decision to migrate. This brings another dimension into the analysis of conditions from which migration emerges, sometimes instrumentally focused on economically driven decisions (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:73).

Hope is integral for how one imagines oneself and the future, as such it is connected to understandings of the past and the present. In scholarly literature, hope has been conceptualized as an emotional projection into the future, an affective becoming (Andersson 2006; Warren & Manderson 2008). An approach to hope is to regard it as an affective dimension of everyday life, and as such a part of participants’ relocatory trajectories. What participants had hoped for in the late 1990s affected how they experienced their positions
in the 2010s when these interviews were carried out. Their hope had directed them to certain understandings of their past and futures. As ethnologist Angelika Sjöstedt Landén has argued, discourse structures what is made possible, not only in the past and present, but also in ways of possible futures (Sjöstedt Landén 2011:287).

To relocate oneself can then be analyzed as a way of finding new directions after a dislocatory event. To opt for migration they had to believe that a better life was achievable somewhere else, and they had certain expectations on that life, expectations that were conditioned by what discourse made possible. The discursive makings of subjective directions that Sjöstedt Landén’s study points towards are important for how I analyze participants' negotiations of their past and present as part of their relocatory trajectories. The aftermath of the collapse of the USSR seems to have resulted in feelings of uncertainty for participants. Part of initiating a relocatory trajectory was to make sense out of how they and their children were to prevail in the midst of social and economic crisis. Their decision to migrate was an orientation towards other future prospects than they could see possible in Ukraine or Russia. In this way hope became anchored to a specific space (Rafaettá 2015). Similarly, Sara Ahmed has noted how migration is a process involving the need for subjects to reorientate and direct themselves from former and towards new belongings (2011:153).

I suggest that these affective dimensions, for individuals who have experienced a dislocatory event, are important to understand in relation to the larger structural factors that shape their possibilities and impossibilities. As Moya contends, various kinds of socioeconomic push-factors can always be listed when one analyzes migration, however more importantly are the bigger structural changes, the dislocations that reorganize societal structures (Moya 1998:43). Moya argues that if the overseas mass migration of the 19th and 20th century “was caused by something, that something was not backwardness but modernization, a process that engendered poverty for many, opportunities for others, and change, competition, disruption, and motion for a greater number (1998:44). In the wake of dislocatory events follows mobility, not necessarily spatial, and I suggest that this mobility becomes directed by contemporary

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6 Sjöstedt Landén uses fantasmatic logics as a concept that “concerns the very reasons why subjects consider particular practices to be possible or impossible” (Sjöstedt Landén 2011:291). Recently Swedish ethnologists have employed the logics perspective in studies of such varied phenomena as political activism (Gunnarsson Payne 2006), ageing (Lundgren 2011), professional subject formation (Sjöstedt Landén 2012), and compulsory care (Silow Kallenberg 2016). In these studies fantasmatic logic is used in order to understand why people maintain certain ideas of the world and themselves.
discourses and possibilities. Just like the Spanish emigrants Moya writes about, participants in this study went overseas, nurtured by a hope that in the Americas they could find a better life for themselves and their children.

As the century came to an end, scholars and policy makers had reached an agreement that the expected (modernizing) “transition” to a market economy in the postsocialist region did not develop quite as planned. As Evhen and Valentyna told me, new conflicts, social problems, and insecurities appeared in the vast postsocialist region (Bridger & Pine 1998; World Bank 2001). When the Soviet system imploded it was taken as a sign of the “end of history”, implicit in the celebrations of the free world was the idea that the global market economy simultaneously had triumphed (Fukuyama 1992; see also Hann 1998; Burawoy & Verdery 1999). Historian Robert Service has written about what many former Soviet citizens lived through in the 1990s:

The USSR’s demise met with an unconditional welcome abroad, and it was supposed that almost all citizens of Russia shared this attitude at that time. The dominant assumption was that Russia had been given the opportunity to move towards the End of History: at last they could painlessly embrace democracy and the market. The brightest of these hopes were soon dashed (Service 2002:4).

Almost three decades after the walls came down, unemployment, inequalities, and poverty had increased throughout the postsocialist region. Illustratively, at the time Alexei, Kyrylo, Jelena, Evhen, Valentyna, and others like them left Ukraine, The World Bank stated that one particular challenge to what they called the Ukrainian “transition economy” was “the realization that poverty can appear even among the employed population” (World Bank 2001:6). Evhen and Valentyna were angry with corrupt politicians and former party leaders. And even if unhappy in Argentina, Ukraine was a place they felt they had been “evacuated” from: a dead end with no place for hope.

Igor was another of the participants who had lived through these dislocatory events as an adult and a family provider. He was the neighbor of a friend of an acquaintance and when I first telephoned him he spoke in a broken Spanish and seemed reluctant. I used my most ceremonial forms of presentation and persuasion, as my Russian teacher and another participant had taught me just the day before. Before we hung up I thanked him so much for agreeing to meet with me and wished him a nice weekend. I was surprised to hear him laugh. The day after I walked through a working class neighborhood in the city and found him outside of the taxi office where he worked.
He was washing his car and greeted me with a glint in his eyes. It was the period between the morning and lunch rush, and we sat down across the street, against the wall of a big department store. First Igor said he really had nothing to tell me but then we ended up talking for hours – in the end he was full of stories. I asked how it came to be that he decided to migrate to Argentina:

Everything changed in the countryside when the Soviet Union ended, they started to privatize the land and big monopolies appeared /…/ In Soviet times the government was in charge of everything, do you understand? If you produced something and there was negative profitability the government paid the price but the prices would still stay the same. Bread was always 16 cents (centavos), for 80 years the price of the bread was always 16 cents.

Born in the early 1960s in central Ukraine, Igor used to work with alimentation and reproduction of animals in the countryside at a collective farm. However, after the fall of state socialism he became unemployed. He continued:

When we were there in Ukraine and everything changed we had three children and we could no longer give them an education. So we thought ‘perhaps there is another country’. Actually we thought of leaving in order to allow the children to get out into the external world so that they later on could choose where to be, where to live, I don’t know. Something like that was the idea.

This indicated how a closed world had opened up for Igor and his postsocialist peers; the dislocatory events had set them free (see Laclau 1996:19). When participants spoke about the 1990s they conceptualized these events as the “changes”. After the “changes” Igor and his ex-wife’s worlds would transform, but perhaps not in the way they had imagined.

The Transition Paradigm

“Change” was a word that echoed throughout the postsocialist region in the early 1990s, an adequate word to describe the rapid transformation of the societies (Ghodsee 2011:10). As in Igor’s case, it is also a word that appeared in all participants’ vocabulary when they described their decision to migrate. Just like Kyrylo, Valentyna, Evhen and Igor, many spoke of the years following the “coming apart” of the system as a dislocatory event in the
Laclauian sense – a change that altered their way of life in a radical and often brutal way (Laclau 1990). It was not only the language and symbols of state socialism that had been exchanged for those of free-market economy (Pine & Bridger 1998:5). As can be seen in these quotes, the whole material structure had given way to new kinds of insecurities. In other interviews with postsocialist migrants in Argentina, Perestroika and the changes it brought about is mentioned as a rupture and abandonment by the state (Domínguez & Lucilli 2010:62).

Given that I regard discourse as an articulatory practice that constructs and organizes social relations while also constructing materiality, the narrative of change is approached here as a response to the discursive ruptures of social and material orders – as a way to make sense of their experience of a major traumatic event. After “it all came apart” Igor and others like him were made unemployed and had no possibility of ensuring their children a good education as the former educational structures transformed. The discursive material configurations of day-to-day institutions that formerly sustained him and his peers literally vanished in front of their eyes. This is clearly illustrated by Igor’s reference to the rupture of the fixed system of prices. The prices were part of a discursive temporally fixed system, when the price of bread abruptly changed, it thus allowed the underlying contingency of a discourse that had presented itself as a whole to manifest.

The implosion of the former system, regardless of ordinary people’s political views and whether or not they welcomed the transformation, turned their daily life around. As Kristen Ghodsee, one of many anthropologists who “set out to explore what had happened to the little people who had been ‘lost’ in the transition” (Ghodsee 2011:14), puts it:

How do people continue with life after the total destruction of the political and economic system within which they spent their entire lives? What happened to the state-owned enterprises where they worked? What happened to the money they had saved or the pensions they had earned? What happened to their cities, their schools, their playgrounds, to the cemeteries where some of the tombstones bore red stars instead of crosses? The scope of the Changes was immense (Ghodsee 2011:17).

While Igor and his peers were struggling to survive in postsocialist everyday life, scholars from various disciplines debated different theories of “transition”. One question of concern was the impact of the past and whether there was continuity or rupture with the former political system (Burawoy & Verdery 1999:4). Scholars of the totalitarian school considered communism
a system based on terror, colonizing all realms of life and leaving no autonomy. Burawoy and Verdery argue that in accordance with this theoretical perspective, economic policies of the neoliberal model were seen as a means of: “rescue by insisting that markets can spontaneously create a new world if the old can first be destroyed” (Burawoy & Verdery 1999:2004).

Shock therapy then meant that the policies promoting price liberalization, stabilization, and privatization was a way “to dissolve the past by the fastest means possible” (Burawoy & Verdery 1999:2004). The assumption was that the postsocialist countries would transit into “the promised world of capitalism” (Burawoy & Verdery 1999:4). At the time of the transition-paradigm debate, Burawoy and Verdery argued that the so-called transition could not be deemed as certain as many claimed. They directed attention to how, rather, complex relations existed between socialist and postsocialist, when the past entered the present “not as a legacy but as a novel adaptation” (Burawoy & Verdery 1999:4).

Indeed, putting too much emphasis on the rupture of the Soviet system might give the impression of one drastic change from one day to the next. For those quoted here, the discursive material structures that had sustained their livelihoods came apart, perhaps not over night, but rapidly locating them in the midst of a dislocatory experience (See Howarth 2000:176). As Yurchak (2006) has demonstrated, small discursive changes had in some way prepared people for the major dislocation when it happened. Even if they welcomed the changes they found themselves in a situation where they could not sustain their lives in the new circumstances. Like Evhen, many spoke with bitterness of new mafias, new businessmen, and former communist leaders who simply changed titles and enriched themselves in the process of supposed regime change. After the Soviet regime had been dismantled, personnel who had staffed former institutions stayed in their places (Service 2003:79). Robert Service writes, “The decommunisation of the USSR was inconceivable without the co-operation of the communist elites” (Service 2003:82). While a few made a fortune, others, like Igor, were left with nothing.

New Openings

Intertwined in the reasoning of these various material factors that made them leave is also a spirit of adventure. “We also wanted to travel, we were interested in some sort of adventure,” Igor went on to tell me. Dislocatory events can be regarded as threats to stability, but according to Laclau they are also a possibility “for historical action” (Laclau 1990:39). Once the social order had
been dislocated, new possibilities arose. In Clyde Mitchell’s classic study on the conditions necessary for migration, Mitchell suggested that economic pressures could not be understood as a sole factor for someone’s decision to migrate (1969). Rather, what Mitchell called “sufficient” conditions were also needed in order for someone to emotionally invest in a migratory process. As Boccagni and Baldassar have suggested, “These sufficient conditions included a diverse range of possibilities from political and social constraints to climate considerations, health concerns, and even sense of adventure” (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:76).

Adventure entails a longing for something else, but also the impossibility to predict what will come. The Oxford English Dictionary defines adventure as: “An unusual and exciting or daring experience”, and takes as its first example of its use as a noun: “Excitement associated with danger or the taking of risks”. One participant spoke of sufferings and hardships, however when he saw my eyes tear up, he was quick to assure that at the time he had lived it with a “youngster’s adventurous spirit”. Thus, in connection to the consequences of the “changes”, insecure material welfare or personal insecurity, most also remembered the moment when they decided to migrate as a sense of opportunity. The dislocatory events they had lived through presented them with new possibilities and directions for their relocatory trajectories. Many described how they desired “to get out into the world”, a kind of mobility and a place that had appeared as possibilities after the USSR’s demise. However, this was an opportunity linked to risk.

The only research participant who had arrived in Argentina with a highly skilled professional career already initiated, who had not had to endure downward mobility was Alina. Born in the early 1960s in Ukraine; she held two university degrees within humanities and psychology and had lived her adult life in Russia, married to a Russian military officer. Unlike everyone else, after arriving in Argentina, she had worked in more skilled environments and then succeeded in starting her own business in a similar area to what she had previously worked in. This was due to her falling in love and then marrying a man from the local elite shortly after arriving. Through this man’s contacts, Alina had found employment where she learned to speak Spanish and after some years was able to start her own business. At the time of the interview she was a widow and lived very well in comparison to many others I met. Alina said that she did not like to spend time with other

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postsocialist migrants. “*They are stuck in time,*” she said, referring to how “*all they ever do*” is to “*complain.*”

At the time of the dislocatory events in Russia and Ukraine, Alina had recently divorced and returned to Ukraine with her son in 1991. Unemployed, she witnessed how things were coming apart rapidly around her:

> Professionals did not get paid or they were paid very little. There weren’t any places to work either. /.../ After everything had changed, in 1995, there was an opportunity and I left everything. I was ready to change my life and with my little son we left holding each other’s hands /.../ At this time there was a door open to Argentina for Russians and Ukrainians, there was an agreement between the countries. I don’t know if you remember? It went very quick. I sold everything I owned over there and … I took a leap, so to speak, without fear. It was an opportunity to have a good life.

Just like for Alina, the discursive rupture of surrounding structures affected many negatively, yet at the same time, they articulated it as a possibility to travel and see the world. This has a relevant connection to what ethnologist Angelika Sjöstedt Landén has written about ideological notions of “the good life” among new recruits to a Swedish governmental agency that was to be relocated to a province in northern Sweden (2011; see also Berlant 2011:2). Sjöstedt Landén finds that various ideological fantasies of what a “good life” entailed made the relocation a possible option for the participants. Subjects invested affectively in different notions of what the “good life” in northern Sweden would be like, because the logic of the fantasy suggested their various needs and demands could be fulfilled there (Sjöstedt Landén 2011:295).

Sjöstedt Landén’s findings can be closely related to the dimensions of hope in participants’ initiation of their relocatory trajectories. Alina’s statement suggests that the relocatory trajectory she emotionally invested in after the dislocatory events contained hopes and aspirations of finding a place where a good life could be achieved. Similar logics can also been seen to operate in the transition discourse. This resembles the notion of a “promised land”, a spatial, and imaginary, location that one might travel to find (Fenton 2006). This presents an interesting dimension of a “coming to”, indicating how the strive for fulfillment of the subject in relocatory trajectory can take the shape of a spatial location. To relocate after having experienced dislocatory events of the kind Alina and other participants had, means to recreate a relative stability in order to cover the contingency manifested by the dislocatory events. To find oneself in a new social setting and in new subject positions meant directing one’s hope and aspirations towards something new.
In this process, determined spaces were inscribed with different logics. Argentina was described as a place of possibility, a place to get a new chance in the quest for a decent life. Rafaettá has demonstrated that hope is not only a temporal projection, or “an illusory state, and therefore a potentially deceitful condition, which projects promises which may never be fulfilled into an indefinite future” (Rafaettá 2015:116). In her study of Ecuadorian migrants in Italy she found that hope was located in determined spaces of their everyday life, such as the garbage collection area symbolizing the tidiness if their new country. Rafaettá contends, “Thus conceived, hope is not just a coping mechanism to be engaged while waiting for a better future. Rather, it also affects and effects people’s lives in the present. The spatial dimension of hope mitigates criticism of its evanescence” (Rafaettá 2015:116). The articulations of hope thus have an effect on the constructions of space. As participants ascribed their hopes to Argentina, Ukraine or Russia were simultaneously re-inscribed with new meanings. Through the dislocatory events, places where participants had lived meaningful lives with professional or social trajectories had ceased to exist. As Valentyna said: “Today, Ukraine is just a big cemetery”. Through her process of relocatory trajectory meanings had changed, the idea of where a decent life could be achieved had also changed its spatial anchoring and actual material possibility.

In this way constructions of space are also affected by dislocatory events and relocatory trajectories. Similarly, ethnologist Karin Lindelöf suggests that the notion of a successful international career among young Polish women she met in the early 2000s was tied to the discourse of “transition” from state socialism to market liberalism and the view of the international and “non-Polish” as the source of possibilities (Lindelöf 2006:195). In the places where a decent life and a good future for children had been made impossible by the dislocatory events, Argentina appeared as a possibility because of the migration agreement implemented in 1994.

The Promises of the Free World

The MI 4632/94 Resolution

The Resolución MI 4632/94 and 1931/95 stipulated that those who wanted to immigrate to Argentina from countries affected by the demise of the USSR were to be given residency there. The Ministry of the Interior established the agreement whereby migrants could apply for a temporary residence permit without having to present a formal work contract. Graciela Zubelzú, who
studied international relations between Argentina and post-Soviet countries, suggests that the agreement came from the highest authority, president Carlos Menem, and was announced in a sudden and ambiguous manner, appearing to be part of Argentine international diplomatic relationships (Zubelzú 1999:108).

From 1994 about 10,000 people migrated to Argentina from former Soviet areas with this special program of migratory facilitation. Seventy percent of the Visas within this migratory program were granted in Kiev, Ukraine. The program was annulled in 2001 (Marcogliese 2003:46–50; Paceca & Courtis 2008:35). According to a report from the International Organization for Migration, 9,879 temporary, and 587 permanent residences were given within the frame of this agreement (Texidó 2008:12). Many of the migrants relocated to other places, like Canada or Spain, upon receiving Argentine residency. The 2001 population census indicated that 4,156 people from the former Soviet Union still resided in Argentina8 (Pacceca & Courtis 2008:20).

Strong diplomatic relations between Argentina, Ukraine, and Russia are nothing new. Argentina’s bilateral relationship with the USSR has been described as “discrete partnership” (Zubelzú 1999:53). During the final years of the USSR, bilateral trade reached a value of about 800 million U.S. dollars per year, about 90% of which was made up of Argentine, mainly agricultural, export (Zubelzú 1999:65). The structural changes of the USSR’s demise impacted these trade relations, which diminished significantly towards the end of the 1990s. Former Argentine president Alfonsín had visited the Kremlin in 1986 and during his presidency Menem initiated personal diplomatic relationships with the USSR, meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 and after several attempts finally with Yeltsin in 1998 (Zubelzú 1999:49f).

Argentina was the only country in Latin America to recognize and establish relations with the Ukrainian People’s Republic in 19219. Argentina was also among the first countries in the world to recognize independent Ukraine in 1991, only four days after its independence referendum (Zubelzú 1999:102). In 1993, embassies were opened in both countries and diplomatic bilateral relations were developed during the 1990s. In 1998, Carlos Menem was the first Latin American president to visit Ukraine (Zubelzú 1999:105)10.

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8 This can be compared with 923,215 migrants from neighbouring countries residing in Argentina according to the same census of 2001 (Pacceca & Courtis 2008:20).
10 During this visit, Menem received praise for his economic model and the Ukrainian president said that Ukraine could learn from how Argentina had overcome two global
President Carlos Menem and the Rumors

The circumstances around this migration agreement take many forms in my material. Many participants or other postsocialist migrants interviewed elsewhere said they had been promised assistance for housing and language courses, that their migration supposedly was part of a program. However, upon arrival the promised support was non-existent. When trying to make sense out of what had happened at that time, participants either shook their heads or said they weren’t really sure. Some provided numerous details of how someone, “a friend who works at the embassy”, had witnessed what had actually been corresponded in terms of the program and thus the support that had been taken from them. It appeared that different positionings in the Argentine contemporary political landscape created diverse understandings of the opaque circumstances of the agreement.

The circumstances surrounding the MI 4632/94 resolution, in which former president Carlos Menem and his administration play an important role, are crucial for understanding constructions of meaning and identifications among the participants in this study. When I first met Natalia she was quick to claim that she adored the Menem government, expressing how she was forever grateful for the migration resolution that allowed her to leave a country she felt was burned by past communist atrocities. Born in Kiev in the early 1960s she had arrived in Argentina in 1996. At the time of our interviews she gave classes in Russian and I also took Russian classes with her as part of participatory observations. Sitting at an open-air café downtown, Natalia’s praise of Menem was not only meant for my ears, but also for two men who were eavesdropping our conversation. Natalia was a fierce critic of the current Kirchner government and whenever she had a chance she would take a stance in political oppositional discourse. Just like Natalia, other interviewees would return to Menem, positioning him as a hero or villain in the circumstances that had brought them to Argentina. As the material started to grow I asked myself why this was – what was the role Menem and the rumors of corruption played in participants making of meaning?

Menem is a not a neutral persona in Argentina; formerly the governor of Rioja he has been a controversial figure from the start. Born of Syrian parents, he was the first provincial Peronist ever to become a national president – and financial crises (the Asian and the Mexican) (Zubelzú 1999:105). Escudé and Cisneros also note that the World Bank had suggested that Ukraine should study the Argentine model and they claim that this led the former minister of finance Cavallo to travel to Russia and Ukraine to diffuse the Convertibility plan.
as such he was ridiculed by Buenos Aires elites as a provincial caudillo that brought peripheral barbarity into the presumably civilized city. He was president of Argentina between the years 1989 and 1999 and his administration is also infamously known for its corruption and the somewhat opaque manner in which 90% of all state enterprise was privatized during his presidency (Treisman 2003 quote from: IMF 1998: 5–6). His name is linked to many scandals\footnote{Perhaps one of the most publicly debated was the death of Menem’s son in a helicopter crash under strange circumstances in 1995. The incident was said to have been a mafia vengeance that the government silenced.}; stories about suspicious deaths, and examples of how local and national politicians, the state, and its bureaucratic apparatus obstruct legal processes and manipulate information are associated with his administration\footnote{During the time of Menem’s presidency, Argentina saw many suspicious deaths. The AMIA-bombing is an example of a crime investigation from the time of the Menem government that has been obstructed and that seems almost impossible to solve. In 2015 a public prosecutor, Alberto Nisman, who was to present another piece of the investigation bringing forth accusations against sitting president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner was found dead in his home. See more: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/20/cristina-fernandez-de-kirschner-alberto-nisman-death-investigation or http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/02/150129_argentina_nisman_muertes_sospechosas_vs (Checked September 4 2015).} (Faulk 2013; Lewis 2009; Peruzzotti 2005:242). At the time of my fieldwork, Menem was also charged and condemned for illegal weapons affairs to Ecuador and Croatia during his presidency\footnote{On July 13 2013 Carlos Menem was the first former Argentine president to be condemned to prison.} and this also made his role in the agreement a central issue for interviewees.

As will be observed in the quotes below, the migration’s resolution almost seems like an urban legend; everyone says they were promised help with housing and access to labor markets, but when this did not happen they have their own analysis of what the so-called program really consisted of and who benefitted from it. Some blamed Menem and his corrupt governance; others believed that it was the subsequent government who had broken the promises the migrants had been made. Some said it was the diaspora organizations that had taken resources allocated for the migrants. One thing they all agreed upon was the role of corruption in the opaque circumstances regarding the migration resolution.

In an upper-class neighborhood, Alexei and I drank our espressos and conversed about why his parents decided on Argentina. He said they first wanted to go to Canada or Australia, but there had been some problems with
the paperwork. Then, “a possibility to emigrate to Argentina opened”. He explained:

For some reason they opened up for migration here and if I am not mistaken they even gave you some… (the waiter interrupts) they gave migrants some benefits like land in Misiones, I think there was also some economic support. But that was before. So there was a lot migration in the beginning of the 1990s, but we arrived at a moment when … let’s say it was easy to get here, they didn’t ask for much, for much paper-work but it had no benefits /…/ You arrived and then you started to look for work.

Before meeting Alexei I had heard others speak of economic support and diaspora groups who had supposedly made a profit out of support intended for migrants. Misiones is a northeastern province where many earlier waves of Ukrainian migrants settled, and where they were also given land during the period of colonial settlement. When I asked Alexei if he was sure of this recent repartition of land he started to speak of the community of Apóstoles. This is a town located in the northeastern province of Misiones, indeed constituting a central hub in the diaspora Ukrainian community in Argentina, yet not particularly connected to the postsocialist migrants as the majority remained in Buenos Aires. Another participant had also talked about how plots of land supposedly had been divided between the migrants. What they all had in common was that it was “before” the interviewee had arrived, indicating perhaps that these were just rumors. Sociologist María José Marcogliese writes that the migratory agreement was neither structured nor coherent, rather the entry of persons leaving the post-Soviet havoc was a disorganized affair:

The absence of concrete actions directed to the assistance and orientation of the immigrants, led them to develop different strategies to integrate themselves into their new reality (Marcogliese 2003:44)

According to Marcogliese, the Argentine government hoped the migrants would bring small investments. The hasty initiative of the president, there were no previous plan or studies of Argentine capacity to integrate migrants in times of unemployment, was reproved. Due to this criticism, the Menem administration implemented a number of pilot plans with public institutions such as the Office of Population (la Secretaría de Población), the Ministry of the Interior (Ministerio del Interior) and the Ministry of External Relations (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores) (Zubelzú 1999:108). Zubelzú writes
that according to the documentation she could access, the Office of Popula-
tion initially assumed responsibility for handling the case and asked the
International Organization for Migration to investigate the potential amount
of migrants, the political and economic framework, and possible effects on
Argentina. The responsibility for implementation then fell to a committee
constituted by public servants from the affected ministries (Zubelzú

Marcogliese notes that when former president Menem presented the idea
in 1992, he argued that the professional qualifications of the postsocialist
migrants would be favorable to Argentine society. The agreement also
assigned the involved institutions to promote accreditation of titles and certi-
ficates, something that will be discussed at length in chapter 5. Furthermore,
it also stipulated the facilitation of language comprehension and knowledge
of Argentine society (Zubelzú 1999:109f). This is something none of the
participants received upon arrival. According to documents from the
operative program that sociologist Susana Masseroni quotes, the Argentine
government was interested in qualified migration as well as external
resources: “A selected, informed, capitalized migration, supported by
resources obtained by external sources, that would contribute to regional and
sectorial development” (Masseroni 2008:124, my translation). Zubelzú
suggests that Ukrainian and Argentine representatives had a joint plan for a
contingent of migrants from Crimea to form a village and initiate projects
within the fishing industry in Patagonia, however the program was cancelled
due to lacking investment. Yet the potential farmers were free to migrate
individually to set up their own business in Argentina (Zubelzú 1999:110).

These arguments of the Menem government are a direct articulation of
the incitements in the Law of Videla14 to foster immigration of European
professionals and migrants who might bring capital, while hindering
migrants from bordering countries (Nejamkis 2016:22). Argentine state
administration is not transparent and the institutional political climate easily
gives rise to rumors of the kind surrounding the migration agreement (see
e.g. Faulk 2013). However, the question at hand here is not whether there was
corruption involved in the agreement of migration, but rather how migration
policies affected identifications among those I interviewed.

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14 See chapter 2 Background, under the heading ”Latin American migration”.
Seated at a table in the international hamburger restaurant where he had suggested would be a good spot for an interview, Myroslav, a former physician born in the late 1950s in Ukraine, who like Natalia was in favor of the Menem government, said this about the resolution:

Argentina made a program because they needed specialists and we came with that program but it was the end of it. To all the people that had come, they had promised language courses and access to labor markets. But it was never finished. **Jenny:** It was lost somewhere? **Myroslav:** Of course, this last year, Menem wasn’t president anymore /…/ when he left office, this whole affair was closed down /…/ and no one wanted to hear us out. We asked ourselves why and then we found out what happened /…/

When the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991 /…/ they (Western governments) were afraid that illegal immigrants would come, so they established a program with the U.N. where they looked for countries that could receive these immigrants legally. And among these countries, Argentina set up a program. I don’t know Jenny, but they said that the U.N. paid the government /…/ these are all rumors, right, and we never received any money … And when Menem’s term of office was out no one wanted to talk about this.

This quote points towards how global politics shapes subjective processes and individual experience. Furthermore, it carries notions of the geographical hierarchies that alongside the stories of corruption slowly grow into a crescendo in my material. Myroslav did not say that he felt fooled or unwanted, yet by articulating it like this, this he ascribed to a logic of coloniality where some are wanted and others unwanted and where he himself was positioned as a pawn in someone else’s game.

These rumors also entail the tension with diaspora groups. A sense of being unwanted, not only by Western governments but also by the Argentinians and the diaspora communities, appears in the narrations. Evhen and Valentyna blamed not only the Menem administration, but also diaspora organizations. They stated that governmental officials and members of Ukrainian diaspora organizations had divided plots of land in interior provinces and capital from international organizations between themselves, thereby seizing subsidies intended for the migrants. In the words of Valentyna:

Later, well these are just rumors, but a lot of people learned about this agreement (the migration program) /…/(An acquaintance) worked in the
Ukrainian embassy /…/ she said that this agreement did exist and that for each person who entered Argentina to populate they paid ten thousand dollars /…/ there were plots of land also /…/ so that people could settle there. She said that they divided the plots of lands between (old diaspora) associations of Ukrainians /…/ and the Menem government, they shared (the profit), no one knew or heard anything about it.

Evhen and Valentyna described how they went in vain between embassies, Argentine ministries, and international organizations in order to receive the support they had understood would be part of the program, and the administrative benefits they had been promised. In an interview with Ivan, who had arrived in Argentina while still a child, he said the following about the migration agreement:

It was clearly a scam, that paper that they made us sign, certainly they divided the money between Ukraine and Argentina because the Ukrainian (diaspora) organizations turned their backs on us. In fact my Dad heard comments from them like “What did you come here to do? No one asked you to come”.

Embedded in these stories about the corruption concerning the migration agreement is also a tense relationship with diaspora groups. Valentyna, for example, implied the groups had been involved in a scam to obtain resources that were meant to be distributed to the postsocialist migrants. Both Evhen and Valentyna were upset with the Ukrainian diaspora who they suggested had taken advantage of the situation in other ways, for instance by employing recently arrived migrants for less than the minimum wage. In interviews with members of the Ukrainian diaspora community of Buenos Aires, members clearly expressed their dissatisfaction with the newcomers. Described by Louise Baker, they voiced concern with the way postsocialist migrants expressed their belonging the way they approached the community spaces. Members of the community interviewed said they felt the postsocialist migrants took advantage of their organizations, that they were not Ukrainian enough, for example in their language since many preferred speaking Russian or called themselves Russian instead of Ukrainian. They also expressed that the newly arrived women would not comply with the gendered code of conduct in the traditional women’s organizations within the diaspora community (Baker 2011). Others have noted how gendered identifications in U.S. Ukrainian diaspora communities were re-negotiated by independence (Koshulap 2013:1).
Baker finds that they were seen as anti-patriotic for having deserted Ukraine when it had finally received independence and as ungrateful for what the local diaspora communities had done for Ukrainianness. The newly arrived migrants were seen as an unstable group who, in contrast to the diaspora community who had constructed their identity around their Ukrainianness, wanted to abandon their past as quickly as possible (Baker 2011). Likewise Lemekh demonstrates that in the U.S. the Ukrainian diaspora community had seen independence as its ultimate goal. However, when migrants started to arrive it was “undeniably unwanted” (Lemekh 2010:10). “Those, who were supposed to live and work in Ukraine to facilitate its transition to the fully fledged capitalist democratic country, dared to emigrate, abandoning their patria”, Lemekh contends (Lemekh 2010:10f).

Ivan continued his story:

My dad was in contact with a lot of people, if I would tell, you would be so surprised, it was people from UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refuges), from INADI (The National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism) /.../ And according to that agreement every family was entitled to 10,000 dollars per capita and a piece of land. It was some kind of settling ... they wanted to repopulate, I don’t know where actually but they wanted to repopulate various places in Argentina. This is something that a representative told us in the consulate. Very few know of it, or some people from there who say they saw that treaty, I mean the agreement /.../ that person said that it was an atrocity what was omitted. My dad tried to get what corresponded to the treaty and he managed to get half of it with the help from the UNHCR. Right? /.../ That treaty is a particularly shady thing ... and no one wanted to raise it because the benefits were most certainly divided between the powers.

As can be seen in the quotes in the beginning of this chapter, when participants spoke about the way they remembered the dislocatory events in Russia and Ukraine, they described memories of how people were without rights. They mentioned how the bank could close your business; take your home or car and so forth. In addition to being connected to post-Soviet stories about that particular time, this was also an Argentinean way to present Ukraine and Russia. Like Evhen many spoke of what it was “like over there”, describing the post-Soviet crisis as a universe where people had no rights. This rightless universe however continued after their arrival in Argentina, particularly for those participants who struggled in subsistence markets for a long time. I suggest that the way this struggle is articulated has a language of rights that was acquired in Argentina.
Human Rights Discourse

In the wake of the brutal repressions of the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1982), the concept of human rights has acquired a central position in official discourse through the persistence of activists. Argentina has also become an important actor in global discussions on human and citizenship rights. Anthropologist Karen Ann Faulk has examined how the discourse of human rights is interrelated with neoliberalism (Faulk 2013). She focuses on the prominent role of a language of rights in Buenos Aires social protest organizations and argues that the idea of human rights has been made a crucial feature of public discussion, and as such “figures centrally in claims made by groups from across society” (Faulk 2013:3). The dislocatory events in focus for the participants’ memories of the 1990s are thus reshaped through an Argentine lens, and the struggle Ivan described was both narrated through this language as well as acted on – the language of rights transformed into various actions his father was able to take such as contacting UNHCR.

This language of rights thus characterizes the way they talked about the migration agreement and the way social actors and spaces were constructed through these narratives. Faulk argues that the language of rights has come to center around the notions of corruption and impunity during neoliberalism in Argentina (Faulk 2013:2). She finds, “The 1990s saw both the height of neoliberalism and the consolidation and popularization of human rights in Argentina. Human rights became and remain the inescapable referent for ethical conduct, political responsibility, and social action” (Faulk 2013:57). When postsocialist migrants appeared in newspapers they also employed this sort of language of rights. Particularly in articles (see e.g. Fedyszak 2006; Carbajal 2010) featuring a Ukrainian woman who founded the aid organization Oranta15. Like the participants of my study, the migrants who feature in articles talk about having fled the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. As could be seen in the narratives of Evhen and Valentyna this was only one of the reasons mentioned. In the articles however this position is significantly highlighted and the women portrayed there are thus placed in a position of refugees from an environmental disaster and thus related differently to a framework of rights.

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15 Oranta is support group for postsocialist migrants founded in 2003 by a Ukrainian woman who arrived in Argentina in the 1990s. Oranta is open not only for Ukrainians but for migrants from all places in the former socialist world. This is something negatively perceived by the Diaspora members Baker interviewed, who regarded that as part of an extensive “Russification” (Baker 2011).
The desencuentro, or disagreement, between the diaspora community and postsocialist migrants seems to have been further deepened by this language of rights featured in the media. In interviews with Louise Baker, members of the diaspora community voiced dissatisfaction with how the media referred to postsocialist migrants and their human rights claims. Regarding a conflict between postsocialist migrants and a Ukrainian parish in 2010 when postsocialist migrants were being evicted after a new priest was installed (Carbajal 2010). Baker’s interviewees claimed that “the Oranta people never made any mention of being “ecological refugees” before they were given an eviction notice” (Baker 2011:65). According to Baker, the diaspora members believed the postsocialist migrants were “mere economic migrants” that tried to “win over” the Argentinean media by making human rights claims (Baker 2011:65).

Given this, one can understand that the postsocialist migrants were caught in the crossfire their self-understandings were thus formed by both global and local politics. After the dislocatory events Argentina presented itself as a possibility to anchor one’s hope to. The rumors of corruption, however, impacted subject positions and forms of identification when making sense out of their migration. It was particularly those who had not been able to recuperate a social position similar to the one they held in the USSR, like Evhen and Valentyna, who spoke most about the corruption rumors. To end his story, Ivan told me:

They did it really cleverly those guys, because still today, who would get angry with this? No one, I don’t know ... There was a lot of shady stuff going on with Menem anyway, regarding other stuff, like weapons eh /.../ So you can imagine the stuff he would have gotten involved in Jenny: Yes, yes it was a shady time Ivan: And no organization would get involved in that issue because Ukraine ... Who would give importance to post-communist countries at that time? No one. Poland managed to get in to the European Union, but clinging on to it. Right? I hope that maybe if Ukraine could join the European Union now16 it would be a whole lot easier this whole issue. I don’t know. I tell my dad he should go to some country where he could work well.

There is a whole range of hierarchies in this quote clearly indicating how global politics influence subject positions and self-understandings. The

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16 The interview was held during the time when the Euro Maidan protests were initiated, with aspirations for Ukraine’s integration to Europe.
power hierarchy between states is clearly marked by a logic of coloniality where Ivan posits that no one cared about the “post-communist countries” at the time, also indicating how the conditions of postsocialist migrants in the global South was nothing to “get angry with”. In this quote is also the division between the former East and West. Ivan points out how Ukraine has no voice in global power, while also saying that he and his family lack a voice in local politics. Tlostanova has written that after 1989 those who inhabited the post-Soviet space “have been universally regarded as the annoying remnants of the collapsed system unwelcome in any part of the world to which they have been trying to escape”. She posits that up until 9/11, when this emphasis on othering shifted to the Muslim others; they remained “the essential outlaws of the new world with no future” (Tlostanova 2012:161).

During the interview with Evhen and Valentyna it became clear how the stories of their search for restitution had become a familiar narrative, a trauma many times repeated. As Akhil Gupta has argued, “The experience of corruption on the part of all parties involved occurs in a field over determined by stories about such acts, stories whose reiterability enables the participants in that particular social drama to make sense of their actions” (Gupta 2005:6). What did these narratives do to the spaces and bodies involved in this migration agreement?

Undesired Spaces and Undesired Subjects?

Argentina has a troublesome role in the narratives of the how’s and why’s surrounding the participants’ decision to migrate. When participants look back at their reasons for choosing Argentina, most mention that it was the only option available at that time. Whether content or not with the ending of the former USSR, those who chose Argentina said it was because they did not have enough in their bank accounts for Western governments’ visa proceedings. None of the research participants expressed a particular wish to go to Argentina; rather it was the only affordable or viable solution at that time. The same can be seen in other interviews with postsocialist migrants in Argentina as well (Marcogliese 2003). Argentina was narrated as the “cheapest” and “easiest” solution as the borders to Western countries had been closed for participants. “Sincerely, the only reason to come here was because there was no other way out” Natalia said when the men had stopped listening in on our conversation.
The narratives of corruption surrounding the migration agreement examined above are relevant also in this context, for corruption does something, not only to those who arrived with the agreement, but also to the spaces of Argentina and the world. Myroslav and those who like him were prevented from migrating to where they wanted are positioned as undesired subjects originating from a Europe that was not quite Europe in the eyes of Western governments. A former employee of the Menem administration told sociologist Susana Masseroni that when the Berlin wall had fallen and Western Europe was afraid of mass immigration from Eastern Europe, if it was possible to direct the migratory flows towards:

Such an empty country, like Argentina, so in need of big and small businesses, probably Europe would facilitate that migration subsidizing it in some way and providing financial support to productive projects, that would allow people to move to the interior regions of Argentina instead of moving to Paris (Masseroni 2008:124 my translation).

When the Soviet Union imploded Western constructions of the former East changed. For example, migration from the postsocialist region became associated with discourses of prostitution, organized crime and trafficking (Jacobsen & Stenvoll 2010:270f). The resemblance between the above statement and the colonizing population policies Argentina has implemented since the mid 19th century is important. In accordance with a logic of coloniality where spaces to be colonized have often been described as “empty”, Argentina is here positioned as a virgin land in need of European economic resources. Zubelzú suggests that the migration agreement also meant an introduction of a new theme into Argentine foreign policy – when the European countries were preoccupied with migration and security in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, it was perceived as a timely initiative by Argentina in international politics (Zubelzú 1999:108).

The notion of massive “illegal” immigration to the West is connected to Western migration policies and the implementation of the Schengen visa system in 1990, limiting access to Western Europe as it took full effect in 1995 (Hormel & Souhtwort 2006:620). During this period, questions of migration started to be articulated in the global agenda in relation to issues of security (Zubelzú 1999:108). If cosmopolitanism was ever an ideal, it became increasingly common to conceptualize human mobility, multiculturalism, and postcolonial relations in terms of risk and jeopardy after this (Gilroy 2004:4). As Castles argued in the beginning of the 2000s, the most crucial
borders were no longer those that divide nation states, but the division between the global North and South with its differences in life standard, incomes, human rights, and security. He suggests migration control is then really about regulating the relations between the North and South (Castles 2004:211). This control of borders is hence made against a backdrop of spatial social inequality and racial differentiation.

The participants experienced not being European enough to be let into Western Europe, “somewhere closer to home” like Natalia said she would have preferred to migrate. De-colonialist thinker Walter Mignolo sometimes theorizes the racialization of himself as an Argentinean of Italian descent as “off-white”. This is a concept he has used to describe an experience of being a “Third World person” who is fitted into different racial logics of differentiation according to the places he visits – in some places he is conceptualized as a “person of color” because of his accent, in Europe he is a “Sudaka”, in the U.S a “Hispanic”, and in other places or when positioned by other groups he is understood as white and so forth. With these examples he intends to demonstrate that racial classification depends on local histories (Mignolo 2016). In a similar manner the subject positions were constructed by the rumors and migratory policies that on the one hand, in European frameworks, limited participants’ mobility and on the other hand, in Argentinean policies facilitated their mobility into that country. Participants’ off-whiteness consisted of being constructed as not European enough in one place and being European enough in another. Their mobility from the “Second World” to the “Third World” required a determined set of subject positions were their European “off-white” condition obstructed or facilitated spatial mobility. Madina Tlostanova has also noted how the “off-white” characterizes postsocialist experience in global coloniality. In dialogue with W. E. B du Bois, she writes that “Russians, and, more broadly, Eastern Europeans have become the off-White Blacks of the new global world after 1989” in the sense of “looking and behaving too similar to the same, yet remaining essentially others” (Tlostanova 2012:161).

The social crisis in the 1990s aroused xenophobic discourses in Argentina, and migration from neighboring countries was restricted. Simultaneously the convention regulating immigration from former Soviet republics was defended by the Interior Minister who expressed that the postsocialist migrants would have a favorable impact on society since they were “a working force more intellectually qualified than the domestic one” (Marcogliese 2003:48 my translation). This racialized discourse is not uncommon in contemporary Argentina where middle class and elite in the city of Buenos
Aires tend to have a particularly explicit racist and classist discourse (see for example Grimson 2008; Guano 2004, 2003, 2003b; Joseph 2000). The Interior Minster’s statement is made meaningful in accordance with a logic of coloniality, as racialized class discrimination and a sociopolitical history where Latin American bodies have been created as “barbaric others” and European bodies as “desired civilization”, has been articulated in Argentine public discourse and migratory policy spanning over a century.

To Have a Choice or Not

In Argentine official discourse the postsocialist migrants were thus constructed in terms of an “intellectual input” to the nation, somewhat contradictory if, as according to the rumors, the Menem government at the same time expected economic compensation for doing what they thought would be regarded as a favor to the Western countries. Regardless of the actual circumstances, the narratives of the program operate according to a logic of coloniality where spaces and subjects are constructed as desired or undesired in accordance with territorial hierarchies of the West and the Rest (see Hall 1992). As discussed, when participants spoke of their reasons for choosing Argentina they often said they did not have a choice, either other people decided for them – particularly women and those who arrived as children say their spouse or parent decided for them – or they were prevented from travelling freely to the West. It is important to note that this is how they remembered it from their present perspective. To narrate one’s experiences is a retroactive act; it constitutes the past as it is understood from the present. Perhaps a different outcome of their migration to Argentina would have formed another understanding of their reasons and of the rumors.

How these global policies and contradictions were lived was very present in my empirical material. Vadim was a Russian man born in the early 1970s who described his reasoning as follows:

The agency I came across offered me to emigrate illegally to England or legally to Thailand, South Africa or Argentina. In 1997 it was almost impossible to leave Russia with an emigrant visa. Many embassies were involved in this black market and there was a big distribution of the money taken from people who wanted to emigrate. It was the best alternative of the bad ones, in South Africa I would be a white man among the blacks because I was poor, in Thailand it was too unstable. The con men in the fake agency convinced me to go to Argentina. It wasn’t a total scam because they did what they promised to do, but the additional info they gave me was a bunch of lies in order to seduce me.
As this quote demonstrates, there are many reasons and logics at work in making sense out of the migration agreement and the reasons one had to choose Argentina. I argue that these kinds of descriptions reinforce a geographical hierarchy of places informed by a logic of coloniality that constructs identifications, spaces, and bodies as desirable/undesirable and makes mobility possible or impossible. While being on what at the time was described as the threshold of the free world, research participants experienced limited access to this world. Like Tlostanova has noted, the former so-called “Second World and particularly its post-Soviet part came to be a problematic region in such as Duboisean collective sense of people with delayed or questionable humanity and no place in the architecture of the new world” (Tlostanova 2012:161).

The world was presented to Vadim in terms of mobility or immobility. He could go “illegally” to the U.K., which he did not want. Race and class played a role when he decided he did not want to go to South Africa and be a “white man among the blacks because I was poor”. “Liberation” had come, but the so-called “free” Western world was still closed for Vadim and other participants in this study (see Kalb 2005:180). This experience of limited mobility in terms of space and social position is something many migrants suffer throughout the world. As Andrew Ross has indicated, “trade deregulation has brought down barriers to the movement of capital and jobs, but it has not freed up movement of people in pursuit of a better livelihood” (Ross 2011:15). Thus, while capital is allowed to travel free, people without Western passports are not.

As discussed in chapter 2, the regulations for Latin American immigration became stricter in the 1960s. In addition to this, one needs also to consider the incorporation of Mercosur17 policies regarding borders to already existing frameworks. Alejandro Grimson and Gabriel Kessler posit: “Just as globalization has not spelled the end of the nation state, Mercosur has not erased frontiers” (Grimson & Kessler 2005:53). They argue that state and political frontiers have undergone a transformation in order to foster the flow of capital, goods, and people. However, in the name of national interest, large corporations are rather the only ones included in this “regional integration”, since long standing transnational mobility and trade between local producers and buyers in frontier zones have been outlawed through fiscal regulations. They write, “the benefits of ‘neoliberal integration’ have been limited to

17 Iniated in 1991 when Southern Cone states (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay) signed the Asunción Treaty, Mercosur is a free-trade bloc that became oficial in 1995 (Grimson & Kessler 2005:53).
certain economic sectors” (Grimson & Kessler 2005:56). These regulations do of course affect mobility in border regions, while creating immobility for certain subjects in the frame of “regional integration” for global capitalism.

Those who expressed not having had a choice also seemed to relate to their position in Argentina as “stuck”. I met with Yulia at a café she often frequented in a residential part of town. The traffic on the avenue outside the large open windows was unusually quiet. Yulia, born in the early 1980s in Kiev, had arrived in 2001 with her husband and his family. She had recently graduated from a higher education in the fine arts, and she found herself in a country where no one had ever heard of her specialization before. Yulia drank mineral water and told me of her many paths to the position she was in today, the owner of her own business within that specialization. During their first years in Argentina they had tried to relocate to Spain by paying an agency to find them a work contract there. They paid one hundred U.S. dollars, an amount Yulia considered small, as she knew others who had lost much more to fake agencies. Yulia and her partner never heard from the agency again and the office disappeared from where it had been. Like others they had been scammed various times in this way. She thus settled for a life in Buenos Aires:

It never happened for me. Never. A lot of people, a lot of friends went to Canada, Australia, the U.S., Europe, loads of people. But every time I tried, something happened, and always something regarding work, all of a sudden I had a job offer … an offer that promised success and a good wage.

Many of the participants spoke in that way: “Nunca se nos dió” – it never happened or it was never made reality. Like Yulia many also related to others who had arrived at the same time but had gone to live in other countries, most often mentioned are Spain, the U.S., and Canada. In this way they were part of a transnational space, yet at the same time their self-understandings were characterized as being the people who had remained in something they felt they had not entirely chosen.

“Making the Americas”: Now and Then

The historical context of mass immigration plays an integral part in the migration agreement of 1994 and the narratives about it. Centennial Argentina was a wealthy country that attracted immigrants from overseas, a land of promise and as such a place of both prosperity and despair. In the
historical period however, upward mobility was a possible outcome of migration to Argentina (Moya 1998:267). Romero writes that the migrants of former epochs took their chances for economic success, some succeeded while others did not:

Ultimately, of those who succeeded, they or their children entered the emerging middle classes; those who did not probably went to the cities or returned to their countries of origin. What is certain is that both contributed to the great profits of the large landowners and the exporting firms that benefited from the advantages of the system but did not participate in its risks (Romero 2014:11).

To “hacer la America”, or to “make America” was a common phrase of the epoch when transoceanic mass migration to the Americas (that is: both to the north and the often forgotten south) was associated with possibilities of prosperity. The descriptions of this historical land of promise bare many resemblances to the descriptions research participants said that agents, and others associated with the migration’s program, gave of Argentina in the midst of post-Perestroika crisis.

When the migration agreement first appeared in 1992, Argentina was in the midst of increasing economic growth. As suggested by the ex-government employee Susana Masseroni quotes, perhaps the Menem administration wanted to show its grandeur, as Argentina seemed to be returning to former glorious epochs under this government. Others have discussed how migration policies in the Americas have reflected the ambitions and the appearance that local governments have wanted to create for themselves on world markets (Fitzgerald & Cock-Martín 2014). Was the agreement perhaps a strategy by the Menem government to position the uprising neoliberal Argentina amongst the countries of the so-called First World (see Grimson & Kessler 2005:117)? However, the reality the postsocialist migrants encountered in Argentina was not like the one the former migrants had met before them.
At one point of my life in Buenos Aires a friend’s mother told me about how she used to walk through the city in the wake of the economic crisis of 2001. The streets were the same as always, yet filled with all the signs of the destitute from the crisis. She continued going to her regular café; its interior was the same, however the world outside had completely changed. On the street corner a man had set up a home of cardboard boxes to live in. Her face changed when she remembered him. ‘You could see he was not just a homeless person. He was a man who had the routines of a middle class person. Even though he was living on the street, he would change his clothing for afternoon tea. He sat there on the sidewalk shaving every day with a pocket mirror. Like it was normal! Like those cardboard boxes had always been his home!’ The memories upset her, as if that man symbolized everything she, a middle-aged, middle class woman, had believed her country was, and then turned out not to be. The crisis had shaken her profoundly, rupturing the link between good education and a secure future.

With the last military regime in 1976, Argentina started applying a neoliberal economic model. This intensified during Carlos Menem’s time in office, privatizations of public companies and services such as the state-owned gas, oil, phone, electricity, water supplies, and railroads were implemented. The dismantling of the public sector was followed by deregulation of labor markets and rights. These measurements had a documented negative impact on society and the labor market (Villalón 2008). Many scholars have demonstrated how during this decade poverty and economic inequality increased alongside growing movements of social protest (Auyero 2000; Cerrutti & Grimson 2007; Shefner et al. 2006).

Like the demise of the USSR, I regard the Argentinian economic crisis of 2001 to be a dislocatory event. In the example above, my friend’s mother’s
encounter with the homeless middle-class man in her neighborhood was an experience of when her “mode of being” was “disrupted” in a dislocatory sense (Glynos & Howarth 2007:110). The poverty and inequality that preluded and followed the economic collapse in 2001, with its many violent incidents, were lived by many Argentinians in this dislocatory sense. Argentina was a country always lived and imagined like a Latin American exception with its burgeoning middle class and efforts towards equality. Grimson and Kessler argue that Argentina was a society with a passion for equality that with the events of the economic crisis of 2001 turned into something else (Grimson & Kessler 2005:58). In the beginning of the 2000s half the population lived below the poverty line. A country that once had “salaries, social rights, and levels of integration unmatched in the region” and during the last century had attracted immigrants from all over the world, had gone through a remarkable transformation (Grimson & Kessler 2005:58).

Due to the dislocatory effects the neoliberal model had on society, the Argentine middle class, since the 1950s a broad group, suddenly found their positions severely altered and contingent (Whitson 2007:126). Just as in the postsocialist context, the Argentine crisis of 2001 changed patterns of migration to and within the region during this period of time. Labor migrants from neighboring countries such as Bolivia, who formerly had Argentina as a destination, now headed for other countries, such as Spain – and so did many of their former Argentine middle class employers. As Argentina approached the end of the millennium, the immigrant country of the old century turned into an emigrant country. Argentinian applications for visas to the U.S.A. or for dual citizenship with Spain increased during this time (Castles & Milles 2003:150). The first years of the new millennium were marked by social movements, protests, and reformulating of politics in Argentina.

The stories told by research participants in this chapter all revolve around this epoch. Even if the Argentine crisis of 2001 was not a dislocatory experience for them in the same sense that they had lived through after the demise of the USSR, they arrived to a society where large parts of the

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1 During the police repression of the public outbreak of protests of December 19–20 2001, at least 25 protesters were killed and hundreds of others were injured (Epstein 2006:101).
2 Factories abandoned by their owners were being reclaimed and run by the workers. Most neighborhoods of Buenos Aires had “asambleas populares”, meetings between neighbors where political issues and the future were discussed. As the economy was stabilized and many social movements incorporated into the official politics of president Nestor Kirchner, elected in 2003, this particular alliance between classes was, however, subsequently lost (Villalón 2008:260–6; Goddard 2006:276; Carassi 2007:47).
population were coping with similar dislocatory events. In their struggle to integrate to their new country they were affected by these dislocatory events second-hand; the contingency manifested by the crisis had turned social positions and labor markets upside down for many Argentinians and this affected migrants and informal labor markets.

The Encounter with Argentina

On the morning when I met with Igor outside of the taxi office where he worked, the city was unusually calm. The buses roared by on a big avenue a couple of blocks away but otherwise this part of town appeared drowsy. Igor’s colleagues watched us when we crossed the street. It was easy to talk to Igor, we joked about his nosy colleagues and how it came to be that the two of us ended up sitting in a dusty porteño street – so far from our native countries, but yet in the midst of a home we had created for ourselves.

Born in the early 1960s in central Ukraine, Igor had worked at a farm in the countryside. I asked him what it had been like to arrive in Argentina, and during the next hours he was to tell me a myriad stories of hardships, sorrows, and hope. Before traveling to Argentina, Igor and his ex-wife had heard from relatives residing in Argentina that it was a good place to live with supposedly good wages. Igor travelled first; his wife and his oldest son were to travel one month after him, and once they had settled in, the two younger children were supposed to follow:

I don’t know, they said they didn’t steal here and that people were better off /.../ So my ex-wife and I thought it through and then we did the paperwork in the Argentine embassy in Kiev … The problem was that there were already problems here, inflation, but they didn’t tell us at the embassy. You know there was no kind of information. Jenny: Which year was this? Igor: 2001 Jenny: Complicated year to arrive in (the year of economic collapse). Igor: Of course but what did we know, there was no information /.../ We thought that later we could bring (the children) that maybe within half a year we would be stable. What happened is that we had no idea what this country was like. No idea...

This experience is echoed through all the interviews, participants had left one crisis only to arrive in another. Furthermore, it seems a particularity of the postsocialist migrant experience in Argentina that most had “no idea what is was like” but believing there would be high wages, an idea connected to the Convertibility Plan.
In 1991, the Argentine peso was fixed at parity with the U.S. dollar in a currency board-like arrangement, the Convertibility Plan. This was done in close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This policy benefited those with capital purchasing power and the high wages also attracted migrants from the region (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:22). During the years before Menem assumed office, the administration of Raúl Alfonsín had launched the Austral. This was a new currency aimed at combatting the permanent inflation his administration had inherited from the military regime. In 1989, the soaring level of inflation reached over a thousand percent (Faulk 2013:48). The Convertibility Plan was a way to overcome this spiraling inflation and at first it seemed effective. During the first years of the Convertibility Plan, Argentine inflation dropped sharply and GNP and investments grew, spurring faith in the new economy that seemed to improve by 1994 (Lewis 2009:61).

This was the same year that the migration agreement came into force. However, the arrival of the postsocialist migrants in the late 1990s coincided with the period when the Argentine economy faced major liquidity problems. Many participants said that prior to traveling, they were given information that they would have easy access to the Argentine labor market with its supposedly high wages from the so-called “one to one economy”. Yet, towards the end of the decade, unemployment and poverty levels rose to new levels, even for the middle class. The neoliberal restructurings and the Convertibility Plan had initially given some groups more money to spend while larger sectors of the population were thrown into poverty. As the Ukrainian physician Myroslav explained: “The ‘one to one economy’ was only good for those who had jobs.” Before the collapse, those who, like him and his peers, did not have secured jobs earned far below the promised income level and struggled to subsist in the midst of a crisis similar to the one they had left behind. In a report on what happened in the country, the IMF noted:

Argentina was plunged into a devastating economic crisis in December 2001/January 2002, when a partial deposit freeze, a partial default on public debt, and an abandonment of the fixed exchange rate led to a collapse in output, high levels of unemployment, and political and social turmoil. These events have raised questions regarding the country’s relationship with the IMF because they happened while its economic policies were under the close scrutiny of an IMF supported program (IMF 2003).

Many researchers have examined the processes of impoverishment of the neoliberal model of the 1990s (Auyero 2000; Carassai 2007; Grimson &
Kessler 2005; Kessler & Luzzi 2007; Kessler 2009; Villalón 2008). Grimson and Kessler suggest that the shift was not unforeseen, rather “it was the result of long decades of social, political, and economic decline that gradually destroyed one kind of society and created another (Kessler & Grimson 2005:58). Twelve years after this financial crisis, Igor and I were sitting at a Buenos Aires sidewalk. An old lady walking her dog spotted the unusualness of an interview in the making and walked by us as close and slowly as she could. Igor waited for her to pass, and then he told me about how he arrived at the airport in 2001:

Someone was going to meet me at noon, that person knew my flight number and everything ... everything. So you know when I got here I stayed there and I waited and then this Ukrainian guy shows up. He was a stranger who said ‘look we are searching for someone to share our apartment because a friend who lived with us went back to Ukraine, so we have a bed that’s not occupied, so we could, eh, divide the rent of this family house’.

Igor had arrived in a country that many – both natives and other migrants – were leaving due to the dislocatory events of the economic collapse. According to a poll conducted one month after the peak of the crisis and the social protests of December 2001, one third of the respondents said they would emigrate if they could (Lewis 2009:139). The city of Buenos Aires at that time was a place where young professionals were camping out in endless lines for European embassies, placing their hope in emigration (Lewis 2009:140). Igor continued his story:

So I said, ‘Well, no, I am waiting for a friend right now, you know, my friend is going to help me’. Well. This Ukrainian guy left me a piece of paper where he wrote (the address), just in case. Well, so what do I do? I wait. One hour. Two hours. A taxi driver comes up to me and he says ‘come on, I'll drive you’. I told him ‘no, no, I have to wait, they will come soon’. Time goes by, two more hours, the same taxi driver who already made a journey and came back, comes up to me and says ‘Are you still here, come on I will drive you.’

I suggest that the way Igor mentioned the Ukrainian stranger that approached him at the airport points towards a shift in the self-understandings implicated in his relocatory trajectory. In the narrative, the man proposed that Igor could take the place of a Ukrainian migrant that has just left the crisis-struck country. This was a suggestion that entailed a shift of
subject positions that the narrating Igor knows he will eventually have to accept, but that the narrated Igor is still oblivious to. When telling the story Igor was situated “as a narrator in relationship with” himself as a character, and thus “both a speaking subject and a subject of discourse” (Langellier & Peterson 2004:9). In Igor’s description of his arrival at the airport, he described a subject still unaware of the sort of journey that had actually begun: the Igor described is still a family-provider who, with an adventurous spirit, has taken a decision in order to assure the future for his family. He thus sits in the airport waiting for a friend to come and help him. Yet, as the hours pass by, the nature of his endeavor – as well as his subject position as a responsible family-provider – is transformed as the vulnerabilities and risks implicit in the adventure and in his migration slowly manifest. In his narrative there is a determining time dimension, everything slows down for him while the world keeps moving. The taxi driver goes to the city and comes back, everything moves but Igor is immobile until the driver persuades him to come with him to the city:

It was five o’clock in the afternoon and I was still waiting, no one had come, so with the little piece of paper and this taxi driver I made it to that address. I paid 50 dollars because I had dollars and it was raining and kind of grey, you know it was kind of significant of what was to come. /.../ Maybe after a week or so I already had a premonition that it was going to be a long and difficult process, but we had already sold our house, our furniture, everything... eh so to change that, you don’t have the strength to change that situation, when you already took the first two steps, then you are bound to take the third, whether you like it or not.

Thus, when the movement starts again it directs him towards a different set of subject positions. Since no one showed up, Igor had no other option than to go to the shared house of the Ukrainian migrant where he replaced someone who had just left – hence turning into a migrant among other migrants. In the narrative this is when his subject position shifted and so did his prospects for his future. When he first arrived at the airport he positioned himself as a resolute father doing what he could to get to know the world and provide his children with a better education. From the moment he realized that no one would come, however, a whole other journey than the one he had imagined begins. His former position as an agent active in changing his life and deciding his own fate was narrated as reversed, his position was now interpreted as that of someone being governed by external forces – when he
was forced into taking the third step even into the house of migrants the sky turned grey as a premonition of “what was to come”.

Already in the airport Igor experienced the consequences of the dislocatory events in Argentina. He was going into something others were leaving. Our conversation suddenly turned very serious and Igor looked across the street to the taxi-office where he was informally employed at the time of the interview. He frowned and said he had “not progressed at all” from the moment he had stepped out of the taxi in front of the shared house. As Rafaettá has discussed, studies of hope in migration studies are generally focused upon aspirations prior to the migration (Rafaettá 2013:116). My study indicates how Igor and his peers experienced these aspirations after arrival and their narratives were of course affected by the place they were telling them from.

“There Was no Going Back”

A few weeks before the encounter with Igor, I had heard a similar story from Vadim. He was born in the early 1970s and had lived his adult life in a Russian city. In 1997, after going through a divorce and being made unemployed during downsizing at the bank where he worked, he decided to leave his ex-wife and child in Russia and migrate to Argentina. Like many others, he had been promised “good wages” at the “migration agency”, yet the circumstances he encountered were different:

I bought a one-way ticket and left my native country in just 28 days, record time. In my suitcase I had some documents /…/ a dictionary, a thousand dollars, some clothes and even an old frying pan that was just as old as myself /…/ In Ezeiza (the airport) two Russian con men waited for me, they were local contacts of the Russian embassy. They brought me in their car to an old family hotel in San Telmo /…/ they helped me to rent a room with a private bathroom and fridge for 400 dollars. Then they asked me for my documents so they could process my DNI (Argentine National Identification Card), without any official seal on it or public notary! It was remarkable how well the trail of corruption was greased here. I paid 100 dollars for their help. And then I was left alone.

Vadim’s story is quite representative as it describes the simplicity of the migration procedure through the special agreement. It also echoes the way other participants and postsocialist migrants have described what it was like to arrive. The assistance they thought they would receive to integrate into the labor market, find decent accommodation, and learn the language often
It was the 8th of December, a national holiday /…/ I went out to walk the streets of San Telmo. It was noon and I wanted to have lunch /…/ I put on my nicest clothes. I didn’t know a word of Spanish and just a minimum of English. There was no one in the streets. Everything was closed. I didn’t like the look of it at all, the streets were dirty, the houses were worn down /…/ The family hotel was really old. My room was in the back, and it had a traditional fig tree on the patio. I ate its figs with an appetite /…/ Then I started going around town, looking for a job, but no one took me seriously because I did not know how to speak Spanish. I bought the paper with classified ads and tried to call. It was frustrating and useless. /…/ I felt distressed and scared.

Vadim’s story points towards how participants interpreted unexpected difficulties. In his narration there is a play between material objects – the worn down houses and dirty street contrast with the life-giving fig tree. He had just found himself in what risked becoming a precarious and exposed position in a country that did not seem to correspond to what he had been promised. Yet from its ground grew also the promise of a new life manifested by the fig tree. This manner of affectively engaging with one’s environment can be understood as a way to emplace hope (see Rafaettá 2013).

This way of narrating a precarious arrival can also be seen in other contexts and periods of time. Diaspora scholars have described how Ukrainian pioneers from the first wave of migration to Argentina in the 19th century were grateful to see orange trees as they were heading for the town of Apóstoles in the northeastern province of Misiones. Just like these Ukrainian migrants “could avert the prospects of hunger by filling a sack with the wild oranges” (Cipko 2011:22), Vadim satisfied his hunger with the figs that grew out of the new country’s soil. In the midst of the approaching economic chaos Vadim could sense, there was life. As if Argentina, even if appearing dirty and worn down, received him with the very life migrants throughout time had come in search of.

Just like Vadim and Igor, many participants spoke of the fear they felt when they realized that there “was no going back”. As the brutality of the situation dawned on them, many like Vadim described how “distressed and scared” they felt. Similar to Igor, some spoke of their migration as a process of being drawn into something uncontrollable – a force that altered their self-understanding and turned them into something they had not aspired to
become. Alina, the Russian double diploma psychologist who had leaped out into the new world of opportunities, holding her little son’s hand told me: “Yes, to tell you the truth I was scared /.../ I arrived … eh … I didn’t like it at first. It shocked me quite a lot”. Just like Vadim, Alina saw her savings consumed by the high costs of living caused by the convertibility economy. It seemed impossible to find a job and she counted the days they could remain in the hotel where they were staying.

The words describing their mental states, “scared”, “paralyzed”, “shocked” illuminate the traumatic experience of having to relocate oneself after a dislocatory experience, as well making sense out of the Argentinean dislocatory events they were faced with. Lemenkh writes of the postsocialist migrants in the U.S. that they had escaped destitution and uncertainty and arrived in the U.S. where they hoped for “a more or less stable, steady and comfortable life” that entailed opportunities for their children (Lemekh 2010:141). Anthropologist Frances Pine has examined postsocialist Polish economic migration as an act of hope. Pine argues that migration can be understood as “a symbol and an enactment of hope and of faith in the future and an act of or a reaction to hopelessness, despair, and acute loss in the present” (Pine 2014:96). As Castles has pointed out, there is a tendency to regard migration as something separate from other social relationships and processes of change (Castles 2010:1566). By using the concept of relocatory trajectory, migration research can be linked to broader knowledge of how self-understandings are conditioned in contemporary society (2010:1566).

How do people make sense out of having to relocate? What do unexpected trajectories and assigned subject positions do to self-understandings? What direction does hope take in this process and why?

Just as Vadim remembered the dark streets, and Igor the grey rain, many research participants mention how Argentina appeared as dirty or dark in those first days. Sometimes, the memories of dark and dirty streets are contrasted with the purity of the places they grew up in. Sitting by the open window in the cafeteria where we had met, Yulia remembered:

One thing that almost killed me, and still does, is how dirty the streets are in the city. When I came here in 2001, ah (makes sound of surprise), I almost had a heart attack, I walked in the streets and then I saw dog poop and I reacted like a child that points to something it has never seen before. I just stood there, looking, look at this! /.../ All the dog poop, everything that has been thrown on the streets, it was all so dirty! This dirt took my breath away. I couldn’t believe it. Buenos Aires was like a big trash can. I didn’t like this city at all.
Yet, at the same time, in the midst of this place they describe as dark and dirty, there are signs of life and hope. Pine suggests that hope “is a complex, many-layered notion resting on the capacity for imagination, on a sense of time and of temporal progress, on a desire to believe in a better future or in the possibility that something can change, and to some extent on uncertainty” (Pine 2014:96). Yulia, born in the early 1980s in Kiev, was a young recently graduated woman who had pictured a big adventure ahead, yet Buenos Aires with its increasing inequality and social problems appeared to her like “a big trash can”. Pine indicates how hope “is also always mirrored or shadowed by its opposite, despair” (Pine 2014:96).

Yet, even though she did not like the city, Yulia still remembered how people were friendly and helped her when she could not speak Spanish while holding her first subsistence job after arrival. As a leaflet distributor it made her scared to be in the street without understanding the language: “But then I noticed that people were different here, not like in Ukraine or maybe Russia, we’re pretty much alike, here people were not so aggressive. It surprised me, that people tried to help you, more even when they saw you did not know the language”. This dimension of hopefulness is also present in the way those who had fled consequences of the Chernobyl accident talk about how their own and their children’s health improved rapidly after arrival in Argentina. The consequences of their decision to migrate seemed dark and scary, far from the adventure they had expected; yet at the same time there was also hope and life in their new country.

Transformed Labor Markets

Research participants had quite some difficulties during their first years in Argentina. The Argentine labor market reforms in the 1990s meant new regulations for public employment, dismantling of social services and the social security system, weakened labor laws, and deregulations (Whitson 2007:123, Cerrutti 2000:881). As migrants, participants occupied vulnerable positions within these markets. Pacecca and Courtis have noted that since the postsocialist migrants had no economic capital, they had to insert themselves as wage earners in labor markets where they suffered similar difficulties as other migrant groups in Argentina. “The lack of a network of (post-Soviet) compatriots, nonexistence of knowledge of the language, and the somewhat imprecise information about Argentina that they had received, resulted in difficult and painful processes and not always successful labor and social integration” (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:35 my translation). However, being
highly skilled, as well as documented, they were in some respects different from some other migrant groups. This indeed gave them some sort of advantage, although those benefits were then within typical migrant sectors of formal and informal economies: construction, manufacturing, domestic service or self-employment (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:31). Pacecca and Courtis argue that livelihoods of postsocialist migrants in Argentina were conditioned by what seems an inescapable rule for migrants:

Economic migration devalues previous educational and labor merits; possibilities to become incorporated in the labor market seem not to depend upon one’s qualifications, but rather on the typical occupational niche available for the migrant: construction, domestic service, street vending, security (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:35 my translation).

The neoliberal model and the social and economic crisis had altered subject positions in labor markets, affecting not only migrants but also the native population. Grimson posits that the positions traditionally occupied by migrants from bordering countries, jobs native Argentines did not even see as an option before the crisis – seasonal agricultural work, manual labor, or domestic service – were turned into possibilities to earn a living by the dislocatory events of the economic crisis. Grimson argues that the xenophobic discourse of how immigration increased, and thus jobs competed for, stemmed from a new kind of social exclusion that made unemployed Argentines turn to precarious sectors with work conditions they had earlier not tolerated. Grimson concludes: “It was not immigrants who began to compete with Argentines for their jobs; rather, it was Argentines who began to compete for jobs traditionally held by immigrants. Immigration did not change; it was Argentina that changed — dramatically” (Grimson 2005).

The precarization of labor markets makes manifest the way different subjects were incorporated to positions as workers. As Bridget Anderson has suggested, “migrant work” is often a way to refer to labor positions outside standard employment contracts and to sectors with sub-standard conditions and low wages (Anderson 2015b:647; see also Gavanas 2010). What happened in Argentina at the time of participants’ arrival, in terms of the relation between xenophobic discourse and the incorporation of larger sectors of workers into precarious work conditions, can also be seen in British pre-Brexit debates. Andersons notes, “The fantasy of the labour market as

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3 As in the case of highly educated Peruvian women competing with Paraguayan women for domestic service jobs (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:30).
depicted by immigration controls collides with many people’s experiences of working. Europe has seen a growth in agency working, self-employment, interning, and so on” (Anderson 2015b: 647). The European austerity policies, similar to the neoliberal model that had been implemented in Argentina, thus create a similar conflation between positions in labor markets. “If we understand precarity, poor conditions and low wages as “migrant work” then in practice a lot of the jobs on offer are, to paraphrase U.K. Prime Minister Gordon Brown “Migrant jobs for British workers” Anderson concludes (Anderson 2015b: 647).

The Argentine neoliberal policies of the 1990s and the crisis of 2001 had laid the ground for precarious and informal work to flourish. Even though the economy stabilized in the 2000s, levels of informality remained higher than “any time during the last 60 years, with over 42% of private waged workers continuing to work informally in 2005” (Whitson 2007:122). As unemployment rates rose, so did the levels of poverty, affecting more than half of the population by 2002 (Whitson 2007:123). This social situation ironically shared many of the structural changes that research participants recently had lived through in Ukraine or Russia. Yet what was lived as a dislocatory experience by many Argentineans was experienced second-hand by participants. During the interviews, some laughed and said it was “just another crisis”. Others shook their head and rolled their eyes as if wanting to point out the absurdity of the situation. The Argentine dislocatory events had not shaken their mode of being, but their relocatory trajectories however were severely affected by the economic collapse in 2001.

Ekaterina was born in the early 1980s in Russia. She was one of only two participants who contacted me through Facebook after seeing my advert posted in various forums. When we first spoke, she said that she had “a lot to tell me” and after a couple of failed tries we finally meet in November 2013. A couple of months ago Ekaterina had given birth to a baby she was now pushing along as we walked towards a nearby city park. I asked if she enjoyed her maternity leave and while arranging a hair band over the baby’s head she shook her own and said: “I just want to go back to work, the house-wife thing is not for me”. The city was amazingly quiet when we crossed one of its major avenues and made it across into the lush green of the park.

From the age of four Ekaterina’s father, who was in the military, was placed in Ukraine and the family went there to live. When Ekaterina was still a child, her mother “threw her father out” and after the collapse of the Soviet Union Ekaterina’s mother had a hard time supporting the small family. “After the walls had fallen, me and my mom were left in the void” she said about her
and her mother’s experience of the dislocatory events they had lived through. In the tumultuous years of the 1990s, Ekaterina’s mother became involved in some informal business and was then forced to escape to Russia. After we had taken a seat at a bench, Ekaterina told me that her “*only way to stay with her friends and to finish school*” was to marry her boyfriend at that time. After finishing school she processed the visa for Argentina together with her husband and his family who had relatives in Argentina. They arrived in 1999:

> We started to work without knowing the language, really without knowing anything and our first job was in the factory. We spent years working in the factory, twelve hours a day, seven days a week /*...*/ In the end there were some problems, the owner kind of went crazy and we were all foreigners there //...// Actually we didn’t go anywhere to study the language, but the people in the factory helped us. After that factory I ended up in another factory, but I didn’t like the environment and I kept on looking and then I found work as a salesperson in a furniture store.

The majority of the research participants had a similar story, during the first years they worked in factories or with other unskilled jobs in order to survive. Some found work through members of the former Ukrainian and Russian diaspora, or through relatives or acquaintances. In the first years all of them, including the young adults who had arrived with their parents, worked with unqualified manual labor, and both men and women spoke of manufacturing in factories. Since they were always occupied with subsidence jobs no one had time to study to accredit their educational qualifications or to learn Spanish. Instead they learned Spanish “*the hard way in the street*, “*always walking around with a dictionary*” or asking co-workers “*how to say this or that*”.

Ekaterina did not stay long in the furniture store. Because of an economic setback during the conflict between the Fernandez-Kirchner government and soy-producing farmers in 2008:

> The sales went down by sixty percent and my wage was reduced to sixty percent, obviously they wanted to lay off staff /*...*/ So I started looking for other jobs, within two weeks I found one in sales but I didn’t like it /*...*/ It was a company where the salespeople walk in the street and visit small shops to offer merchandise /*...*/ Well there was a lot of pressure and I didn’t like that. And then after six months they fired me //...// I found a job at the cafeteria on the corner of our block //...// I spent eight months at that job but then I just burst, I couldn’t take it anymore … Bad treatment … the owner was apparently up to something strange because they had a really big place but … people never came in there … and then there was no tipping and the wage wasn’t that high /*...*/ It was barely enough to pay
everything so I started looking for something else. I worked with the
mother of a friend, she is a dressmaker and I spent one month helping her
and then I found a job through a newspaper ad, they were searching for
“an administrative female employee”.

Most research participants shared Ekaterina’s experience of being precari-
ously employed; one could get fired anytime and would never know what to
expect from an employer. Ekaterina’s story also demonstrates how precarious
conditions and insecurity characterized her relocatory trajectory, still nine
years after arriving in Argentina. Even if the country has stabilized its
economy, many participants spoke about how constant ongoing economic
crises had become a normal part of everyday life (see Pine 2014:95).

Subjects without Rights

After Igor’s wife had arrived, they started to do whatever they could to survive.
Like many other men from Ukraine and Russia, Igor went into the security
business working as an armed guard for private firms. His wife had a university
degree as an economist and accountant but was unable to accredit her
qualifications. When he talked about her he looked sad and said, “she should be
the one telling you this but she left”. They had gotten divorced some years after
her arrival in Argentina and she had then gone to Spain with an emigrating
Argentinean. The way Igor narrated her story; she had started out selling coffee
from a cart in public parks and streets. However suffering sexual harassment,
she left this and found employment as a cleaner at a funeral chapel. There was
a lot of trouble there and the owner who was a man in his seventies “wanted to
hit it off with this girl who was in her thirties” Igor said:

She worked there for a while and at the end they didn’t pay her. //…//
They would have been forced to make her employment formal and to
avoid that they fired her. They fired her without paying the last month’s
wages. Then she started this, you know Ukrainians, Russian they can be
quite aggressive, or really not aggressive but intense, because over there
we all have rights and here it’s another thing. Here people get used to
lowering their head and begging. Over there very few people beg. So she
said you have to give me what is rightly mine, and they answered ‘we will
pay in quotas.’ Can you imagine?

Igor connected the notion of not “having rights” with having migrated to
Argentina; yet, his former colleagues in Ukraine were going through a similar
process in informalized and deregulated labor markets (Likic-Brboric et al.
In 2013. Here, Igor places a spatial meaning into the concepts of rights that is contrary to the way Kyyryo, Alexei, Evhen and Valentyna spoke about Ukraine and Russia as places of no rights when they remembered the dislocatory events. “There we all have rights”, he said referring to his idea of Ukraine. It seems however that he was not talking about the postsocialist crisis years, but rather his former life and work in the USSR. As Pine has demonstrated, to imagine one’s future is an act that take place through references both to “good” and “bad” pasts (Pine 2014:96).

When faced with the loss of rights and subjected to insecure employment arrangements – not only in a deregulated labor market, but also from the loss of the former subject position as respected workers, Igor and his wife decided that Igor should visit the director of the funeral chapel. Igor does so, on his way to work, dressed in uniform and carrying a firearm, in the company of a Russian friend who he described as “bigger and stronger” than himself and “blonde”:

We rang the door bell //…// he could see us through the window, we rang but no one came out //…// Within five minutes three police cars came, eight officers got out, we raised our hands, they had guns and rubber truncheons /…/ The owner had called them and they said we were threatening him, we said that we were just ringing the bell (the police inspects his license for the firearm and then lets him off) /…/ So the next day my wife went and told the boss ‘Look my husband was here yesterday with an unloaded gun, but the next time it might have bullets in it’, she said it like a threat and well then he started paying thirty pesos per week. Thirty! You understand, he wanted to pay thirty per month and then we got him to pay thirty per week. /…/ And when the last paycheck came they said ‘You already received it’ and she said ‘No I didn’t’ and they said ‘Yes, look here is your signature’ and it had been faked. I felt so sorry for her, I didn’t know, do you understand, they had to steal that last thirty pesos. They sold coffins for five to ten thousand for memorial services, you know. It was total discrimination.

Like Igor, many research participants recalled humiliating situations, desperation, or how employers took advantage of them. They remembered not being paid or how they had been promised jobs that did not exist. In these cases, the vulnerable positions they were placed in seemed to reinforce gender roles, where women were made prey for sexual harassment and men attempted to regain dignity through violence. Migration is a highly gendered phenomenon that goes beyond mere transformations in gender roles (Donato et al. 2006:4). In Igor’s case it characterized the way he made sense
of the subject positions and his self-understanding. It was quite easy for Igor, as a man, to get a job as a security guard. He explained, “I saw an ad and then I went to an interview, and I spoke almost no Spanish, they asked if I had a license to carry firearms and I said yes. ‘Ok, so you will become a guard, but we will only pay this amount’”. He received a very low salary, on which “it was really hard to live”. As a guard he got involved in some fights protecting the owner of the supermarket from violence directed towards him, he was arrested, and charged for injury inflicted upon the person the owner had quarreled with, he was moved to a position as guard at another supermarket:

So I went to work at another supermarket. They were always provoking me, playing around, you know. For example when they would pay me, it wasn’t the company, but the boss who had an envelope, you know, so you had to go to his house and then he would say stuff like ‘Igor come here, here’s your envelope’. And you would take it and there’s 100 pesos missing, ‘Why?’ and then he would say ‘Do you remember the other day when you were eating a banana, do you remember that, I went by and you didn’t see me’. That’s how he stole money.

What is being acted out between Igor and the employers, first the boss who refused his wife the agreed salary, and then the boss who does the same to Igor, can be regarded as part of a discursive negotiation of the rules of capitalist production. A subject enters into work to get remunerated, but what happens when the contract is broken in the manner Igor describes? If labor were part of the chain of capital accumulation, it would take the form of a commodity in this process. However, workers are conscious, sentient beings and thus differ from material artifacts commoditized in line of production. One implication of this is that workers are only “temporarily commodities – except in those extreme and disturbing cases of bonded or indentured wageworkers” (Castree et al. 2004:29).

Thus, when the presupposed agreement is broken, the worker’s status as only a temporary commodity is ruptured and its identification as a free-willed subject is altered. The denigrating practices of Igor’s employer are articulations that turn him into something else than an honorable worker or a man. When Igor told me about the numerous difficulties he had experienced in trying to receive an adequate level of payment, or any salary at all, he often went on to describe situations where he had mastered the outcome with violence like described above. On one occasion Igor went to collect the salary but the supermarket was closed. He then went to the owner’s house on his bike:
I rang the bell, he came out and gave me money and a paper where it said how much was supposed to be there. I counted and saw that money was missing so I told him. Then he started ‘oh but do you remember this and that’, and I said ‘no that is not relevant’ /…/ I took it (the envelope) and I threw it in his face, ‘you eat this’ and then with ugly words I took my bike and left. So I left, and then he called out ‘Igor come here, I have your money here’. So I went back and he gave me money, but still there was money missing and when I said so he said ‘well it is subtracted for this and this’. I told him, ‘look I am tired and he said ‘don’t worry about it’. And then I don’t remember what he said but I just exploded, you know, so I took the money again and said ‘open your mouth’ and I did it (threw the money in his face) and I took my bike and said ‘look I quit’.

If agency is what separates workers from conventional commodities in a production line (Castree et al. 2004:29), then, by acting as a free subject insulting the boss, Igor regains his dignity, but also constructs a sense of being a free subject. This is however a gendered construction as Igor articulates masculinity with codes of threats and physical violence in order to restitute a dignified position (Connell 2005:83). Research on gender roles in migration contexts suggests that downward mobility might be lived as a shift in self-understanding. Men of majority groups, particularly educated middle class men, formerly enjoying status and power, experience how their position transforms from “self” to that of the “other” – a position women and discriminated groups already are acquainted with (Farahani 2013).

Scholars have argued that globally increased informality of economies and labor markets is related to larger economic changes brought about by policies of economic globalization and the need for cheap labor (Whitson 2007:124, Likic-Brboric et al. 2013:261). In this process, Igor and his wife were transformed into “right-less” subjects humiliated, ridiculed, and harassed in different ways by employers’ arbitrary decisions. The state is a major actor in regulating the negotiations between workers and employers, however, during this period of time the states of both countries failed at this.

Vulnerability

Migrants tend to be incorporated into precarious work and a significant amount of research has been done on migrants and labor (Dahlstedt & Nergaard 2013:21). In a report on employment and working conditions of migrant workers in the European Union the authors summarize:

In most countries, migrant workers have higher unemployment rates and, when in employment, tend to be segregated in unskilled occupations and
exposed to higher risks of over-qualification. Moreover, they experience considerable job insecurity, and the sectors and occupations where they are employed are characterized by less advantageous working conditions (Eurofond 2007:2).

The vulnerable situation the majority of the research participants found themselves in was tied to their position as migrants. Nevertheless, their difficulties must also be read in light of the changes in local Argentine labor markets. The dismantling of the Argentine public sector, and the subsequent deregulation of the labor market and rights, is not an isolated phenomenon. The increased rates of informal work in Argentina at the beginning of the new millennium can be seen as “a local reflection of a process of increasing globalization” that had been initiated decades earlier (Whitson 2007:122). Similarly, as political scientist Peo Hansen has proposed, the liberalization of the EU economy in the 1980s led to undocumented labor migrants occupying vulnerable positions in European labor markets (Hansen 2017). Others have also suggested that the more recent processes of austerity politics in Europe have transformed the social landscape, particularly for the lower classes and undocumented migrants, but also for the middle classes who have seen their social security erode (Johnsson & Willén 2017:3).

Much scholarly work is dedicated to the concept of informal work (Likic-Brboric et al. 2013:261, Whitson 2013). The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines work within the informal sector as not “recognized or protected under the legal and regulatory frameworks,” hence the worker occupies a position “characterized by a high degree of vulnerability” (ILO 2002:3). Nevertheless, both the ILO and scholars emphasize that the term “informal sector” might not be suitable to describe the multifaceted and dynamic relations and aspects of this global labor phenomenon, as it is often intertwined with formal economies and relations.

For example, Igor was actually on a formal working contract when these events occurred. During the interview with Igor, our conversation was interrupted twice as his colleagues came by to eavesdrop. When this happened Igor became quiet and shook his head at me, as if we shared the foreigner’s “silent conspiracy”. After they had gone I asked Igor if the interview would be a problem for him, but he quickly rejected that idea, “This is not a formal employment, I don’t owe them anything, I can leave whenever I want and that’s it”. There are always discrepancies between formal stipulations of a contract and actual work practices. The ILO thus argues that the “the most meaningful way of looking at the situation of those in the informal
The economy is in terms of decent work deficits” (ILO 2002:4). The stories from Igor and his wife’s encounters with deregulated labor markets and the migrant position can certainly be characterized as deficient of decency. However, apart from there being a deficit of decency, there is also a structural problem perhaps not describable through ILO’s definitions.

The experiences described by participants in this chapter might very well also be defined by the word precarious⁴. In the Oxford English Dictionary, “precarious” has two related meanings: “1. Not securely held or in position; dangerously likely to fall or collapse: 2. Dependent on chance; uncertain⁵.” The term precarious livelihoods then describes the uncertain positions created by global capitalism in the late 20th century, where flexibilization has become a new form of exploitation, and living is informalized and insecure (Schierup et al. 2013; Standing 2011). The last three decades have seen the reconfiguration of livelihoods through deregulation and privatization, or as sociologist Andrew Ross puts it: “over the landscape of work, there is less and less terra firma” (Ross 2011:1). Migrants are often found among the working poor, their bodies are both expected and needed in precarious, often gendered, work sites of the global economy (Gavanas 2010). However, the experiences described here are not only representative for migrants, but also for “formal employees in select high-wage and low-wage sectors who increasingly find themselves in a precarious work-life environment” (Ross 2011:212, see also Anderson 2015:647). As will be discussed in the following chapters, the dislocatory events participants had lived through shifted their subject positions and roles in labor markets, for example, as professionals who have experienced downward mobility. However, the positions post-socialist migrants were able occupy in Argentine labor markets, and the way they were treated were still more favorable than the brutal situation many migrants from bordering countries faced at the same time.

The dislocatory processes initiated by neoliberal policies in Argentine society had dislodged professional positions in labor markets, thus altering subjectivities and social as well as spatial mobility, destabilizing the firm

⁴ First introduced in social science by Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of precarity has recently become widely used and debated in international research on migration, globalization, labor, and citizenship (Standing 2011, Schierup et al 2013:249f). Guy Standing has used the term “precariat” to describe what he sees as a new class of precarious workers. When writing on the global South, this concept has been debated and questioned for example when it comes to questions of landless or working poor who have endured precarious lives for generations (see for example Munck 2013).
ground Ross speaks of, for both migrants and the native population. Anthropologist Don Kalb proposes three systematic outcomes of the process of “globally imposed marketization” – an “ongoing proletarization of the world population”, a “gradual de-legitimation of post-welfare” state and an “indigenization, ethnification and parochialization of post-citizens” (Kalb 2005:2). I propose that the experiences of the research participants should be understood in light of these global processes. Vadim told me of his first years in Argentina:

I walked around and I met some Russian guys who took me to a place of work! It was a car wash /…/ Bolivians, Paraguayan, and Peruvians were working there and the owner told me to come back tomorrow. I was saved! I worked between 7am and 7pm and almost died because of the sun. The owner, an old Armenian, changed me to the night shift, so then I worked from 7pm to 7am. It was hard, I wasn’t used to sleeping in the day. But I started earning good money – I made 500 dollars and 15 pesos in tips every day //…// For almost two years I could not get a girlfriend. I lived in poverty, I didn’t go out, I almost didn’t have friends, no routine, I was constantly forced to move, I dressed badly. I spoke really bad Spanish! /…/ I hit rock bottom, I got to know nightlife, poverty, marginality, hunger, solitude, limitations, and anxiety. From being employed in a bank, I went to washing cars 12 hours a day to be able to pay for my room and a daily meal, sometimes sex. /…/ I felt like a failure, forgotten by God, I didn’t write or call anyone in Russia. I didn’t want them to know the misery I was living in. But my pride prevented me from going back. I didn’t want everyone there to know about my mistake in emigrating and my failure.

In this narrative, there is no place for hope. Rather Vadim’s story is full of the hardships he had undergone in the relocatory trajectory – turning out differently to that he had imagined. I suggest that in this narrative, Vadim’s subject position and practices in labor markets are constituted through racialized relations. As Laclau has underlined, discourse can be seen as “any complex set of elements in which relations play the constitutive role” (Laclau 2005:68 Italics in original). When Vadim remembers what it was like in the carwash, he juxtaposes his former – implicitly respectable – white-collar work at a bank with his alignment with Peruvian, Bolivian, and Paraguayan migrant workers in the car wash. The articulation of his own position alongside exploited and discriminated migrant groups in Argentina, does something to him as a subject. By stressing how they worked together, he expressed his own downward social mobility; the reference to the alignment between their
bodies places him in a racialized and classed category of the exploited migrant worker.

August Carbonella and Sharryn Kasmir have noted how “simultaneous making of wage, wage insecurity, and wageless labor depends crucially upon the production of racial difference and spatial segregation”. They argue “the process of defining waged and unwaged labor is inherently political, with long-term implications for working class formation and politics (Carbonella & Kasmir 2014:17). The category of the migrant worker is one Vadim had not expected to be positioned in, yet when he found himself there, in this example he acted in accordance with ideas of masculinity. He told me that after work “the Peruvians” would go to steal food from a nearby supermarket. He would accompany them, but he “would steal cans of beer instead”. And when they sometimes would go to prostitutes, he preferred “las morochas” – the brown haired Latin Americans, while his co-workers would “go for the blondes”.

The way he chose to describe the women, themselves often migrants from marginalized interior provinces or neighboring countries, whose bodies Vadim was in a position to purchase, points towards another layer of gendered and racialized positions in day-to-day survival in informal economies. I suggest that this was an articulation that can be read as a racialized and gendered heteronormative way of reconstituting himself as a non-subordinated subject. As Connell has argued, white men’s constructions of masculinity occur not only in relation to white women but are also interlinked to black men (Connell 2005:75). I propose that this was an articulation thus made both in relation to Vadim’s racialized co-workers, but also to the women he spoke about. His construction of female racialized sex-workers articulated his position as an active white heterosexual male subject, a buyer and thus a winning subject on any market.

During the initial years, Vadim lived in a so-called family hotel with other postsocialist migrants. There he met a Ukrainian man that mediated a work contact:

He brought me to see the owner of 40 Ugi’s pizzerias. This lady liked Russian and Ukrainian guys so I started working there /.../ There were two of us working there and we made 300 pizzas per day in front of the customer’s eyes. It was exhausting. They paid 380 pesos per month, for 12 hours of work and they gave me 2 pesos per day to eat. With that salary I could just about pay my rent and buy some bare necessities /.../ Everyday some pizza would come out burnt and my colleague would put it aside. The whole day my mouth would water and I wanted to eat it so bad. At
11 o’clock at night the supervisor would come to get the cash and then they gave me that burnt pizza. I ate as if it was a delicacy and sometimes it was my only meal that day.

Ugi’s is a chain of low budget pizza restaurants, perhaps emblematic of the 1990s and the growing impoverished conditions of the Argentines. Just as the reference to the other migrants constructs his body as a migrant worker, so does the articulation of Ugi’s pizzerias alter the construction of his own subject position. In this cheap food place, Vadim has to wait until closing, to eat as “a delicacy” what the people who could afford would refuse. This places him in a position of marginality; his narrative is one of suffering, something common in my material that is addressed in the next chapter. He then found work in a fresh pasta factory. “They paid better and I could eat for free, they gave us ravioli every week. In this factory I then worked from 1999 up until 2006, it was a formal employment with social security and free healthcare insurance medicine rights”.

Vadim’s experience indicates how a migrant worker might occupy a vulnerable position in labor markets. Regardless of being formal or not, his different subsistence jobs lacked the “decency” of formal and secure employment. This is a condition shared by many migrants all over the world. It is important to note that however complex and volatile these positions might be they are often constructed along lines of gender and race.

Vadim’s story is articulated from a “safe” position, as can be seen in the quote above, it “ended” quite well. Vadim was neither “destined” to stay in the carwash with the migrant workers, nor to eat burnt low-class pizzas from Ugi’s with other exploited workers. As the economy stabilized, he found a more secure job with benefits and rights. Yet, he did not go back to a white-collar position in a bank. Like Vadim, many participants mention how they were selected for jobs because the employer liked “Ukrainians and Russians” or knew “that they worked well”. Thus in some way, a racialized position helped break through structures of migrant work. But how far could that position take them? I will return to these questions in chapters 5 and 6.

Gendered Divides

As already demonstrated, there was a gendered divide in the positions of employment that were available for the newly arrived migrants. To understand how participants made meaning out of this it is important to gain an understanding of what discourses on gender they had been brought up with and what kind of discourses they had arrived to. In the Soviet model women
were part of the workforce, their level of education was equal to that of men and they were represented in professional classes, while at the same time carrying a double load as workers and mothers.

With Perestroika this changed as women were expected to “return to” domestic matters or were forced into small-scale business, such as the one Ekaterina and Jelena described their mothers engaging in (Kuehnast & Nechemias 2004). In the production based socialist economy full employment of both men and women was necessary, and to facilitate this, the state reorganized certain domestic tasks and also relied upon early retirement, in a way making social reproduction “geriatrized” (Verdery 1994:231). Anna Rotkirch writes that women’s employment was not an invention of the Soviet system, however “it implemented female wage work on a massive scale”, making the “gender contract of the ‘Soviet working mother’/…/ an affair between women and the State” (Rotkirch 2004:170). The state articulated a discourse that constructed working mothers as Soviet heroes and organized some childcare tasks but full-time, waged, working women were still considered responsible for housework and mothering (Solari 2010:223f).

As the economy changed in postsocialist Russia and Ukraine, so did the importance of full employment, thus also creating changes in gendered discourse. Women experienced a decline in labor market access that has been described as a re-domestication of women (see for example Ashwin 2000). The postsocialist transition in rural areas was characterized by a gendering of labor markets, where women just like Jelena’s mother, often went into small-scale entrepreneurial activity such as being merchants at local markets (Kuehnast & Nechemias 2004:7–9). Ekaterina and others thus left a society where former meanings of gender roles and work moralities were undergoing drastic changes requiring emotion work and changes of self-understandings and occupational trajectories6 (Bloch 2011, Hankivsky & Salnykova 2012, Solari 2010).

After arriving in Argentina, participants experienced how female and male bodies were inscribed with different expectations. Male research participants spoke of industrial accidents, sometimes bringing masculine ideals forwards as a way to regain an independent position when they described

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6 See for example Alexia Bloch’s studies on women shuttle traders who in the process of “unlearning” how to be a good Soviet citizen and how to become a good capitalist experienced feelings of shame and confusion. Bloch argues that Russian women’s insertion into global capitalism in the beginning of the 1990s required individual “emotion work” as “work lives”, “gender roles, expressions of power, and the meaning of labor” in people’s life was transformed (Bloch 2011:318).
practices of abuse and downward mobility. Some female interviewees spoke about how they or other women went to work in domestic service or cleaning. In Buenos Aires, and indeed in many other cities around the world, migrant women have historically provided domestic services. Among the early 20th century European migrants many women – particularly Spanish – found work in the domestic work sector. This is also a sector that since the 1940s has employed internal migrants from rural areas and bordering countries (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:24). In the 1990s large numbers of Peruvian women entered this sector, many of them overqualified for domestic work. Pacecca argues that this gave Peruvian women an advantage in competition with less qualified Paraguayan women in this stratified and gendered labor market (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:30). Given that this sector is both gendered and racialized perhaps this gave the highly educated postsocialist women an advantage?

None of those I interviewed remained in this sector. One of the participants, Alina, had herself even become an employer. She looked at me with a smile when I asked her if it was different to be a woman in Argentina and answered: “I like to be a woman here, because being a woman here I have more time for myself /.../ to grow, to study /.../ because I could allow myself to have helpers”. The possibility to buy herself out of a gendered role thus made Alina feel freer in Argentina than she had in Soviet Russia. This can be compared with Lundström’s Swedish interviewees, whose migration also allowed them to buy different domestic services. Lundström suggests that the privileges of whiteness are located in class and gender structures (Lundström 2010:28). As Anderson has demonstrated, the organization of “care and domestic labour in the private household is a powerful indication of the divisions between women across multiple axes (Anderson 2015a:648).

The women I interviewed also addressed questions of sexual harassment. Some gave examples similar to what Igor had narrated about his ex-wife’s experiences, but generally they were reluctant to talk about these issues. Sexual harassment in public places was however a frequent topic. Ekaterina recalled a situation when her body was made the center of attention in a public space:

I remember a thing (piropo) they shouted at me in the street, when I worked in the furniture shop and I went out to buy a sandwich. As salespeople we had to be nicely dressed /.../ I was dressed in a tube-like tight skirt and a black jumper so I was like a walking black stick and I crossed the street and then this guy came driving by and he screams, ‘bitch (perra)!’ /.../ Everyone turned around and looked at me, I was red like a
tomato and so angry, you know if I would have had anything in my hand I would have thrown it at him, but the only thing I had was the money and I said no, money is not to be thrown (laughs), I wanted to eat.

This kind of heterosexual verbal attention in public spaces is called “piropos”, a global practice of street harassment perhaps more commonly known in English as catcalls. This gendered spatial practice in public space constitutes masculinity and femininity according to a discourse where bodies that present femininity are subordinated (see Connolly 2005:83). These practices condition how bodies should behave, what they can expect and be expected to perform in public spaces. After this event, Ekaterina said that Argentine streets always made her feel more “visible.” Later she described how she once hit a man in the subway who directed a piropo at her:

I was coming back from work and you know when, here when they just stick their face really close, all of a sudden they just move really close to you, actually I got really scared, he something to me, I think it wasn’t until five minutes after that I could make out what he had really said, I mean you hear it afterwards. I reacted. I hit him, I hit him, I hit him like this (shows a slapping gesture) /…/ then I took off running really fast.

Buenos Aires is a segregated city where the spatial organization of the city coincides with socioeconomic groups (Grimson 2008:504). How one moves within the metropolitan area indicates conditions of class and privileges. It is relevant to note how Ekaterina’s experience of being verbally harassed, like many others, is connected both to places of labor and to public spaces. Some of my research participants had to travel several hours a day to get to their workplaces in places located far out in the conurbation area in Greater Buenos Aires.

Others, like Alina, who first worked with her local husband and at the time of the interview owned a business of her own, had the privilege of not having to expose herself to public spaces in the same way. Some, like Ekaterina, had to move around in public spaces during their workdays and were constantly under exposure. As Farahani has proposed: “While both men and women undergo displacement, and experience its consequences differently, class, ethnicity, age, and education, among other factors, have significant effects on how each goes through the immigration process” (Farahani 2013:152). Spatial dimensions of gendered exposure are also connected to class – the possibility to avoid exposing oneself to precarious work locations and certain public spaces is not a question of being a migrant or not. Rather, it is a
question of class. However, Alina also mentioned piropos as one of the phenomena that had bothered her most in the beginning of her life in Argentina. Even though she could choose when and how to move in public places, Alina said that this verbal harassment disturbed her, yet she had gotten used to it. “Now I’m fifty-five” she said, “it used to be worse”:

When I was younger, ten years ago, many times I went to my husband and cried and I told him ‘Don’t I have the right to walk in the street” and I wasn’t asking for attention, normal, right? /…/ It was hard at the beginning, I will not lie to you /…/ But I learned to see it as normal, as something that doesn’t hurt and that doesn’t lower my … or to see it as lack of respect.

Natalia also told me of how she had been forced to “dress down” and do her work at night, in order to avoid attention, when she worked with posting adverts on walls. Her memories of one of these first subsistence jobs brought out a lot of negative comments about Argentina. I asked her about her Ukrainian ex-husband from whom she had gotten divorced after arrival. Then she stopped and laughed.

Sincerely, if I had the possibility to go back in life I would never get married and I would never had children! I would live only for myself. Here in Argentina, it is a good country.

Like Natalia and many other postsocialist migrants I heard about, many had gotten a divorce some years after arriving in Argentina. Seven of the participants in this study arrived in Argentina as married, three women and one man had become divorced, one had become a widow, and the other three stayed married. Three of the women had re-married Argentine men and one of the men had re-married an Argentinean woman. It’s interesting to note how all of those of the “older” generation re-married Argentine spouses. While those who had arrived as young adults or children had re-married or entered romantic relationships with peers who had arrived in Argentina from Russia or Ukraine at the same age.

Sub-standard Housing

Just as employment for vulnerable groups tends to be concentrated to certain sectors of the labor market (Castles & Miller 2003:182), so does housing have
its own logics of vulnerability. Migrants are “more likely than any other demographic to be trapped in substandard housing that is overpriced, illegal and dangerous” upon arrival (Ross 2011:143). Many research participants mentioned conditions of labor markets and housing as intimately related. For Vadim, places of work and living were interlaced during this first period:

I met a Russian man that worked in a delicatessen and bakery and he said that the owner was looking for someone. /…/ I went there and he gave me work. The owner let me live in a room in the small factory /…/ The work was really heavy /…/ but we ate lunch like kings and for free /…/ and when the day ended the owner always gave us food. My supper was secured. After two weeks I could rent a room /…/ Then the owner started having financial problems and couldn’t pay on time, he would give something the due date and a little the day after. I resigned and left. Later I heard he had become indebted to the employees. I then worked in some restaurants, pizzerias, fastfood places, and in October 1998, I found a job as a baker in a bakery. I worked from 3 in the morning until 1 in the afternoon. I had no place to live. /…/. Since I had the keys to the bakery I would go back there after they had closed, I ate something and I washed myself with hot water in the big pan /…/ In the bakery I slept on the floor, on some old cardboards and for pillow I used a bag of old bread that hadn’t been sold.

Similarly, Ekaterina recalled living in the same building of the factory where she worked:

It was a storehouse with several floors and right next to it there were some apartments, like houses, it was like the typical ‘chorizo’ long hallway and three or four houses. We lived in one of the houses that was … actually just for one family but we were /…/ four families in there. /…/ (After changing workplace) I started to look for something in the city, they advised me to look in Russian churches /…/ I found a place in one /…/ They had several properties for rent /…/ at low prices /…/ It was like a family hotel, the entrance and then several rooms, bathroom and shared kitchen. Some people had lived there for years already /…/ I was eight months pregnant and I was able to move in. For the first six months I lived there for free, because I asked for it and they allowed it /…/ Then slowly I was able to start paying.

Similar to other places in the world, precarious work and life were mixed together, in this case first arranged through a relative of Ekaterina’s husband. When Ekaterina lost her job in the factory she also lost the place where she lived. She had divorced her husband. Pregnant, unemployed, and homeless
she turned to a Russian orthodox church that then provided her with substandard housing for a period. At the time of the interview she had more or less firm ground under her feet, living with her Argentine husband in his flat.

During this period, the creditor’s guarantee system also made it difficult to find a place to rent in Buenos Aires due to the fact that one had to present a guarantee from someone who owned properties, preferably in the capital. This made the situation especially troublesome for foreigners, migrants, and others without connections in the capital. Talking about this issue with participants, I remembered my own visits to small ambulate offices that offered black market creditor’s guarantees. In my case, I could however compensate for this by paying extra for a short-term rental lease that was constantly renewed. This was also the case for one of the families whose stories I heard during fieldwork. For those who could not pay, however, living conditions were crowded and uncomfortable for many years.

Family Hotels

According to interviews carried out among postsocialist migrants in Buenos Aires between the years 1999 and 2002, most postsocialist migrants’ first residency consisted of worn down so called “family hotels” (CAREF-OIM 2002:16). This is also the most common experience of the participants. In these overpriced facilities, migrants paid for a precarious room with shared services. Kyrylo remembered being installed into “a Peruvian boarding house, in the room there was only one window and it opened into the Peruvian’s kitchen, between the door and the floor there was like 7 centimeters so the wind entered through there”. When he recalled this, he laughed ironically, emphasizing the absurdity of the situation and pointing out the racialized and classed connotations “family hotels” have in Argentina.

Alexei told me the story of how his family first lived in a “family hotel”, in a room of two meters by two meters, “full of cockroaches and with a big hole in the wall”. They then moved to another family hotel where they stayed for five years until they could produce a creditor’s guarantee and rent an apartment.

Other participants rented similarly low standard houses in residential areas and shared the rent among several families. For example, Igor, who after no one had come to pick him up at the airport, settled into a shared house in a residential area where the unknown Ukrainian man at the airport had offered him to rent a bed. In this house they were: “three persons sharing a large room, we had four and half meters each and everything was shared, shared toilet, shared shower, everything was like that”. These housing-related
Some participants told stories of how other postsocialist migrants facing the same difficulties in the family hotels betrayed each other, for example by stealing another person’s job or housing. Valentyna and Evhen told me about their first year in Argentina:

“It was such a struggle, now it seems depressing. For example it was common for a lot of Ukrainians to live in the same hotel. When a person found work or maybe was to have a job interview /…/ they would come to the interview and be told that they had already hired someone. That was someone who had heard something in the kitchen of the shared home and then ran there (to take the job).

Valentyna recalled how one cold porteño winter, her family finally found an apartment they were promised they could rent without presenting a creditor’s guarantee. The family hotel where they were staying was cold and drafty and their son was sick. However, a Ukrainian man who lived in the same hotel heard them speak about the possibility of renting this apartment without a guarantee. He then went to the apartment, offered the owner to pay more than Valentyna and her husband had paid, and ended up with the apartment. When confronted he excused himself by saying he had done it for his family. Valentyna said he was “shameless” to steal the apartment behind their backs and then reluctantly concluded: “We went through all sorts of things, in … immigration, right? A person fights like an animal”. These kinds of stories are common among my research participants. One participant even described the nature of the position they found themselves in as the “wild west” where no one could be trusted. It was as if they were distanced from others in the same situation in brutal ways and thereby became more vulnerable. Other tendencies of rivalry and competition have been observed in Ukrainian diaspora communities in the U.S. (Koshulap 2013:44). It is noteworthy that their struggle is individualized or only based around the small family unit rather than alongside their migrant peers.

Conventillos, Kommunalki and Displaced Futures
The descriptions from these sites of overcrowded housing are similar to classical descriptions of Argentine immigrant life in so-called conventillos. Conventillo-housing dated back to the transatlantic mass migration era and was the local Rio de Plata version of the U.S. immigration’s tenements. A conventillo “was often quite large, housing dozens or even hundreds of
residents in tiny, lightless rooms that faced an interior courtyard that was the site of cooking and washing” (Rosenthal 2000:65). Vadim’s description is illustrative of the similarities to the way migrants lived in Buenos Aires a century ago:

The hotel where I lived was full of Ukrainians and Russians. It was a living hell. The women cooked their food in the small kitchen that we shared, the men got drunk every day. I used to wash my clothes by hand in the bathroom sink and hang them on the terrace. I didn’t have an iron and my clothes were always wrinkled. My neighbor was a trainer of yacht-sports, he was a world champion, he wanted to work in the yacht club but they didn’t let him /…/ instead he worked there with cleaning. He had a wife and a child and sometimes he cried on the terrace.

Besides the reference to the yacht club this could have been a scene from a conventillo for migrants at the turn of the century. These narrations are very similar to representations of European immigrants from 19th and 20th century, often depicted as suffering and dwelling in nostalgia. In Vadim’s story there is also a clearly gendered divide between the women who cooked and the men who got drunk on the terrace. Vadim is not the only one who spoke of adult men crying when he remembered life in the family hotel. A Ukrainian physician, Myroslav, born in the late 1960s, lived with his family in a Ukrainian parish during the first couple of years. He described how difficult and humiliating he found the situation of labor and housing:

You cannot imagine what it was like when people, adult men were crying, because there was no ... They had come here, and there were some really difficult problems, and they had no work or money to go back, it was so far away. So they didn’t know what to do and they had been promised that everything was going to be all right here.

In many of the narratives, the family hotels become spaces where lost hope is inscribed. As a place of despair, I suggest that these recollections of “crying adult men” in family hotels, testifies of how the dislocatory events had restricted possibilities to inhabit certain subject positions, such as a professional subject or a family-provider, and thus affected self-understandings. These individuals had opted for migration as a way out of the crisis and the impossibility of creating a future in Russia or Ukraine. Nevertheless in Argentina they found themselves in a similar context, perhaps creating a sense of not being able to cope with the situation. Others have demonstrated
how the demise of the USSR meant the loss of their place and value for whole generations (Pine 2014:101; Parsons 2014).

Michele Parsons argues that the Russian postsocialist mortality crisis, where men died as a result of alcoholism, can be explained through an experience of being unneeded. In 1992, the population of Russian men decreased and the drop in life expectancy was the worst in the world for a country not actively engaged in war or affected by natural disasters. It has been argued that this increased death rate for men was a result, not of the transition to capitalism per se, but rather of how that transition was managed in terms of rapid austerity policies (Stuckler & Basu 2013:22). Women in contrast, due to gender structures and the double burden of both paid employment and unpaid domestic work in Soviet society, were still needed in the family even if paid labor had vanished in the postsocialist society (Parsons 2014).

Myroslav’s description of how he and his peers had expected something that did not exist upon arrival describes a feeling I posit as important for understanding how these dislocatory experiences are made meaningful. As mentioned above, many spoke of the expectations of adventure that they carried with them in the decision to migrate. The representation of adult men that burst into tears testifies, not only of how masculine constructions were altered but also how dreams of a new possible future had shattered. I suggest that former discourses of what the world outside of the Soviet Union would be like, most likely played an important part for what they expected, and how they made sense out of what they then found (see Pine 2014).

As discussed in chapter 3, the imperative of “change”, the constant movement forward was important in participants’ understandings of why they had left the post-Soviet crisis only to end up in another crisis. The imperative of progressing mobility, the transition to the future, was not only for former socialist economies but also for them as subjects in the free world. As sociologist Michael Burawoy and anthropologist Katherine Verdery have suggested, the word transition implicates a process that connects the past with the present (1999). Whether content or not with perestroika and the aftermath of independence, the participants and others like them, set out with aspirations of a personal transition – subjects moving from the past to the future. However, the housing situations they found themselves in not only resembled traditional Argentine conventillo living, but also Soviet communal kommunalki living.

After the 1930s, housing in the USSR was “organized on a communal basis. The hallway, kitchen, toilet, and telephone were typically available to
the tenants of a group of rooms, and they lived together in cramped conditions that left little opportunity for privacy” (Service 2003:83). Even if the policy on communal housing was down prioritized during the Khrushchev era in late 1950s and 1960s, the notion of kommunalka living was still part of everyday life in Soviet society (Messana 2011). Despite their different origins – the conventillos stemming from the need of immigrants and opportunistic landlords and the kommunalki from Stalin’s architecture schemes – the traces of these past forms of living were most likely present in the disillusion so many mentioned when they spoke of the family hotels. For example, when Yulia, told me of what it was like to live in a family hotel the pitch of her voice went up:

I started to live in a family hotel, I mean, you know what a family hotel is right? There are a lot of rooms, one shared kitchen for everyone, one shared bathroom for everyone, a disaster. Well, I started living there and it was quite shocking /.../ It was a really closed room, old, it had no lights, it had nothing. I lived there almost half a year /.../ When you finish university you think that the whole world is open to you right? In your country you already know everything, you know your possibilities there, where you can go and work and all of that. So then they (her parents-in-law) invite you to a different country, they give you the tickets, it seemed really interesting ... like an adventure, right? Well, then we came and we were faced with this /.../ A family hotel is an atrocity that I could never have imagined.

Yulia was disappointed and outraged by what she met in Argentina, she told me her parents-in-law had chosen this for her, just like so many others who spoke about losing control or not having a choice. Illustrated in the quote is a feeling of having set out to explore the world, the recurrent narration of the search for the good life, however then experiencing an unexpected setback. Her narrative is full of contrasts; a “whole world” had opened; yet Yulia found herself in a closed room that she describes as an “atrocity”. The dislocatory events had set her free, however, the new subject position she found herself in also seemed to have relocated her in the wrong direction through time and space. Like the crying men, Yulia had set out with great aspirations for the future, but instead had been placed back in time, in a housing situation that resembled the kommunalki or the conventillos of a past they all thought they had left behind. The leap she took for “change” had placed her in the category of the “migrant”, a position with structural conditions she and others had not expected.
Exposed Bodies

In contrast with what the ILO had predicted in its earlier reports, the volume of informality in labor markets grew all over the world in the 1990s and the “flexibilization and informalization of production and employment relationships” increased (ILO 2002:2). Narratives are recurrent in my material of how bodies are exploited, exposed, and abused as they are incorporated into informal labor markets. In most narrations the body has some kind of reaction to the treatment it has to endure – it shakes, it breaks, it falls etc. These experiences can be seen as bodily reactions, material consequences, of certain discursive orders (see Marciniak 2010:100). I argue that the practices described in the previous section of labor markets impact not only to subject positions, but also the bodies and psyches that contain these subjects.

Putting the Body on the Line

I posit that the practices of labor markets described in this chapter affect subject positions and materiality – in terms of the bodies inhabited by these subjects. Physical bodies manifest societal and political notions and ideas – how a certain body is understood and why is discursively constituted in contextual webs of meaning. For example, a body can be made meaningful in relation to a certain space, or to a political system. To illustrate this I would like to return to my meeting with Kyrylo. He had recently graduated from media studies in Ukraine, and was nineteen years old at the time of arrival in Argentina. In order for his family to survive he had to work in a factory:

On the seventh day I went to work at a metallurgical plant /.../ My wage was just enough to pay the housing with something left over for food, but that was all. My mom and dad worked, my dad had a few things on the side and that was it, that’s what we arrived to. Well … four months went by or five /.../ and then I found a job working night shifts in a textile factory … In the daytime I worked in the metal plant, I went home to eat and then I went to the textile factory, they paid one peso an hour. Jenny: Really? Kyrylo: That’s just plain theft (laughs) /.../ First I just did stupid things, like remove grease from items, then they had me welding stuff /.../ Then there was an accident /.../ it was a tube that failed, I’m not sure what happened and a guy lost fifty percent of his eyesight and I went three days without being able to see a thing.

Waged labor, far beyond the technical act of delivering a service or putting together something in a production line, is a part of the discursive networks that create societal life. Labor constructs subjects and ascribes meaning to
bodies. I suggest that the meaning ascribed to bodies; such as migrant or “other”, plays a role in the bodies that are found in, or are expected to occupy positions in, informalized dangerous settings of labor markets. Labor markets are structured around practices that articulate different subject positions; certain expectations regarding gender, race, and class are inscribed in the occupation of these positions (see Adib & Guerrier 2003).

During the 20th century, foreign labor migrants in the West have often been placed in positions of replacement or buffer functions on labor markets. They have been employed in occupational areas where native workers have rejected the low wages or poor conditions (Bade 2003:228f). Accidents in work environments can be analyzed along the lines of class and gender, and contextualized with statistics. For example, during the period that Kyrylo and other participants spoke about, workers in Europe with low levels of education more often reported bodily injuries and physical health issues than workers with a high educational level, that reported factors affecting mental well being such as stress (Eurostat 2007:10) Numbers from Eurostat on workplace accidents in 2007 indicated that health problems caused in relation to work “often occurred in the sectors ‘agriculture, hunting and forestry’, and ‘mining and quarrying’” (Eurostat 2007:9). For women, the largest reported numbers came from the “health and social work” sector. In addition, manual workers were more likely to report “work-related health problems than non manual workers” (Eurostat 2007:9).

These are numbers from Europe, but they can be seen as illustrative for classed, gendered, and racialized work life that places physical risk differently upon human bodies. Kyrylo’s accident occurred in Argentina where in 1995, the frequency of fatal work-related accidents was “twice as high as that of Spain and five times that of the United States”, a majority of Argentine firms were also reported to “violate the laws on safety at work and sanitary controls” (Abdala et al. 2000:336). In 1999 Argentina reported 1 069 work-related fatal accidents, and in 2007 the number was 1 020. The three most affected sectors in 1999 were manufacturing with 186 reported casualties, followed by construction with 164 reported deaths and then the community, social, and personal services sector reported 162 cases. In 2007, community, social, and personal services reported 216 deaths, manufacturing 167 death

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7 It is of course a complicated business to compare statistics across countries and regions, particularly since different countries report work-related accidents in different ways and there is a large share of non-reported accidents from informal sectors.
followed by construction with 163 reported casualties. All of these are sectors that employ the working class and migrants.

In 2013 the majority of migrant workers in the world were engaged in the service, industry, manufacturing, and construction sectors (ILO 2015). These numbers come with highly notable gender differences where female migrants represent a much larger share of the domestic work sector. In comparison, between the years 1999 and 2007, fatal workplace accidents in the EU countries reduced from 5,275 people to 3,580 (Eurostat 2007:9). The majority of fatalities were “men, younger workers” and “workers with low levels of education” (Eurostat 2007:8). In the report on health and safety at work in the EU between 1999 and 2007 the authors summarize:

Migrant workers tend to work in unskilled occupations and are more likely to be overqualified for their job. They experience considerable job insecurity. Moreover, migrant workers are more often employed in sectors and occupations with less advantageous working conditions. Women and young migrants are considered vulnerable (Eurostat 2007:19).

In the scheme of cheap labor in informalized and flexibilized de-regulated labor markets, bodies that are othered by racial or nationalist discourse and placed in certain positions by legal frameworks, can be allowed to occupy vulnerable or dangerous positions. This is a phenomena observed in many parts of the world. De-colonial scholars have noted how racial classifications formulated from colonial ideas still operate today. Quijano writes:

In fact, if we observe the main lines of exploitation and social domination on a global scale, the main lines of world power today, and the distribution of resources and work among the world population, it is very clear that the large majority of the exploited, the dominated, the discriminated against, are precisely the members of the ‘races’, ‘ethnies’ (sic), or ‘nations’ into which the colonized populations, were categorized in the formative

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8 Figures from ILO Statistics; Cases of fatal occupational injury by sex and economic activity; Argentina. Checked September 27 2016.
9 Fatal accidents is not affected by under-reporting in the same way as work-related accidents, thus looking at numbers of fatal accidents might provide an idea of how work can affect bodies differently.
10 Research on for example the construction sector in the U.S., with many work-related deaths and also where the bulk of Hispanic migrants were employed, showed that migrant workers or foreign-born workers were at a higher risk of falling from heights (Dong et al 2009).
process of that world power, from the conquest of America and onward (Quijano 2007:168f).

This raises questions about the relation between the subject position of the ‘migrant’ and described situations of vulnerability. What discourses make this sort of exposure tolerable because of a racialized categorization? My intention with presenting some of these numbers is not to give a full statistic account, but to provide an indication of the bodies that are allowed to be damaged in societies that attribute different value to different bodies. The statistics point towards the role exposure and vulnerability in labor markets plays in the possibility, or rather impossibility, for migrants to direct their relocatory trajectories in a desired direction.

After the accident, Kyrylo had several other jobs, often moving between shifts or jobs:

I worked three years in a company that sold telephones //…// I had money and time to study but not to support myself fully, so I went to this factory that was owned by a Ukrainian guy. It was a factory of sweets, marmalades of sweet potatoes and quince /…/ I started at half past four in the morning //…// It went all right, but I burned my hand, this hand (shows me) was burned in a bucket of 98 degrees hot sweet potato. The guys subtracted (from his paycheck) it up until the last minute (laughs) … and well what is one to do?

So what is one to do when one’s body is injured yet the employer does nothing but subtract the working time lost from one’s paycheck? Kyrylo changed job. Over the years he was to go through many different jobs and locations. In one he experienced how the boss of a transport company turned out to be trafficking drugs:

The next day the gendarmerie, the federal police, you know, all the helmets came bursting into the office, and it turns out the guy sent drugs with diplomatic papers. Son of a bitch, can you imagine? I put my signature on those papers and they didn’t give me any of the juice. Those guys (the police) take your kidneys out first and then they ask for your name … I was shaking … shaking.

He then went on to work in another company, this was a formal position. Yet, his body could not take it anymore:
I had a … I am not sure if it was a pre heart attack or something like that or at least that is what they told me … Then I left everything and I went to (interior province) to work with wood. *Jenny*: How do you mean pre attack? *Kyrylo*: I went out running (he hits his hand over his arm and makes a clicking sound) … and that was it. An old man found me and took me home, if it hadn’t been for him I would still be lying there … So, I said, that’s enough, if not today it will be tomorrow.

After surviving through this, Kyrylo decided to step off the “guinea pig wheel”, as he termed it and he went to live “outside of the system” in the countryside. Throughout his narrative Kyrylo oscillated between positions, subjected as a worker that could be used and fooled, but also constructing himself as an autonomous acting subject who made the right decisions within the more opaque practices of labor markets – for example by resigning from the transport company when he started to suspect his boss of misconduct. It is notable how his body was exposed in various ways as he moved within these labor markets. His hand was burnt and he almost lost his eyesight, while at the same time being forced to take part in corruption and drug trafficking. This activity could have resulted in his being shot or imprisoned and as he realized this, his body reacted by “shaking” and eventually he had a “heart attack scare” and decided to leave urban neoliberal life.

Kyrylo’s story is one of a young man who does what he needs to in order to save himself and his family. It is a story of how the world transformed for him, it became a place where he had no other option than to put his body on the line, to risk it. His story is also one of masculinity and a good working subject that bears the sufferings of one’s body. Throughout his story there is also a layer of what one could call work morality – his narrative is about work and the value of those who perform it. Pine has suggested that one of the most frequent alternative coping strategies in the postsocialist world was migration (Pine 2014:98). In this sense, Pine regards migration as a future oriented embodiment of hope in the postsocialist context. The migrant who went abroad to work was ensured of the future. However, Pine finds that this often meant:

Working in conditions and socioeconomic contexts that were not only not highly valued but were in fact undervalued, both in the host country and at home. In a sense, migration takes the moral or social value out of work; labor, rather than being valorized as it takes place, becomes something to be endured in the short-term present for a greater good in the long-term future (Pine 2014:98).
Participants narrated the experience of precarious lives as corporeal, mediated through a body that had been placed in a position where it could become subjected to abuse, exposure, and risks. Kyrylo endured the conditions he told me about in order to secure another kind of future. Yet when he spoke about this he did so from a distance, he had stepped out of that context and was living another kind of life as the owner of his own business.

To have to expose one’s body to vulnerable positions in precarious labor markets is not necessarily an outcome of being a migrant, particularly not in this case where dislocatory events in Argentina had exposed large sectors of native populations to vulnerable positions. However, the level of exposure that one has to put the body through bears witness to classed, raced, and gendered labor practices and societal structures. In societies with stable conjunctures, the level of workers’ exposure to vulnerable positions tends however to be connected to migranthood. In her work on Europe and immigration, Saskia Sassen asks if migrants are not the pioneers of our time. She argues that postcolonial history is also to be found in Western societies where the lowest paid, most dangerous, and precarious job sites occupied by migrants constitute border zones within nations. Sassen suggests that unemployment, affecting both native and migrant populations, is a modern border that can no longer be transferred to distant countries through mass emigration (Sassen 1996:214).

To Have Been Made a Migrant

When participants recalled the conditions of their first years in Buenos Aires some spoke of having been made a migrant. Vadim who felt he had been fooled by the “fake agency” told me: “The lies used to turn a Russian citizen into an immigrant-traveler started early on and were strong and precise”. He thus experienced having been “turned” into something, or placed in a subject position he had not anticipated. This dislocatory experience and the unexpected route of his relocatory trajectory had created a sense of being out of place or being made into something he never had intended. In a similar manner Igor narrated how, during his journey from the airport to the house Ukrainian migrants shared, he was transformed from a responsible family-provider with an adventurous spirit into a migrant.

11 The working poor and increased segments of native populations are marginalized in deregulated labor markets in the contemporary global economy. There is a link between the informal economy and poverty and worldwide this particularly affects women (Carr & Chen 2002:3).
Sitting at the plastic table in the Costanera harbor area, Kyrylo and I watched the ambulant street vendors crossing the street where he had parked the truck. The river was on one side of us and the skyscraper apartments built in the old harbor area were on the other side. Beyond the luxurious glass facades of the skyscrapers we could hear the city bustling with afternoon traffic, but here it was calm, the branches of an old eucalyptus tree moving softly in the wind. Kyrylo seemed to hesitate but then he decided to tell a joke to explain what migration was really about:

A man dies and goes to heaven, there it’s all pink colors, angels, and the guy gets bored. Saint Peter goes up to him and says:

‘What’s wrong?’
‘I’m bored.’

‘But this is heaven my dear, what is it that you need? Do you want to party here?... You will get used to it.’ So the guy walks around there and all of a sudden he sees a small black hole. He goes through it and then he’s in hell. There are the demons with the girls, the partying, and the drugs …

‘What is this? Is this hell? Can I stay here for a week’
‘But stupid, this is hell.’

‘Yeah, let’s go there!’ So they give him a tourist visa, he goes and returns. Half a year goes by. So he asks Saint Peter: ‘Could I go for some weeks to see what’s up in hell?’ ‘But you are crazy my son. Why do you want to go to hell?’

‘I just want to go and see, I get bored here.’ So they give him a tourist visa. He comes back and:

‘Saint Peter I have decided I want to stay in hell’.
‘But son, how can you change paradise for hell?’

‘It’s that I like it there.’ So they give him a permanent residence and the guy finds himself in a giant pot with a demon stirring it. He says:

“But man yesterday we were drinking together and today you are cooking me?”

‘Yesterday you were a tourist, today you are an immigrant’.
I suggest that this joke\footnote{The structure of this joke allows for it to be used in various local settings and circumstances, engaging different subject positions, there is for example a similar joke about Putin in hell and Göbbles in Norway during the occupation.} captures an experience most participants convey in their narrations of how they suffered or endured in the process of re-establishing their lives in Argentina. This was a process that entailed being placed in subject positions without the benefits of choice the tourist visa provides – subjected to vulnerability and exposure and thus turned into migrants. This joke implies the broken illusions most postsocialist migrants expressed – they believed they were going to paradise, however ended up in something that resembled hell.

Jokes are quite common in my material, participants joke about how they got lost in the city or bought meat intended for dogs during the initial years. Others have written about how jokes, or the presumed absence of jokes, in post Perestroika times was a way to mediate the dislocatory moments people were living through (Yurchak 1997:22–23; Pesmen 2000:44). Studies of humor indicate how sociocultural differences tend to be part of particular political settings, specific places, and involving different audiences – such as the enunciator and the listener – and affect different kind of jokes (Tsakona & Popa 2013:3).

In this case Kyrylo was speaking to an ethnographer who indeed had spent many years in Argentina, but always on a constantly renewable tourist visa. There is a tension between the position of a tourist and that of a migrant that can be understood through the privileges of whiteness. In tourist spaces, white travelers can cross boundaries without being confronted with their own racialized position, to become a migrant, however, entails a loss of privilege and the practices and possibilities associated with whiteness (Mattsson 2016:92f). Research participants had experienced being turned into the kind of subjects whose bodies can be put at risk in flexibilized informal labor markets.

This joke can also be understood as a narrative part of a relocatory trajectory, which serves to create a sense of order. I suggest that speaking of dislocatory experiences in interviews through jokes or in litanies, as will be discussed in chapter 5, is a way to restructure the loss of discursive order. Migration is often understood as forced, those who undertake such a journey do it at the risk of loosing their privileges while for example “lifestyle”
migrants travel as an extension of their privileges. As Yulia said “Yes, migration, all life migration is very difficult, it’s a constant test, one test after another, all the time you are subjected to tests”. When I first asked Natalia what her experience of the migration had been like she exclaimed: “Uff! That’s quite an experience! Yesterday I told a student of mine that I’m going to write a book and it will become a bestseller. Because it is ... No, it’s really terrible ... That’s the word ... terrible”. Natalia was the first to articulate this, but not the last. One year later, Vadim was to explain that: “one could write a book with his story”. And then, a month later, Ekaterina said that a teacher of hers had told her “one could write a great novel with your life”. Why is it that these participants so readily could see their experience in a novel, even a bestseller? Perhaps because their relocatory trajectories they had imagined took unimagined turns.

After arriving in Argentina, most of the research participants experienced a new set of possible subject positions. Among these was the possibility of suffering poverty, a subject position related to the dislocatory events that had taken place in Russia, Ukraine, and Argentina, as well as to the crisis and practices of the labor market and bureaucracy. These were positions that were directly related to migrant-hood. The research participants had stepped out into the world, yet there was nothing that supported them there, no social security, and no blueprint for how things might work out. As Kyrylo said at the beginning of chapter 3, most research participants said that they had no idea what Argentina was like, but that the agents of the migration program had led them to believe that there would be work there. The initial idea of Argentina as a high-income country is recurrent in most narrations; in retrospect many spoke of being “lured in” by promises of Argentina’s healthy economy. This constitutes a noteworthy parallel to how former migrations to the Americas were circumscribed by agents, moneylenders, and other negotiators who had made emigration a lucrative business (Moya 1998:321f).

Narrated from his contemporary terrain Vadim told the story of what happened when he was “transformed into a migrant” by what he called a “fake agency”:

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13 For a discussion on lifestyle migration see for example Nordic Seniors on the Move Mobility and Migration in Later Life” Anne Leonora Blaakilde & Gabriella Nilsson (eds).

14 This partly contradicts Zubelzú’s suggestion that Argentina appeared as one of the most known destinations for Ukrainian migrants due to its large diaspora population (Zubelzú 1999:107).
The people from the agency were excellent psychologists, promising exactly what was lacking – easy access to job searching, accreditation of former studies, no necessary previous knowledge of language, easy access to real estate and low prices, high wages … We both know none of that is true of Argentina, but a frustrated and failed person who is experiencing a bad period does not doubt these promises, but believes in them. Further, personnel from the agency bought furniture, electrical appliances, and cars at cheap prices from the people they had seduced, because they knew exactly that they did not have time to sell it. That is what happened in my case; the director of the agency bought my used car. I do not remember their names anymore, many years have gone by. But they filled my head with sweet lies and they sent me off to Moscow.

In the wake of the dislocatory events and the way Vadim experienced them he had made a decision, that at the time seemed to direct him towards, if not a prosperous, at least a decent life. This was, however, to turn out differently to what he had expected. Vadim’s narrative resonates with former migration history in the region, indicating how structural circumstances shape and direct hope.

For example, when Brazilian plantation owners sent recruitment agents to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in order to “offer the peasants jobs, land, and prosperous futures”, some recruiters were believed to have “helped persuade peasants to sell their property to innkeepers, who in turn shared the profits with recruiters on the subsequent sale of the land” (Satzewich 2002:33). Likewise, at the time of transatlantic mass migration, the wealthy centennial Argentina in need of labor force encouraged immigration through propaganda and subsidized travel costs. However, as Romero has suggested: “Neither of these measures would have been effective if possibilities for finding work had not simultaneously increased” (Romero 2014:6). The Argentina of the mid 1990s was a fairytale waiting to burst, a boasted neoliberal economy that like in the old days acted as its own “magnet” of attraction (Satzewich 2002:35). At the end of the century jobs were becoming increasingly scarce in Buenos Aires. Postsocialist migrants arriving in Buenos Aires at this time had left the social and economic post-Soviet turmoil only to face a similar situation in Argentina. It is not a coincidence

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15 A similar case occurred with Ukrainians recruited to work as indentured labor in Hawaiian sugar plantations; “Some were persuaded that Hawaii was a new Jerusalem where they would find good wages, easy work and mild climate” (Satzewich 2002:34).

16 Satzewich has noted that the authorities did not have to recruit labor migrants because the fast industrial expansion in North America in the late 19th century functioned as “its own magnet” (Satzewich 2002:35).
that many of them, when remembering the post-Soviet havoc, immediately made parallels to the Argentine crisis of 2001.

Coping in the Aftermath of Dislocatory Events

In the beginning of this chapter, Igor remembered standing in a grey porteño street having a premonition of the hardships that were to come. Similar to most of my research participants, the future he and his wife had hoped for turned out somewhat differently than they had imagined. They had become migrants and thus incorporated into the precarious and harsh practices of deregulated and informalized labor markets, but what else did his premonition bore witnesses to?

Igor told many stories of his and his ex-wife’s endurances. After he had secured a job as a guard patrolling a supermarket owned by Asian\textsuperscript{17} migrants, he found work there for his wife as well. She started out as a cashier, the boss had asked if she could operate a cash register and when he told me that he added, “of course if you are educated you know right away how to operate a cash register”. To contextualize this statement he told me:

The majority of those who came from Ukraine they are all, they all have enough education … but what happens is that the language and culture and customs, it is really difficult to learn in a short time and behave as is expected, that’s why … The ones that work, there are some young people who finished over there and then when they came here they managed well, and now they work in positions like any other Argentine, but there are not many of them, they are few. The majority work in levels of … (sighs) low, not in the middle, lower than middle. Like security guards, or like taxi-drivers … Jenny: They had to take some steps down the ladder? Igor: Yes, yes they had to take quite a lot of steps down (laughs) … That really got to my ex wife, it affected her head.

At the time his wife started at the supermarket, Igor had gone to work as a guard at a truck company. He worked from six in the morning until 11 at night. He said that with all this “my ex-wife started to have problems”. Over time she became depressed:

She wanted to go back, she felt very bad, really bad, she started to take anti depression pills, tranquilizers. And then she couldn’t work anymore because the pills affected her too much, you know /…/ it’s like you can’t

\textsuperscript{17} He calls them “Chinos”, a term common in Buenos Aires’ vernacular to designate Asian migrants and particularly those who own supermarkets. This does not necessarily mean that they were Chinese, they could very well have been Taiwanese or Korean.
take one without the other, because then when it stops having an effect one starts to be really depressed /…/ So she increased her doses on her own and I was working all day and couldn’t control that, she was at home all day.

During their last year of marriage, what Igor described as the physiological problems of his ex-wife became worse.

In this case, one day she was really bad and one day … like she was sick in her head, it was like, impossible to control, she caused a lot of problems, screamed, you know, she tried to kill herself a often /…/ One day when we lived in (name of street) when my oldest son still lived with us, I left to buy something and she was bad and when I came back she was still not feeling well, I don’t really know what happened … (clears his throat) like she had fallen in love with an Argentine who had a lot of money, who had everything, because she was a woman and already tired of being poor and … eh .. of not having any possibilities to see her children.

Their children, except for the oldest, were still in Ukraine at this time since they had not been able to afford to send for them yet.

Something like that, so of course, perhaps she fell in love I don’t know. She said she had fallen in love and I wanted to know who it was and said we have to go talk to him and she started to get really bad, bad, bad and then you know she grabbed the stuff (makes a sound) and right in that moment my son came in … I … I didn’t know what to do, you know /…/ … she hung, like that, she hung herself … so we waited until she lost conscience and then we took her down, we cut this… She was unconscious (clears his throat) we woke her up and our son wanted to give her coffee, you know something (clears his throat) she started to scream and felt ill, you know like this … This part was really sad you know (clears his throat).

This was clearly a dramatic event Igor described, narrated from his point of view. He seems to locate the fault of the disillusionment they both suffered with the conditions they encountered. His ex-wife “was a woman” and had gotten tired “of being poor” and the inability to see her children. For Igor, becoming a migrant meant that he could not provide for his wife and family in the way they had planned. As our conversation went on he told me many dramatic events where he had helped his ex-wife and her new Argentinean husband. I suggest that the way he chose to tell me these later events was a
way to recuperate the agency taken out of him through the narrative of these tragic occurrences.

Many of those interviewed talked about how they had hoped for something that was then not realized. The adventure had turned into a disappointing uncertainty. Their lives and bodies were conditioned by the encounter with flexibilized labor markets, structural poverty, and non-existing social policy (Auyero 2000). This took a toll on both their bodies and psyches. Other research participants also spoke of acquaintances or former spouses who had “gone insane” after arriving in Argentina, as if the order of things had been turned upside down and could not be fitted back into place. The references to physiological illness and suicide attempts, can perhaps be compared to Laclau’s example of the psychiatric hospital as a place of no discursive order – as a result of the discursive field of meaning being torn apart and their new subject positions being unlinked from former trajectories their worlds became most uncertain (see Laclau 1990:67). The inability to cover the contingency made manifest by the dislocatory events and the disillusionment with relocatory trajectories was perhaps mediated through the corporal materiality. Bodies were “shaking” or hurt at workplaces, as were psyches.

In the interviews Baker held with Ukrainian diaspora, they expressed that they regarded the postsocialist migrants as an unstable group afflicted by divorces and suicides (Baker 2011:59). There are no statistics on this group in particular that can be analyzed as indicators of such sensitive issues. Nonetheless, on a larger scale, an extended rate of suicides has been observed as a reaction in contexts of economic despair. Sassen has noted that a worldwide trend of increased rates of suicide in times of crisis indicates the effect that economic policies might have on people’s lives (Sassen 2014:54). Likewise, political economist Mikael Holmqvist has noted increased suicides among members of the Swedish elite during the financial crisis (Holmqvist 2015:507).18 Medical scholars David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu have researched extensively on the relation between austerity policies and public health. They argue that the debate about austerity, as the neoliberal program of cutting public spending is usually called in the 2010s, has been based on ideological beliefs rather than facts retrieved from national statistics on public health (Stuckler & Basu 2013).

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18 An anecdotal historical parallel, among Canadian homeland returners to the USSR in the 1950s, Roberts and Cipko have noted that suicide was a term often used “both by embassy officials and the returnees themselves to describe the sense of entrapment that many felt” after their disenchantment with Soviet reality (Roberts & Cipko 2008:129).
According to Stuckler and Basu, choices of economic policies “are not only matters of growth rates and deficits, but matters of life and death” and as such it has implications for our bodies (Stuckler & Basu 2013:x). Through comparisons of the Great Depression in the U.S, shock therapy in post-Soviet Russia, the East Asian crisis, the financial debacle in Iceland in 2009, and the austerity policies imposed on Greece, they scrutinize how public health statistics respond to the actions taken by governments in response to economic recession. They have found that austerity policies severely impacted public health in the case of post-Soviet Russia, the East Asian crisis, and in Greece. On the other hand, the social protection programs of U.S. president Roosevelt’s New Deal politics and Iceland’s rejection of radical austerity, for example, protected their populations from negative impact on public health. Discursive structures, in this case economic policies, do indeed have consequences. In this case the neoliberal dismantling of labor markets and the lack of social policy impacted the participants’ bodies and psyches. This means that the attempted suicide described above or the many other references to bodies that shake, break, or react as in the case of Kyrylo’s “pre-heart attack” are not isolated material units, but can be linked to a wider societal setting of economic policies decided on by governments.

Stuckler and Basu argue, “The real danger to public health is not recession per se, but austerity. When social safety nets are slashed, economic shocks like losing a job or a home can turn into a health crisis” this might even increase rates of suicide (Stuckler & Basu 2013:xiv). For example, the former socialist countries responded differently to the implosion of the USSR and it also affected their health differently. In countries such as Poland where the transition was more gradual, the population grew healthier while in Russia people got sicker (Stuckler & Basu 2013:33). The authors contend that it was not the transition to capitalism in itself that had such negative effects on public health, but the way austerity programs were carried out with rapid mass privatization that in fact correlated with health problems in Russia (Stuckler & Basu 2013:28ff). In the case of post-Soviet Russia, they do however find that male suicides increased “by five per 100,000, heart disease by 21 per 100,000, and alcohol-related deaths by 41 per 100,000” (Stuckler & Basu 2013:36). After comparison of medical data after different governmental approaches to economic recession, Stuckler and Basu conclude: “Had the austerity experiments been governed by the same rigorous standards as clinical trials, they would have been discontinued long ago by a board of medical ethics. The side effects of the austerity treatment have been severe and often deadly” (Stuckler & Basu 2013:140).
What was Igor’s ex-wife to expect in the world she had ended up living in? To work as a cashier in a supermarket in the early 2000s could have been seen as upward mobility for many others, but Igor describes it as a failure. Can the way Igor tells his ex-wife’s story be a manifestation of his journey from hope to resignation? Lauren Berlant argues that the structural changes of post-Fordism in the Western world have caused new unforeseen circumstances for insecurities and vulnerabilities among larger portions of the population. Even if Berlant does not necessarily agree with those who presuppose the emergence of a new globalized homogenous precarious class, she does however direct attention to how “there has been a mass dissolution of a disavowal. The promise of the good life no longer masks the living precarity of this historical present” (Berlant 2011:196).

Igor, formerly employed in animal alimentation and reproduction, and his wife, who had been an economist in Ukraine, were inserted into local economies in the same way other migrants were in this particular context. But while for example a person arriving from other conditions might have regarded the cashier job or the position as a guard as upward mobility, especially in the post-crisis time. Igor and his wife rejected these positions for a number of reasons. Beyond the fact that they could not save enough money to send for their children, it seems Igor felt ashamed and disappointed with having opted for the promise of the good life, and then not having had the possibility of ensuring it was fulfilled for him and his family.

The Shantytowns of Global Market Economies

When speaking of their first impressions of Buenos Aires, many participants mentioned shantytowns, as if these spatial enclaves of brutal poverty made a particularly strong impression on them. I posit that the way they recall the shantytowns is related to the vulnerable positions of their relocatory trajectories.

As I started to put the pieces of the puzzle together it was striking how much time some of the participants had spent talking about rent, the prices of real estate markets, and whether one had owned a property or not in Russia or Ukraine. First it seemed to be a regular part of everyday life – people in my surroundings in Stockholm were also constantly talking about these topics. But, as the other categories took shape, it became clear that this was intimately connected to material circumstances, conditions of migration, and the practices of labor and housing discussed in this chapter. Understandings
of past, future, and present living circumstances unmistakably seemed to vary among the research participants, according to levels of income, spatial and social position as well as whether or not one had managed to buy one’s own property or not. Some still suffered from problems of inadequate housing. For example, Evhen and Valentyna, who had first lived in a shared housing, and now resided in a rented house in the province, told me:

Valentyna: It was really difficult to find something when we had just arrived, if you have no guarantee from a creditor there’s nothing you can do. So why are we here? Because we have no guarantee, we can’t change ... Evhen: We found this house, it was closed and abandoned ... With the owner’s permission we fixed it up a little and we have been living here for thirteen years now.

Valentyna sat at the kitchen table and smoked one cigarette after another. About her prospects for the future she said:

I was … what can you do? I work, I don’t know, how much… I start to think of my pension and it’s horrifying, I am choosing a bridge to go live under because with this pension you can’t pay rent. My son? He has his own life. I don’t know what we will do. Maybe I don’t even make it to retirement, that’s the only hope… honestly (laughs)

Their experience points towards how those that could not bring capital from overseas or get re-established in labor markets were particularly affected by the structural difficulties of relocatory trajectories.

Regardless of their economic, social, and material status at the time of the interview, most research participants kept coming back to their impressions of shantytowns during those first harsh years. Many emphasized that they “did not know” what it was or how such a place “could exist”. Igor, for example, told me: In Ukraine there are no shantytowns, so we did not know. The first time I ... could not understand (yo no ubicaba) how could it be, how could the government allow that places like these could exist within a city?” When he searched for words, he said “yo no ubicaba”. Rather than to “not understand” as I translated it in order to facilitate reading, to not “ubicar” carries more spatial dimensions. As the Real Academia Española suggests,
as Igor could not “ubicar” the shantytowns, he could not place what his eyes saw in a determined space or category. Neither, I suggest, could the meaning of these spaces be assigned to what he had come in search of.

“There are so many cruel places,” as Alina said after recalling her worries not to be able to provide shelter and food for her son during those first years. Right before this, Alina had described how she stepped out into the world without fear. Like her, many of the participants described mixed feelings, on the one hand the uncertainties of migration, and on the other as if they had launched themselves into an adventure. Nonetheless after reaching the Argentine shore they realized that the relocatory trajectory they had opted for might have fatal consequences. I argue that the recurrence of the description of shantytown indicates that ending up in a shantytown would be one of those fatal consequences. We were sitting in a nice flat in an residential neighborhood in the city when we talked about these memories. Alina was calm and relaxed, her life was different now – she was speaking from a safe place. Yet a shadow seemed to pass over her face upon remembering.

When we drove down one of those crowded porteño avenues, Kyrylo described his encounter with the shantytowns in the following way:

When I came here, mamita … from Ezeiza (the international airport), alright, from Ezeiza a long distance taxi (remis) that was barely working took us through all the shantytowns of Ezeiza and then the first parking lot where we stopped was in the shantytown of the Paraguayans //…// Well, it’s a pretty nice shantytown (laughs ironically) I looked around at all of this and I said,’ what the hell, why did they bring me here?’ Well, the first night we spent in a boarding house. Jenny: Right there? Kyrylo: No they took us to another shanty … 3 de Febrero has 75 shantytowns, it’s a place (partido) really far out (en la loma del orto), it has the highest number of shantytowns in the whole Greater Buenos Aires area, they took us to the Pensión de Don Pedro, up until this day I remember (laughs).

Sociologist Javier Auyero has done much work on the functions of representations of shantytowns within Argentine society. Since the 1950s, shantytowns have been permanent parts of the geography of most Latin American cities, and they are territories that cause reaction and stir up fantasies. Understandings of these spaces and the bodies that inhabit them depend on contemporary discourses, for example the discourse of insecurity and urban crime that fill them with particular meanings. Sociologist Javier Auyero writes that the shantytowns of Buenos Aires have been:
the repository of so many (mis)representations, of so many hopes in the past, and so many fears in the present. Shantytowns have been portrayed as the ultimate example of the failure of Peronist populism during the fifties, as project sites for the modernizing dreams of the sixties, as hotbeds where revolution was germinating during the 'glorious seventies', as obstacles to progress during the dictatorship of the eighties, and as places of immorality, crime, and lawlessness in contemporary Argentina (Auyero 2000:102f).

In the 1990s, a time of increased indigence and massive unemployment, the populations of Buenos Aires shantytowns, increased by sixty-five percent. Permanent social exclusion, non-existing waged labor, drugs problems, overcrowded housing, and precarious conditions were defining characteristics of the shantytowns of this time (Auyero 2000). This development was not only a product of neoliberal policies, yet the marginality of the shantytown spaces and their dwellers was intensified during this period.

The disappearance of the waged work economy and the growing precariousness of everyday life made most workers in Argentine society vulnerable at this time. For those who fell out of work and into poverty, the shantytown was a spatial manifestation of a future made possible by dislocatory events. The relation between the transformation of labor markets and shantytowns was crucial at this time. As Auyero argues the “withdrawal of wage labor economy puts endemic unemployment at the core of the shantytown’s despair” (Auyero 2000:106). To fall out of the middle class and into poverty, perhaps even residency in a shantytown can also been read as a falling out of whiteness. Shantytowns arose as informal low-income neighborhoods during the first Peronist period, and those who resided in them “were often stigmatized as non-white” and constructed as culturally distinct (Bastia & vom Hum 2014: 483). In the 1990s, social problems such as poverty or the persistence of shantytowns in metropolitan Buenos Aires were constructed as “caused or aggravated by non-white immigration from Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru” (Bastia & vom Hum 2014:488). The shantytowns were thus also racialized places.

As research participants made sense of these spaces of pollution, marginalization, and social exclusion during those first years after arrival, they probably feared ending up there themselves. It thus indicates that the way they spoke about the shantytowns is a way of inscribing the risks of their own vulnerable relocatory trajectory into space. Ivan told a story he himself was too young to remember, but which was clearly vivid as a narrative in his family’s biography:
An Italian lady took us in, well Italian-Argentine, but Italian in her heart. During the first year or two we lived in her house with her family, two blocks from a shantytown. We didn’t know what it was, we knew nothing, imagine that //...// We started to make a videotape, we documented everything that happened, what it was like here and I think that we were partially responsible, the ones that halted this wave of immigration. Because this VHS made it to Ukraine, to the people there. And everyone who was planning on going, they decided not to, ‘no way we’re going there’. Jenny: What did you say in this VHS? Ivan: We documented everything we lived through here, all the changes, what we saw, Argentina was so shocking, so shocking, imagine that it was like, I don’t know, it was like someone told you that you’re going to Africa, the same story. No one knew anything of Argentina.

In this story it is as if Ivan’s family had jumped out into a world of uncertainties, into a system of meaning that did not match the one they had expected. I suggest that in participants’ narrations of shantytowns, these places are made meaningful in relation to the enunciator’s new subject position in a world that implicated the risk of permanent poverty rather than the fulfillment of dreams. A logic of coloniality operates in this story where Argentina and the continent of Africa are equated as “unknown” places. The continent of Africa is a space that has been filled with so much racialized and colonial fantasy throughout modern Western history (see e.g. McClintock 1995). Participants were shocked and confused with how the dislocatory events in Argentina affected also them, the shantytowns became a spatial manifestation of the risk of racialized and classed positions that threatened just two blocks from the Italian lady who “took in” Ivan’s family.

When José Moya walks through the cemetery of Recoleta, the final destination for the Argentine upper class, he reflects upon the historical Spanish immigrants and their aspirations:

Few of those dreams, to be sure, were ever crowned by mausoleums. But few ended up in the common graves of the poorhouse. Few became Anchorenas or tangoed in the Plaza. But many saved some pesos, sent millions in remittances back home, raised families, and became fathers and mothers of teachers and bookkeepers. For the great majority of Spain’s inhabitants of that time, that would have counted as upward mobility. For most of the immigrants, that was what ‘making America’ was all about (Moya 1998:275f.).

For the postsocialist migrants of the late 1990s Argentina seemed more of an impossibility, none of the research participants could send home pesos in
remittances, rather they had to ask those back home for financial help while stuck in subsistence jobs for quite a long time.

The way Ivan’s family documented their situation in order to prevent others from going to Argentina resonates with former migratory narratives – throughout times migrants have sent information in both ways across the sea telling friends and relatives to join them or, as in this more uncommon case, not to come\(^{20}\) (Satzewich 2002:33; Roberts & Cipko 2008). The European mass emigration period has its own cultural scenery of recognizable and often romanticized artifacts. The letters from America are for example common items in understandings of the mass emigration from Europe. The migration to Argentina at the time of mass immigration resembles that of other classical migrant countries – in that it is a land of myths. The tales of Buenos Aires grew among the Spaniards about to emigrate and the city was known even for those who had never been there. During this era of immigration, stories, remittances, gossip or letters passed on from one Spaniard to another were thus part of a diffusion of information that made Buenos Aires more known to the Spanish emigrants than ever Madrid was (Moya 1998). Perhaps Argentina was not known for the participants in my study, but the idea of the free world and its wonders was. Anthropologist Dale Pesmen has called the narratives of Perestroika the post-independence time in Russia for “hopeful otherworldliness”, paying special attention to how the word America was filled with mythical proportions both before and after the collapse of the USSR:

In Crime and Punishment, a man about to commit suicide says he is preparing to go to America. In the 1990s, an American journalist (Kempe 1992:165) cites a Siberian woman asking him to take her to America and then saying no, ‘The cemetery will be my America’ (Pesmen 2000:63).

Pesmen writes that “‘America’ was a most popular other world during Perestroika” (Pesmen 2000:64). It represented a possible future different to

\(^{20}\) An interesting parallel to this kind of information exchange across the sea, is the Soviet campaign for repatriation to the Motherland in the 1950s, where those who had returned from diaspora only to find that the Soviet society was not the paradise that had been described to them, wrote coded letters to relatives in North America urging them not to fall for the publicity and return to the “Motherland” (See Roberts & Cipko 2008). Particularly striking is the man who remembers being questioned by the KGB in Moscow about a letter written by an Argentine returnee addressed to her grandparents in Argentina, “to tell them about the miserable life in the USSR” (Roberts & Cipko 2008:95). See also Satzewich for a discussion of unsuccessful socialist diaspora return movements in the 1920s and the warnings they sent to Canada about life under the Soviets (2002:78).
the one the former empire seemed to be heading for. “Don’t tell us bad things about America. We need hope right now more than anything” one woman told Pesmen during her fieldwork in post Perestroika Moscow (Pesmen 2000:64). Ivan and his family had found that their America did not at all resemble what they had hoped for. Thus, they sent the VHS back home with, among other things, images from the shantytowns, and “were partially responsible; the ones that halted this wave of immigration”.

This demonstrates how hope can be meaningful in relation to spaces (Rafaettá 2014). The idea of “America”, or in the participants’ case, Argentina, represented the hope that directed their decisions to migrate. In participants’ relocatory trajectories, Argentina was not the mythical America that could fulfill their aspirations for a good life. Not only were they dwelling in sub-standard housing that resembled the past, but the shantytowns, with migrants from marginal interior provinces and neighboring countries, also indicated the instability of racialized, classed, and gendered positions. In their narrations the shantytown symbolizes what they then experienced as a threat to their future, a materialized possibility they had not counted on.

This experience is not particular for postsocialist migrant experience in Argentina, rather it could be said to be part of what some authors have called the “flexploitation”; increasing informality on global labor markets (Auyero 2000:101). The threat of ending up in a shantytown is actualized, not only for migrants, but also for those extensively subjected to a society of unemployment, underemployment, and structural poverty (Auyero 2000:101). Perhaps most of the research participants spoke about shantytowns because they are a racialized, spatialized, and embodied threat residing without, yet still within society. The shantytowns and their dwellers can be understood as those spaces and bodies “who are permanently constituted as the ‘outside’ of capitalism” (Carbonella & Kasmir 2014:30).

Important for the transformation of the Argentine society in the 1990s is the loss of wage-work. The new way of organizing society brings along new forms of exclusion and other social practices connected to these (Cerrutti & Grimson 2007:294). Where wage work has been made redundant, while still demanded for subsistence, shantytowns then represent a spatial position that entails racialized, classed, and gendered subject positions that most workers, migrants as well the as educated middle class, might come to occupy. Auyero has noted that the shantytowns, formerly a transitional place for those, who like the research participants, had come to the Buenos Aires with aspirations of a better life, have turned into a permanent state for what he calls “the un population (unemployed and uneducated)” (Auyero 2002:516).
Research participants’ reactions to shantytowns speak of a local reality, but it also holds true for many in global capitalism. Shantytown dwellers embody an undesired condition of the global market economy – whether one analyzes this position as one of “un populations” (Auyero 2002), or by consumerism implanted logic of disposable bodies (Bauman 2004), the urban poor occupy a position that most reject and fear. To be a shantytown dweller is not a subject position desired by neoliberal discourse, but the occupation of this position is inherent in its production of meaning. “Vengo del basurero que este sistema dejó al costado, las leyes del mercado me convirtieron en funcional” 21 as the murga group Agarrate Catalina so neatly put it when they sing about urban poor and neoliberal economy.

21 “I’m from the garbage dump that this system has cast aside, the laws of the market have made me functional” “La Violencia”, by Agarrate Catalina. My translation.
Ivan asked me to meet him in a park in the province of Buenos Aires. It was a muggy November day and as I waited for him I watched for signs of the approaching storm they had reported on in the morning news. The sky above my head was as blue as ever and I felt drowsy, my legs itching from the heat. Ivan arrived punctually. A blonde man, born in the early 1990s in Ukraine, who took off his shades to greet me, ‘I knew I would recognize you’ he said. ‘Us blondes are like stoplights.’ Lacking any other answer I laughed. We walked through the park, having grown up in the area he directed me confidently towards some benches. We sat down under the shadow of a tipa tree. After an hour of chatting I had learnt much about him and his family, and he had probably learnt something about me as well because he asked if I wanted to come along to see his parents. Once again I had the feeling I had passed a test of some kind. ‘But you better prepare yourself because it’s quite an emotional charge’ he said as we got into his old car and drove down the bumpy provincial street.

Notes from field-diary, November 2013.

In this chapter longer excerpts from two interviews are used in order to discuss how downward mobility is lived and made meaningful among highly educated participants who arrived in the midst of professional careers. It is particularly the participants born in the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s who testify of having been most affected by downward mobility. In my material there are six such research participants, five of these have not been able to recuperate their former professions or status, suggesting how age plays a part in conditioning migration processes. In this chapter I discuss the experiences of three of these participants. At the end of the chapter I will discuss the experiences of the one participant of this generation who, after an initial
period of downward mobility, recuperated her former position, and I discuss possible reasons for this.

In the first section Evhen and Valentyna, two professionals born in the 1960s, describe their experience of not having been able to integrate into Argentine labor markets. Quotes from the interview with them and their son Ivan illustrate constructions of professional identifications, experiences of downward mobility, and a resentful feeling present among some of the participants. In the latter section, the experience of the former physician Myroslav, born in the 1950s, who has a similar, yet very different, experience of professional identification and downward mobility is discussed. His story also sheds light on how educational constructions might be understood in relation to class and race.

The quotes are deliberately quite lengthy in this chapter. The experiences discussed in this thesis are deeply personal and affective processes. With this chapter, written in a slightly different style than the others, I hope to allow readers to understand the participants’ dislocatory experiences and negotiations of relocatory trajectories at a deeper level. Thus, in this chapter the participants are first allowed to speak while also allowing my own retelling of the interview situations as they were noted in my field diary. These descriptive parts are then followed by a longer discussion and analysis.

Evhen, Valentyna and a Story of Resentment

Ivan stopped the car in front of a worn down wall that shielded the house his parents, Valentyna and Evhen, had rented for a period of ten years. We walked through the wall and after locking the outer door to the street Ivan asked me to wait in the courtyard while he checked if they were presentable. Not knowing what to expect from the closed house and quite uneasy with being locked into a worn down courtyard, I listened for sounds of thunder. Ivan quickly returned, opened the door to a dark passage that led to a kitchen where his mother Valentyna greeted me with a tired face. She asked me to sit down in the kitchen and Ivan served me some tea. After a while, Valentyna’s husband Evhen joined us and as the yellow light of the approaching storm swept over the sky, in a polite, yet hesitant manner, they started to describe the trajectory that led up to their life in this house.

Valentyna: We were already looking for somewhere to go, we looked at possibilities of going to Canada … to Moscow, anywhere just to get out of Ukraine. That’s how Argentina appeared as a possibility and we said
'Alright'. We signed some documents that we were not going to ask for anything once in Argentina and they gave us visas. //...// Honestly we didn’t know anything, it was just really easy to leave Ukraine and enter Argentina. But then … well… We survive somehow …  

At the time of the interview Valentyna, formerly a bookkeeper and an interior designer, was employed in a nurse-like position at a private health care facility. Evhen had formerly worked as a dentist and dental surgeon, but he had not been able to work in his profession in Argentina. He said he did “smaller jobs here and there” and worked as a stretcher-bearer in a hospital from time to time. When we heard sounds of distant thunder Valentyna stood up and walked to the window, she seemed to look for something she might find in the sky. She returned to the table and continued her story:  

Some years went by and Evhen tried to make some paperwork come through to revalidate his diploma and up until today is still trying //...// he went through all the formalities, but it took a very long time //...// So the revalidation got stuck and either you work or you study. Here there are no social benefits, you can’t take a loan to study, this does not exist in Argentina  

Evhen had taken a seat across the table, in the beginning patiently listening to her story, but after a while he became eager to tell his version of the story and he interrupted her:  

Do you know what they told me? They told me about the odontology college in the province, but well after all, I can’t even get a scholarship, nothing, I mean no kind of help because I am not an Argentine citizen, I am nothing of nothing and well in the end if they give me 280 hours of practice, that would be on my own account. That costs money, where could I get that kind of money? //...// I am not alone, I’m no youngster //...// I have a family and a rent to pay //...// What should I work with? Well, there are other jobs I could do, but …(Sighs)  

As he sighed, Valentyna was quick to tell me “It’s really a disaster because 80% of the people that came to Argentina from Ukraine were professionals. Basically none of them, or very few work”. Evhen continued:  

Evhen: During that time, when the Soviet Union collapsed … not everyone could leave the country, right? Only those who had money for the ticket, it was a thousand dollars, no one had that or let’s say not many. Those who had their own business, which means they were already
corrupted, didn’t want to leave because they had everything. People below didn’t have anything. Well. We were in the middle strata, we had money for the ticket, but not for further costs of living /…/ Everyone that left had an education, maybe even two. They are all working in whatever is available. Valentyna: After being here for three years, Evhen tried to legalize his diploma. It is from the Soviet Union, so maybe it would be possible to do it at the Russian embassy. ‘It’s not possible’ they said and well that was that /…/ Evhen: In the Russian embassy at least they attended and spoke to me. They told me that ‘we are not involved anymore with Ukraine, but, well, since we had the Soviet Union we could put an Apostille on the diploma to prove its legality. So now that is proven. But they won’t do anything else.

As the storm drew closer, our conversation deepened and their memories became more resentful. This was when they started to tell me about the rumors concerning the migrations agreement, described in chapter 3. They held much resentment towards the Ukrainian diaspora organizations in Argentina. Illustratively, Valentyna told me about a Ukrainian physician who desperate because of unemployment and poverty went to a church to ask for help. By accident she happened to step into a church built by German migrants. She sat down at a bench and burst into tears while the congregation gathered around to see what was wrong. According to Evhen, “that very same day” members of the German church brought her furniture and food. “So the German God is better than the Ukrainian God?” Valentyna asked ironically and everyone around the table started to laugh as if they had heard the story many times before. These kind of narratives were filled with disappointment and anger, often directed towards former diaspora, postsocialist peers, or the bureaucratic process halting the accreditation of Ukrainian academic titles:

Evhen: It makes me angry, it made me really angry before. I already broke my forehead hitting it against the walls everywhere and always finding indifferent eyes looking at me and saying ‘You do not know how to speak, you do not understand a thing’. Oh well I said … But you understand me? Jenny: Yes without problems. Evhen: And they can’t understand me. Jenny: But because of your accent? Evhen: No, because they do not want to. /…/ What do you think of that?

Listening to their stories, their son Ivan was quick to assist in ordering the stories (see Langellier & Peterson 204:71ff). “It’s a kind of stupid bureaucracy”, he told me as to contextualize what Evhen was saying. I agreed with him and Evhen who was getting worked up looked at me and asked in a raised voice:
Evhen: Do you understand what this is all about? Jenny: Yes, they raise a wall (pared) against you. Evhen: They signed an agreement of diplomas, of higher degrees. It’s been two years now and nothing has come out of it. I can’t even call, they don’t pick up /…/ I can’t even do it through the computer because Ukraine is not listed /…/ I went there (to the ministry) three times, when I arrived the guard tells me to take a number, they attend forty numbers a day, you have to wait all day for them to receive you. And for what? For them to say ‘we don’t know”/…/ Do you understand? Jenny: Yes, yes. Evhen: It’s a wall (pared) all right, it’s a brick wall (muro) Jenny: And why do you think they raise that wall? Evhen: Because they are afraid. Ivan: I don’t know if they’re afraid, it’s more (gets interrupted) Evhen: They are afraid, afraid, afraid! Ivan: It’s just stupidity, because they are not interested. Evhen: Yes because they are 20 years delayed! 20 years behind the rest of the world!

At the time of the interview, Evhen and Valentyna had spent fifteen years in Argentina without being able to get their degrees or former work experiences officially acknowledged. At an early stage of the interview, Evhen and Valentyna said the main reason they had left Ukraine was that their son, Ivan, suffered from nutrition issues caused by the Chernobyl accident. Accordingly, Ivan was thus the main reason they traveled to Argentina. However, as we continued talking, other stories grew into a broader picture.

Valentyna: (When we came here) actually I went to clean houses, like 95% of the women that arrived … and with those 400 dollars … it was enough /…/ somehow we survived /…/ Well we got together with other families to share the rent. Evhen: We looked through the garbage. Valentyna: We gathered stuff. Evhen: Televisions, in those days they threw them away because they did not know how to repair them, but we did /…/ Valentyna: There was a lot of people /…/ that escaped to other countries /…/ Evhen: Some people saw Argentina as a springboard out into another world. Because at that time it wasn’t easy to go to Canada or the U.S. It was easier from here. Valentyna: Well, actually I like it … We have gotten used to this, we might complain but still he does not want to go … to the U.S for example /…/ At one point we wanted to go to Australia. Evhen: That didn’t work out. Valentyna: It didn’t work out. There are some age limitations and he doesn’t speak English. /…/ So he said no, ‘enough is enough, I already know Spanish, I don’t want more. Enough’. Evhen: It’s too much for me. Valentyna: But you can think that these are fifteen wasted years. Evhen: I don’t see them as wasted. There’s the fruit of it all (he points towards their son Ivan), they are not wasted. Ivan: Professionally wasted Valentyna: Well … we saved ourselves, our health, there’s no knowing what would have happened in Ukraine.
As time passed, Evhen sometimes stood up and walked around the kitchen, after a while he opened a bottle of wine and when Valentyna talked, he filled in words or ended her sentences. Likewise, when Evhen talked, Valentyna was quick to fill in words for him and end his sentences in return. Ivan was located in between them and as they spoke more of their experiences I could hear echoes from the interview I did earlier that day with him. It was as if they were following a familiar script, developed over the years of bitter experiences.

**Valentyna:** We can manage with the money that I make, well, we have a cheap rent here /.../ If someone had an apartment they had a resource to advance, at least to be able to study and we didn’t. I worked… No, there was no possibility … we gave Evhen the possibility to finish secondary school because if you want to accredit your degree you have to finish secondary school here /.../ **Evhen:** They gave all the courses in complete form, for what? Supposedly I don’t know anything, like I’m clueless, as if I was a youngster that came without any knowledge at all. **Valentyna:** The worst part is that in Argentina there is shortage of doctors, there are no dentists in the provinces! Please! We would love to go there and work! We don’t need much, just a place to live, bread and work, that’s it! Use us! **Evhen:** And I am a highly ranked professional.

Our conversation had started reluctantly, they were telling me bits and pieces, but as we strolled further down memory lane, feelings were aroused both in them and me. Evhen spoke of an episode in the odontology college:

When I went to do my practice in La Plata, I had to have all my stuff, well I took some with me. I opened up my briefcase and they all came to see what I had brought ‘and what is this?’ My box was filled with German, French, Russian tools, Soviet as well /.../ ‘Oh would you look at this, what is this?’ Or ‘what is this for?’ /.../ I looked at them and said, ‘Well, who actually came here to teach?’ **Valentyna:** We have a Russian friend, /.../ a physician, she also worked in (name of clinic) she earned less than the cleaners, she worked at a nurse’s level, but if something happened she was considered to be a doctor, if something happened everyone wanted free counseling … the doctors would come to her, ‘what is this?’ or ‘how should we do this?’ /.../ **Evhen:** Salary like a cleaner, but her function was half nurse or helper and then free counseling (laughs sarcastically)

The atmosphere in the kitchen got quite intense, Evhen marched around, and Valentyna lit one cigarette after the other and sometimes glanced at the television that was on in the other room. Ivan got up several times to fill my cup with sweet tea. At some point Evhen rushed out the door and came back
with a chocolate cake that he had gone to the store to buy. Leaned forward over the cake, Valentyna said she had a miscarriage when she was employed as a domestic servant. “I’m fine” she assured and said she had “worked her way through it”; as if there was nothing else to do. Listening to the multiple stories of their educated postsocialist peers in Argentina and their struggles I had the feeling of being taken further down into something much larger than just a family’s personal narrative. Valentyna explained: “And nothing has happened to that resolution (of degrees) in more than two years, so we’re ... it’s like a wheel that just spins around. I am already... What are we supposed to do? I work, I don’t know for how long”. As a contrast to the marginal circumstances they were living in they spoke of the classical Russian literature they read and the theater plays they used to attend back in Ukraine where theatre, according to Valentyna, unlike in Argentina, was a serious business. Throughout the interview they repeatedly stressed their good education and knowledge of classical culture.

Once they sent me to clean a law office. They found out that I spoke English, ‘Oh a cleaner that speaks English, wow that’s good’ (she imitates with a surprised voice and then laughs) Evhen: The thing is that in the Soviet Union we were well educated...

Towards the end of the interview Evhen was angry, he stumbled around the kitchen and the pitch of his voice kept going up. All of a sudden, Valentyna seemed to have had enough, she stood up and looked out through the window again. “We have to let the dogs in before the storm is over us” she said and nodded her head towards the heavy sky. The interview was clearly over; I said goodbye and followed Ivan and Evhen through a little studio with a dentist’s chair for informal practice. Outside in the courtyard, Evhen waved his hand over stuff gathered in piles and said that it looked this “shitty” because the place was rental. He seemed uncomfortable with the house and his own situation; all of which stood in stark contrast with what he had told me about his former professional recognition and success. Earlier he had said, that unlike most others – implying marginalized urban dwellers – they had chosen not to squat the house but continued to pay rent.¹

¹ Evhen’s comment should be seen in the context of various events of occupations and violent evictions where migrants’ right to space had been questioned in the years previous to the interview. In Buenos Aires, socially differentiated groups and classes frame different claims on urban space. Marginal groups direct social exigencies on the state that involve
Ivan followed me to the bus stop. I walked before him with a feeling of just having seen down a pit of anger and disappointment. The storm was approaching rapidly, dark clouds passed swiftly over the conurbation roofs as we walked along a broken provincial sidewalk. I turned around to Ivan and thanked him for so generously letting a researcher into his family. My fingers trembled from the stories they had shared with me; but he shook his head at my gratitude and said that it would “be better” for my investigation if I talked to someone who was “successful”, or at least someone who was “stable”. “My parents are still living it, it isn’t over yet for them,” he said.

Once at the bus stop, we looked up into the sky and Ivan asked what I could possibly see in Argentina, why I had once chosen to live in this country seemed like a mystery to him. All he wanted was to “get out of here” as soon as possible, to finish his studies in medicine and take his parents with him somewhere else, perhaps to the Baltics, where one could communicate in Russian and lead “a good life”. I thought about the privilege I had to travel the world as I pleased, but I remained silent. When the bus arrived, I felt somewhat relieved to get on it, crossing the provincial border back into the city, I wrote with still trembling fingers: “We all have our crosses to bear. It is as if his parents’ resentment resides within him”.

“The Wasted Years”

Like Evhen and Valentyna, all but one of the research participants born in the 50s, 60s and 70s have not recuperated former material status or positions, and some express sentiments of disappointment or resentment in the way seen in the interview above. Many have gone through – or are still in – a process of downward mobility; they hold degrees and professional skills that are not acknowledged even if supposedly needed in their new society.

This is, of course, not unique for these migrants or for postsocialist migration; rather it is a common feature of migration processes (Gans 2009). The denigration of academic titles and former work capabilities is an experience that characterizes most migrant trajectories, there are many places in the world where a cleaner “that speaks English”, or in other ways is overqualified, is to be found. In Argentina, Valentyna and other women from rights to space and housing, shantytowns are usually built upon public space and urban squatters are visible throughout the metropolitan region. For an interesting discussion on how one of these events previous to the interview, a violent eviction of an occupied public park had implications for xenophobia and notions of citizenship in the context of deeply fragmented social rights, see Lederman, Jacob (2013).
postsocialist European countries worked in the homes of older Ukrainian community members, implying also the classed and gendered relation between established diaspora and newcomers. In this case, it was Valentyna who sacrificed her pursuit of revalidating her professional diploma and held subsistence jobs in order to make it possible for her husband to revalidate his professional title. Others have noted how women from postsocialist countries who migrated to Canada, Israel, and the U.S. were more likely than their male peers to suffer downward mobility and work in low-skilled positions (Remenick 2007; Lewin-Epstein et al. 2003). The literature on gender and migration suggests that women take on a larger share of responsibility for pre-school aged children and thus in the case of being highly educated are more likely to suffer downward mobility than men (Logan & Drew 2011).

Like so many others in the world, Evhen and Valentyna struggled to cope with the many feelings downward mobility causes. Like Evhen, most participants expressed feelings of life not having turned out the way they had expected. This can be connected not only to their experience as migrants, but also to their upbringing in a system with its own systems of meanings and professional cultures, a whole world that just ceased to exist. Evhen expressed his frustration quite directly; the time he had spent in Argentina had been “wasted”. His son, Ivan, “the fruit” of this time was then quick to add that he meant “professionally wasted.” This exchange of words brings to the fore the particularity of their experience. Indeed, this is a question of feelings related to downward mobility, but there are certain aspirations and local characteristics that make it particular.

As can be seen in the quote above, Evhen and Valentyna had chosen to give Evhen the possibility to study and recuperate his professional title; nevertheless, there were too many obstacles in his way and he had no possibility to dedicate himself fully to the studies as both him and Valentyna had to work in order to survive. They went through the same process of precarious work and housing, as everyone else in my material. When they spoke of these memories, it seemed Ivan had heard the stories his parents told me many times before. As if they followed a narrative he knew by heart, sometimes Ivan would even encourage his parents to explain more about a certain event or anecdote, a collaborative way of telling stories that indicate it was part of a family storytelling (Langellier & Peterson 2004:33ff, 109).

This performance of repeated family stories clearly constructed me as an audience and assigned certain roles to the family members (Langellier & Peterson 2004:9). Evhen was constructed like the misunderstood and ill-treated professional who had waged a troublesome personal war against
inappreciative authorities. In a sense he was made into the family hero in these narratives (Langellier & Peterson 2004:121). The many descriptions of his countless attempts to try to restitute his former social position obscured the role Valentyna had as the current breadwinner and family supporter. Their assignment of Ivan to the role as “the fruit of it all”, the one for whom all sacrifices had been made, can be seen as a way to deal with a sense of lost hope and broken illusions. Ivan had recuperated from his nutrient illness after arriving in Argentina – in this sense Argentina was once again constructed as a space of life. Ivan had also enjoyed the opportunity of free public education and at the time of the interview he studied medicine. Why were Valentyna and Evhen then still resentful towards Argentina?

The familiarity of the narratives perhaps indicated the trauma of an experience in the making. In a discussion on how narrative interaction always implies the making of relationships between tellers, listeners, and the world beyond these subjects, Amy Schuman has recognized that narration can be understood as “one way of making sense of traumatic situations that completely disrupt ordinary life” (Schuman 2016:127). Like Ivan said when we walked to the bus, “my parents are still living it, it isn’t over yet for them”, indicating the transitional space in which Evhen and Valentyna were located.

In addition to the dislocatory events they had experienced, particularly the loss of a professional subject’s social position and societal recognition, their relocatory trajectory entailed many economic worries. Others have noted how downward economic and social mobility is a painful process that might cause an individual to lose self-respect and control, feel less as an agent of one’s own life, and start to blame oneself. This can then be accompanied by stress, and its related diseases, states of depression, and demoralization (Gans 2009: 1659; Nicklett & Burgard 2009). However, it seemed that the trauma of downward mobility and of life not having turned out the way they had expected was not over for Ivan either. The burden of resentment sensed within him might be understood as a prolongation of his parent’s liminal state – they were involved in strongly affective processes where my visit to their house in a sense activated this trauma and articulated certain positions for us during the narrative constructed in the interview.

At the time I had the sense of falling into a pit of misery and strong emotions. It was difficult to listen to the interview afterwards, sitting at my desk I experienced all sorts of emotions. The material clearly affected me,
positioning me as a witness and a mediator of their troubles. The narrative was one in the making in the interview situation, but its familiar script indicated that they were just adapting the story to fit the person they believed was listening. Indeed, they had positioned themselves as victims as well as witnesses, and me as an observer and in extension a mediator to a distant Western audience. They wanted me to hear and mediate something.

Schuman has emphasized how analysis of trauma narrative is a sensitive act. “Anytime someone tells someone else’s story, the proprietorship, the authority, shifts”, she writes (Schuman 2016:131). Thus, by re-telling trauma stories one always runs the risk of creating an “other” that is to be pitied or that might serve as a “poster child for tragedy” (Schuman 2016:131). This is not my intention, rather I want to point towards the role of subject positions in relocatory trajectories. I suggest that these kinds of narratives reflect the routes that are possible to take and thus indicate possible subject positions, and their effect on the narrated present and the future possible to envision.

The importance of having a higher education is recurrent in these narrations and in my material at large; this is not surprising, given that most of the research participants are highly qualified. Prior to the implosion of the Soviet system, they belonged to what can be called “mass intelligentsia”; those were teachers, doctors, engineers, or cultural workers with higher education (Shlapentokh 1999:1171). This means that they could enjoy, not only having one’s competency acknowledged by the system they lived in, but also free medical service, education, vacations, and cultural activities. This dissolution of Soviet administrative and economic structures changed not only state discourse or material circumstances, but also professional identifications and trajectories as it impacted particularly on groups of mass intelligentsia.

Among those were people like Evhen and Valentyna – professionals who when the Soviet system imploded saw their former structures of employment and social recognition vanished or changed. The change of system dramatically altered many former Soviet citizens’ lives, regardless of whether they decided to seek a better life abroad or stayed in the postsocialist countries. Anthropologist Jennifer Patico, who did fieldwork among professionals in Russia in the 1990s, writes about her research participants that they

2 Indeed one has to consider that I initially told Evhen that my interest in postsocialist migration to Argentina was connected to the invisibility of stories like theirs, thus articulating a subject position that he perhaps compliantly occupied due to this interest of mine.

3 Intelligentsia is of course a troublesome term and is here used in the broadest sense to denominate a group of urban people of relatively high education. See also Ries 1997:5 or Wolanik Boström 2005:13.
had the “rugs effectively pulled out from under their previous material security and vocational pride” (Patico 2008:4). She argues that this presents a locus from where to examine they way marketization influences self-understandings and societal positioning:

The world of these ‘old’ professional classes /…/ was one in which the very logics according to which people once had set goals, evaluated prestige, and received their material rewards had been largely upended, resulting in no small measure of practical and symbolic disorientation (Patico 2008:4).

Just like their peers in postsocialist Russia, Evhen and Valentyna, came to adulthood in a state that had invested in their becoming recognized professional subjects, and as such they occupied a certain material and symbolic position in the society they lived in. When this state ceased to exist, the educational capital, or labor skills, once embedded in their bodies disappeared. As their professional degrees and competencies lost their value so did moralities, respectabilities, and other cultural economies tied to their professional identification.

Nancy Ries who studied conversations of urban educated Russians in times of Perestroika found that the city of Moscow resonated with “long narratives about poverty, suffering, and absurdity” in the years 1989–90 (Ries 1997:17). Employing a discourse perspective she examines spontaneous conversations as “mechanisms by which ideologies and cultural stances” were not only shaped and reflectors of the world, but also served to construct it (Ries 1997:3). She found that certain types of narratives constantly reappeared, among them a narrative genre she terms “litanies” and “laments”, both articulations within what she coins “the discursive art of suffering” (Ries 1997:83). When a person engaged in a litany or laments, Ries notes that they would initiate a “series of complaints, grievances, or worries about problems, troubles, afflictions, tribulations, or losses and then often comment on these enumerations with a poignant rhetorical question” (Ries 1997:84). Ries connects the “litanies” not only with the social crisis of Perestroika, but also with supplicant sacral modes of speech – “an almost prayer-like recitation of suffering and loss directed towards some vague source or possibility of social redemption” (Ries 1997:112).

Most of the interview situations she describes are quite similar to what I experienced at Evhen and Valentyna’s kitchen table where they would join in on each other’s narrative to express how they had been wronged. These
modes of speech, Ries argues, can be understood with Victor Turner’s concept of ritual liminality as the lamenter creates a sense of belonging to a moral community of collective suffering (Ries 1997:87). Was that what had taken place that day of the November storm? Ethnologist Jenny Gunnarsson Payne argues that repetition is essential for social relations to be articulated:

Through repetition subjects involved in diverse struggles recognize the same ‘enemy’ despite disparate antagonistic experiences. It is only through repetition that the evocations of certain feelings in subjects become ‘collective’. Repetition creates the sense of shared feelings required for an affective collectivity to form (Gunnarsson Payne 2015a:9)

This affective community was the family gathered around the kitchen table on the afternoon of an approaching storm. It was also the involvement of a researcher linked to a Swedish and Western community as a listener to these family narratives. Intertwined with stories of suffering and memories of absurd situations retold with ironic humor, were anecdotes of how they were morally superior, more educated or cultivated than others; despite everything still standing up because of their cleverness.

The “litanies” also present in some of my other interviews articulate manifold discursive positions, yet a common feature was that they clearly had been repeated many times before without my presence as a listener. Regardless of the non-existing relation between the participants, to varying degrees the narratives still followed a similar pattern and described similar events. Ries finds that the litanies she examines can be likened to historical Russian genres of laments such as pre-revolutionary and Soviet time letters directed to leaders of various epochs and places. Meaning is always marked by the various circumstances in which it functions; however it is always altered by repetition (Howarth 2013:54).

Reinserted into the Argentine context, I propose that the litanizing narratives in my material resemble the post Perestroika litanies described by Ries, but that they must be understood as what I would like to call a contemporary Bonarense litanizing narrative. This is a narrative of its own kind, rearticulating Argentine and Buenos Aires discourses and the participants’

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4 This was a genre of writing where the writer in need of help with local problems would “portray themselves as suppliants and victims, emphasizing their powerlessness” as also discussed by Sheila Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick 1996:81; Ries 1997:122).

5 As in particularly from the province of Buenos Aires.
new conditions and subject positions, however informed by particular past Soviet and post-Soviet discursive formations and narrative structures.

Their narratives were indeed constructing Evhen, Valentyna and their peers as victims, trapped between bureaucratic dead-ends and shattered expectations. This manner of articulating suffering was addressed to an audience that transcended my presence as a listener. Were they talking to a western audience, to Argentine authorities, to their peers? The positions they placed me in certainly altered the narratives somewhat, however my stated interest in postsocialist migration to Argentina as an unknown history should not be overstated. This is something that Ries also directs attention to. Acknowledging that her presence influenced the conversation she was partaking in:

In many cases, it was clear that people were litanizing, or doing so in particularly intense ways, precisely because they had an interested American listener. I was paying attention to people’s stories of their life struggles; in a context where so many were suffering the same hardships (Ries 1997:84).

This is not to argue that the litanies were merely a product of an encounter with a researcher, rather the interview enhanced the discursive construction of meaning in a situation of despair and material insecurity, seen in the Perestroika times of Reis’ study, or in the everyday life of Evhen and Valentyna in mine. I suggest that it was a particular set of subject positions and social ruptures that constituted the source from which this particular kind of litanizing narrative emanated. When Ries returned to Moscow a couple of years later, the Perestroika litanies were no longer heard to the same extent, indicating their role in a particular context of political and social upheaval. Given that other participants did not engage in this kind of litanizing narrative to the same extent as Evhen and Valentyna, one has to consider why their situation in Argentina had not stabilized.

Evhen and Valentyna were still in a process of relocation, a liminal space of personal and social havoc – “my parents are still living it” as Ivan said when he followed me to the bus. Other participants no longer dwelled in the material and social despair of the first years. Neither is Argentine society in the midst of profound crisis any longer. It has slowly recovered and, as is discussed in chapter 6, some of the participants were certainly hopeful for the future. Those who voiced resentment similar to that of Evhen and Valentyna are the ones in more marginal economic circumstances. As we spoke about
their memories from Ukraine their voices filled with longing and their remembrance of a well-to-do past was seemingly articulated in resistance to the world they lived in at the time of the interview – a world where Valentyna was looking for a bridge “to go live under” when she was too old to work.

Feelings of melancholy typically associated with a past where material welfare was secure, has been analyzed by many scholars as Soviet nostalgia or as ways to make meaning out of neoliberal presents (Croegaert 2011). This does not mean that participants wanted the Soviet system to be kept intact, it was “bound to fall by its own internal corruption” as Evhen puts it. Rather, related to material class positions, their narratives seemed to be directed to various listeners, and articulated from manifold positions. Ries states that the “tale of suffering and injury that they thus poured out for me in these litanies was multi-directional, multi-layered, and multi-resonant” (Ries 1997:109).

Throughout the interview, Evhen got more emotional, and what started as a narrative of unfair bureaucratic practices of governmental departments and embassies, transformed into complaints about postsocialist peers who had stolen jobs or contracts for apartments, anger directed towards families and organizations from the Ukrainian diaspora that had taken advantage of him and his peers. This Bonarense litanizing narrative ended in bitter anger directed towards the Argentine political class, as well as the Jews and Arabs residing in Europe. That was when Valentyna stood up, looked out through the window and said they had to let the dogs in.

Apart from anchoring these litanizing narratives in material and social dislocatory experience that still characterized the lives of this family in particular, are there other ways they can be conceptualized? When Ivan was accompanying me to the bus stop he advised me to look for someone who was “successful”, indicating an assumed idea of a lack – his parents had not yet been able to transform their experience into something. Still living in a liminal state, a space of ongoing transition, their becoming was impeded. What conditioned their relocatory trajectory and from what did they feel prevented?

Professional Trajectories

I argue that it is crucial to look at how Evhen and Valentyna experienced the dislocatory events they had lived through and their migration process in terms of the affect they give voice to. They expressed anger, disappointment, resentment, and within them was the hope they once nurtured, and perhaps still did. Their narrations suggest that the dislocatory events shifted not only
class positions and discourses of state and citizenship, causing altered self-understandings, but that it also affected economies of expectancies and aspirations. Perhaps that is why they invest with so much affect in the Bonarense litanizing narratives. Dreams and hopes for the future touch upon an inner core, yet what we can long and hope for is conditioned by discourse, both in its imaginative limits as well as in its material.

Like many others, Evhen and Valentyna had grown up with discourses of what respected citizens and working subjects were constituted of. Throughout their lives they had learned what it meant to be a physician or an engineer – professions administered and certified by nation states and thereby also part of a larger construction of statehood, citizenship, and future utopias. When the system collapsed, what was once to be expected was then turned upside down. Ghodsee writes:

In the course of a few short years, hard-earned college degrees in Eastern Europe were rendered useless, massive enterprises went bankrupt, life savings were eaten up by hyperinflation and banking collapses while the promises of a comfortable retirement evaporated (Ghodsee 2011:17)

Remembering the Perestroika times, Valentyna and Evhen described themselves as enthusiastic young professionals, subjects seemingly opposed to the Valentyna who worked seven days a week as a maid or a mistreated nurse, or the Evhen whose professionalism was questioned because of his accent. At one point Evhen said that he was “deformed by communism”, not fit for living in the circumstances where he was now located, a life he juxtaposed with memories of being a recognized professional who could enjoy summer holiday in Crimea.

I propose, that not only material insecurity and neoliberal uncertainty plays a part in these constructions, but also the rupture of an economy of expectancies. As part of the former middle class intelligentsia, Evhen and Valentyna could expect a certain life trajectory, one where professional investments and educational capital would be rewarded. However, neither the promises of Argentine migration agents nor of global capitalism had been fulfilled in their case.

Here, the concept of relocatory trajectory entails the expectancies of personal biographies in relation to professional identity, economies of respectability, and rights associated with professional subject positions, as
well as understandings of space. Before I met Evhen and Valentyna, I interviewed their son Ivan. He talked about his parents and the way they and others like them arrived in Argentina:

Can you imagine how many professionals, good professionals, because the communist regime had its flaws, but one of the good things was that they knew how to shape professionals of good quality and the truth is that the Argentine government did not know and still does not know how to use this to its advantage.

Just like Evhen, Ivan states that the Soviet state knew how to educate good professionals. This echoes through my material, not only participants, but also in reports or newspapers, postsocialist migrants articulate their professional identifications in relation to their past and present. This emphasis on having a good education is also found in Lemekh’s study on postsocialist migrants in New York (Lemekh 2010:130). Later during the same interview, Ivan repeated:

Almost everyone I know from my parent’s generation are professionals, engineers, doctors, artists. Everyone with a diploma, but a diploma that stems from their devotion to their work and not from the desire for money, in communism everyone earned the same amount. They are people who really loved their professions and it’s just such a shame. It’s really a pity.

The world professional keeps reappearing, and seems to function as signifier through which claims of entitlements can be articulated. In the quote above, and in other interviews, “professional” is used in contrast to what they are living through today – the “pity” of it all is not just that these professionals are not able to exercise their profession, but that Argentina does not know how to use them for its advantage. Ivan’s statement carries a moral dimension that stands in sharp contrast to neoliberal society and its values – these professionals were not formed out of greed, but from pure devotion. When this morally dignified professional identification is articulated it does something not only to those who embody this position, but also to the spaces that are necessarily constitutive for this articulation.

When research participants make sense out of the reasons why so many in their situation have not been able to recuperate the link between educational capital and societal position, they tend to ascribe “professional” a different meaning. Illustrative of this, political scientist Michael Urban
examines how the word “professional,” was used by past and contemporary members from the Russian political class. Urban finds that the articulation of “professional” permitted group identity while creating distinctions. Through the use of this word politicians constructed a limited “we”, an exclusive group with particular claims to expertise and high moral:

It thereby represents a form of cultural capital in possession of some group who can exchange it for other forms of capital – in our instance, for political capital. Because cultural capital is embodied – it cannot be disassociated from its bearer as could, say, economical capital – professionals in politics claim the right to power and influence not because of popular endorsement but simply because of who they are (Urban 2007:333).

The comparison with Urban’s study is not to suggest that the Russian politician’s use of the word “professional” automatically travels throughout some sort of postsocialist sphere affecting a wide range of subjects. Rather, the crucial point here is the connection between how the signifier “professional” articulates the position of its enunciator and the expected rewards of this position. Evhen and Valentyna were perhaps stripped of the material security formerly granted to them by their professional status. Thus, as Urban’s analysis suggests, their frustration and anger was related to how the investments once embodied in them was not recognized by either Argentine, Russian or Ukrainian institutions as Evhen’s fruitless visits to embassies and governmental institutions indicates.

Also in the U.S. context, newly arrived postsocialist migrants placed emphasis on their embodiment of education and labor skills acquired in the USSR (Lemekh 2010:19). Lemekh suggests that, in comparison with former migrants, postsocialist migrants in the U.S. were to a certain extent incorporated into professional realms and able to find a place in social and economic structures without having to start from the bottom of the social ladder (Lemekh 2010:4). In my case, Evhen and his professional peers embody an ethic framework and professional identifications; yet dwell in marginal circumstances, on another trajectory than the one they believed were intended for them. Their mentioning of classical literature and theatre pieces could thus also be understood as a way to position oneself in alliance

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6 However, there are of course continuities of Soviet time moral and labor discourses resonating in my material.
with intelligentsia social values and moral conduct, reinforcing their positions as professionals and morally worthy subjects.

Space is important in this articulation, both in terms of nation-states, citizenship, and national institutions, but also in terms of a strong sense of being “out of place”, due to the impossibility to occupy certain subject positions. When postsocialist migrants speak of themselves as mistreated professionals they are articulating a strong sense of being located in the wrong space, the expected trajectory of a professional subject has been broken and they search for reasons that account for this. During our encounter, Evhen played out a conflict of subject positions, was he a highly ranked professional or just someone who the employees of the educational department regarded as a man who could not speak good enough Spanish? His resentment conveyed a sense of having ended up in the wrong place, class and history; dislocated from the expected position formerly ensured by having a good education and professional expertise, he said with a tired voice that he is “too old” to change the course of his life. Other researchers have indicated how the implosion of the Soviet system caused drastic changes of divisions of labor, and work moralities (Bloch 2011; Hankivsky & Salnykova 2012; Solari 2010).

These affective relocatory processes draw attention to such changes and the dislocation of professional subject positions, the resentment and anger particularly present in the interview with Evhen and Valentyna points towards demands of moral worth (see Ries 1997:87). It is crucial to note Laclau’s stress on how the English use of the word “demand” is ambiguous as it might be used to formulate “a request, but it can also mean a claim” (Laclau 2005:73). The Russian politicians in the study mentioned above, positioned themselves as “professionals” in order to aspire to “both a claim to cultural capital and, thus, access to the political field” (Urban 2007:334f). In comparison to this, the way many research participants keep coming back to their professional identification can be understood as a claim to the life they feel they deserve.

To have a good education and to be a professional should make a person entitled to a dignified social and economic position – thus, positioning oneself, as a professional is to claim a certain social and material security. As Ivan said, everyone he knew from his parent’s generation were good professionals, implicated in this is that they deserved something better. Using “professional” ascribes to a collective experience, a joint claim rather than an individual request and thus is a more effective way to frame claims of a better life. However, this should be seen as a way to inscribe themselves into a larger
narrative rather than a collective mobilization around a political goal (see Laclau 2005)

Many of Evhen and Valentyna’s peers, relocated shortly after getting their Argentine papers. Canada, the US, or Spain are the countries often mentioned as examples of where those, who could, went. As we spoke, Evhen and Valentyna keep making references to friends and colleagues who after moving to Western countries experienced, if not flourishing, at least dignified lives where they supposedly found possibilities to recuperate their former status and positions. Seated at their kitchen table, we were located in the periphery of the city of Buenos Aires, yet as it seemed, also in the periphery of a global transnational space. They provided many contrasting examples of how their peers’ knowledge and professionalism had been recognized and valued elsewhere. As they talked they got more upset with the obstacles they felt Argentina presented them with, preventing them from achieving completeness.

Aspects of geopolitical hierarchies are present in daily life in Argentina, but in this case there was also a connection to a global postsocialist experience. As if their stories of global peers who had succeeded in Western countries turned into a transnationally activated sadness. “Argentina is delayed, 20 years behind the world” as Evhen shouted in anger. Comparably, Jennifer Patico writes of her puzzlement in Saint Petersburg of the early 1990s, when a PhD chemist that could not afford to buy bananas found it to be highly offensive. Patico reflects:

Imported bananas could hardly have been considered a daily necessity at that time, because they had begun to be sold widely in Saint Petersburg only in the preceding year or so, in the wake of the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. The chemist was aware, however, that in the West professionals with similar qualifications could afford to buy as many bananas as they wished; and it was this comparison that in part explained her resentment (Patico 2008:1).

Part of Evhen and Valentyna’s resentment was thus constituted by a troublesome transnational imaginary where Argentina was figured as the obstacle of everything they could have become but were prevented from being. As previously discussed, in this way notions of living “a good life” were intertwined with colonial understandings of the West and “the rest” (see Hall 1992). This articulation constituted Argentina as a space that hampered their professional aspirations. An articulation constituted in accordance to a logic of coloniality.
When the plan for this research was born, one ambition was to direct attention away from Western Europe and the idea of migrants always wanting to go there. I wanted to direct focus on other routes and alternative understandings of the world and the places in it. As historian José Moya has demonstrated, the amount of research regarding migration to certain countries or regions tends to follow economic power rather than the number of people actually affected (Moya 1998:2). Nevertheless, after the first period of fieldwork, it became clear that the idea of “Europe” and particularly of the “West” had an impact on the ways participants related to the world. Their migration to Argentina was not a neutral fact to them; rather it was conditioned by global and local configurations of power. Regardless of whether they were content or unhappy in their new country, they kept referring to Western contexts and to friends or relatives who had gone to the West instead of Argentina. As if the notion of another possible life in the “West” hung over our interviews as a third presence (Pripp 2001).

Nevertheless, the situation of the research participants is not entirely different from the Western context where many postsocialist migrants suffered social downward mobility and found themselves employed in unskilled jobs. In a study on postsocialist Jewish migrants in Canada, Marina Morgenstern and Soshana Pollack find that men especially were compromised by the masculine breadwinner role and thereby forced into survival low skill jobs, while women – even though working in feminized low paid jobs – had more possibilities to secure academic credentials (Morgenstern & Pollack 2014:125f). Evhen and Valentyna pointed at Argentina and the bureaucratic obstacles they saw there. But bureaucracy does not have legislative power; it simply exercises what has been decided on a discursive political level.

Professions are strongly regulated by states; diplomas and certifications remain key to ensure that specialist competencies can be trusted. The importance of the state is crucial here. There has been a tendency in literature on globalization to downplay the role of the state. Indeed, most of us live in complex transnational fields of relations and communications, but still state policies, as well as local rules and regulations circumscribe our bodies and our everyday life. As some scholars have argued, citizenship impacts individuals at global levels – the place where you are born or the state that

7 This can also be seen as a continuation of the classical anti-Soviet narratives that circulated in the 1980s and early 1990s.
issued your passport is the best indicator of an individual’s position in global income inequality distribution (Boatcá 2014; Korzeniewicz & Moran 2009).

Evhen and Valentyna testified of an experience, familiar to most professional migrants also in Western countries, of loosing one’s former value, as the expertise one state certifies might be rejected by another. Evhen and Valentyna had been formed in a system that strived to surpass the capitalist world in many ways. Like many other postsocialist migrants, Evhen and Valentyna, thus fell from high grounds into a sort of statelessness with no one to safeguard their educational qualifications. “I am nothing of nothing” as Evhen said about the impossibility of receiving a scholarship to study as a non-national and his fruitless visits to the Ukrainian and Russian embassies.

Both had had the opportunity to become Argentine citizens, but like others in my material they had remained Ukrainian citizens. Some said that was due to complicated opening hours, while others said it was an emotional point of identification. Valentyna had failed to renew her Ukrainian passport because the opening hours of the embassy were not compatible with her various subsistence jobs. While some of their postsocialist peers had arrived on more stable shores, Evhen and Valentyna’s difficulties were intensified by the circumstances of Argentina’s profound crisis at their time of arrival. The state that once certified their academic titles was gone, and the one they had arrived in did not acknowledge their educational merits, nor the moral and material economies once tied to their professional careers.

If the collapse of the system partly came inexpediently, as Yurchak suggests (2006), many like Evhen and Valentyna found that they were prepared to build a new life, following their professional trajectories. Equipped with specialist competence they dived out into the world only to find their professional competence was not requested. The resentment and anger expressed by Evhen and Valentyna can thus be understood as directed towards the loss of their professional world and their expected trajectories; in Soviet socialism a modest and decent life was attainable for those who achieved technical degrees and professional certifications. They benefitted from the state and the state benefitted from them. This is what resonates through Ivan’s statement of it being “a pity” or Valentyna’s exclamation: “We don’t need much, just a place to live, bread and work, that’s it! Use us!” In Valentyna’s view, professionals should be put to use by the state to benefit the whole society. The fact that the Argentine government was neglecting this immigrated educational capital gave rise to frustration and bitterness.

These professionals have gone from being socially recognized citizens, to being completely ignored by the state they had settled in. Given this, the
resentment and anger manifested in Evhen and Valentyna’s stories can then be understood as claims of entitlements articulated through the word “professional”. It is a signifier that articulates different demands and creates a larger community, a “we” of Soviet professionals who have been wronged by Argentina and the Western countries. As Laclau asserts, the force in their claim operates through “the order of affect” (2005: 110). I propose that it speaks as much of a logic of coloniality and relations of present global capitalism, as it does of the Soviet modernist promises and dreams of the future (Yurchak 2005:10; Pine 2014:95, Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012:40). To illustrate this further I have chosen quotes from an interview with the former physician Myroslav who spoke about his professional trajectory.

Myroslav and a Story of Education

When I first phoned Myroslav he did not sound pleased with the idea of an interview. He said that he was very busy at work and asked me to wait. I heard how he mumbled in Ukrainian or Russian with a woman and when he came back to the phone he agreed to meet even if there was “nothing in it for him”. The following Saturday morning I stood on the street corner of an exclusive city neighborhood and saw a well-dressed man with a suitcase in his hand stroll towards me. He greeted me in a most polite manner and insisted on treating me to coffee and lemon cake.

As the interview progressed I was surprised by his warm and open way of speaking about his experiences. Like so many others I had met it seemed that once confidence was established, the first reluctance turned into a stream of stories just waiting for someone to hear them out. Born in Ukraine in the late 1950s, Myroslav was a Ukrainian native speaker and also the most passionate Ukrainian nationalist I met during my fieldwork. Together with their young son, Myroslav and his wife, who was also formerly a physician, left the crisis in Ukraine where they had lost their jobs, their money and their trust in the environment because of the Chernobyl accident. He told me:

Oh Jenny it was all so complicated, we did not know much, when we travelled here, it was like we did not have so much … it was not awareness … we were younger so we had a different kind of energy to travel and we were also interested in some adventure, right?

After their arrival in Argentina in 1997 the “problems started because we did not know how to speak, we did not know … nothing and … and we had
nowhere to live and we had no work or anything and then we had to start all over again”. After saying this, Myroslav prompted me to have more cake. I took a small bite that seemed to please him. I watched him sip his coffee and thought that what he had just told me was a story that kept echoing through all the interviews. Like so many others, Myroslav who had expected something else, had to start to work in a factory in order for his family to survive:

I started as a worker in a factory /…/ (I had to) travel two hours, it was a textile factory in (Greater Buenos Aires) /…/ My wife started working as a maid in a Ukrainian family who came here earlier, fifty years back or so /…/ Jenny: That must have been hard. Myroslav: Of course. Jenny: How did you feel during Myroslav: Bad! Bad because 17 years I had (been a doctor), 7 years in university, I already had specialist training, my whole life, everything. And then it was like it did not exist anymore /…/ and I had to start from the first level of being a worker, right? /…/ I didn’t know how to speak and I was always afraid that they would kick me out because at that very same time Argentina went into crisis.

He then described how he worked in constant fear of losing his job “for being a foreigner”. During the first years, Myroslav and his family found a roof over their heads in a Ukrainian church where the bishop was committed to helping postsocialist migrants. The same year they arrived, the Ukrainian community in Argentina celebrated one hundred years of immigration from Ukraine. Over the cake crumbs Myroslav spoke about the Ukrainian diaspora of waves of migrants from the past century:

Myroslav: People came here before the First World War … from the Second World War. Then from after Soviet time and they called us communists because… Jenny: So there were conflicts with the old diaspora? Myroslav: I wouldn’t call it conflicts, there’s always like a … /…/ distance between people, like the ones who were already living here they didn’t want to accept us, we that came in post-Soviet time were specialists, like … eh … professionals that were trained, right. They had come in a different way and just like they had risen from zero, they wanted us to go through those stages that they did. Yet the majority of our people already knew how to speak Spanish /…/ how to speak English and they had their titles from higher education and started to work rapidly, so they did not need to go through all these phases to rise up.

Up until this point, Myroslav and Evhen’s stories resembled each other. However, where Evhen and Valentyna felt abused by diaspora groups who
underpaid them or took advantage of their situation during the first years, being a religious man Myroslav had turned to a Ukrainian Catholic church for help. However, at the time of the interview he had changed parish and said he did not associate more with former diaspora communities. He did not give an explanation and I felt strongly I was not welcome to ask, so I did not. Furthermore, while Evhen could not find a way out of subsistence work to professional recognition, Myroslav and his wife were “discovered” by chance by an employer who was searching the Ukrainian community – famous for its “good workers” – for bakers to a spa hotel in an interior province:

So one day a man came and as we spoke he realized we were doctors … He found that interesting and we spoke about some projects and a lot of things because in the Soviet Union medicine was preventive and here it’s the other way around /…/ We told him about an idea of organizing a whole year health plan so that the hotel would not go without people (during off-season) /…/ So he liked this idea and we started working for him. In 2001 we left Buenos Aires.

Myroslav and his wife went to work for this employer at the hotel located in another province the same year as the economic crisis culminated. At the time of the interview, Myroslav and his wife had returned to Buenos Aires but were still working for the same employer. An employer who had “received” them as physicians, even though they had never had the chance to accredit their diplomas:

Still we don’t have it, because, it’s kind of complicated at the moment … there’s a thing between the Argentine and Ukrainian government … an agreement where our titles would be recognized (convalida) but not accredited (revalida)/…/ Actually, I have not had time to sit down and study. I’ve had my family to support, always working. Still until this moment I don’t have an accredited title /…/ I work with (less skilled health therapists) /…/ that’s what they proposed and we took it to have a work and we still do that /…/ Sincerely Jenny, there are very few of my peers that could graduate as physicians here, for that to be possible you needed to have a base and we arrived with nothing. So we started with the important stuff, with housing, and that sort of thing. Then, some time passed, and I found that my head was not like before … I don’t have the same kind of memory and all of that…

It seemed to trouble him to speak of his non-recognized medical diploma. The interview situation had turned quite intimate, not as all as I had expected.
He seemed to be talking to me like he talked to another professional. He continued:

Anyhow, I have a plan of graduating as a doctor here, I do, and so does my wife /.../ Thank God I am well and I am still working and I have a plan of becoming a physician, but still I need to work ... Well ... I don't know ... I don't know ... I don't know, of course, to ... to feel better, it would be better to have a diploma /.../ I don't know, it's like I already went through that phase. I don't know, I'm not that ... of course ... on the inside I feel that I am a real doctor. //...// Jenny: And did you ever think of going back to Ukraine, or to the U.S or Canada? Myroslav: And ... ... I don't know Jenny ... because ... of course ... before we used to think of improving because the country isn't going well, of course, and we have been on several visits to Ukraine ... But it's already a bit late to start all over again.

Just like Evhen and Valentyna did, Myroslav indicated how age played its part in his possibility to relocate himself on a professional trajectory. He then said that they had bought a flat and that their son had great success with his endeavor as a student of an art's program and that he had gotten a scholarship to a renowned fine art institution in Europe. At the time of the interview his wife had gone there to cater for the son, indicating the same gendered bias as in the case with Evhen and Valentyna, while Myroslav took care of his own and her patients.

I feel 70% like an Argentine. I like this country, its people, the climate ... it's never cold here ... And what's more, I really like the people, we have a lot of Argentine friends /.../ And another thing is that I don't have as much courage, strength, to start up in another country, once again start all over, new language, new friends, new work, all of that. It's not likely, because my wife is already an Argentine citizen ... And me ... I have a date to swear citizenship /.../ the papers are in order and they have already given me a date to take the oath to become an Argentine citizen.

The interview lasted for about two hours; worried about keeping Myroslav from his busy schedule I repeatedly asked him if he wanted to end the interview after the first hour had passed. Myroslav however, shook his head and kept on talking, at one moment he said he had agreed to do the interview because he was a professional and as such it was his duty to help people. The everyday life of the city of Buenos Aires kept imposing itself upon our interview, a child turned into an ambulant street vendor who passed by our table trying to sell pens and bracelets. Myroslav looked the child in the eyes
and addressed him and the merchandise thrown at our table with kindness. After he had gone, I asked Myroslav if he had experienced any discrimination in Argentina.

I used to work in a factory. I found ... I couldn’t believe it could be for real, that there were boys that worked with me, colleagues, that did not know how to write. Before I tried to, eh ... everybody knew that there are no analphabets. But here I found analphabets, so that’s why they always treat me well. Because I have a little expertise (preparación) they always treat me well. You know here, we found out that there are a lot of people who live in shantytowns, there are drug issues and they have not studied. There are people who do not know how to read or write. So whenever someone has a little bit of educational knowledge they are treated well. Yes, that’s how it is, they never treated me like they wanted to discriminate against me, no, no. I haven’t found that here. They treat me well, like a specialist. That’s the way it is. Jenny: I feel the same. Myroslav: Of course. Sometimes even for color Jenny: For the way I look, yes. Myroslav: Yes for looks, sure Jenny: That doors are opened just because of Myroslav: For looks, yes, I experience the same.

Myroslav enjoyed a kind of professional recognition and material safety as the outcome of being an educated subject, as well as for his white appearance. However while experiencing the positive discrimination described above, Myroslav’s professional expertise was still not recognized within an institutional framing. When Myroslav spoke about this he said:

Us, all the families that managed to get up again, we got up on our own, working our way up from zero, like my family, I left all my medical experience, all my pride, all my things, all my ... everything that I am and I started as a laborer, all over again. Of course, many families went through the same. Like ancient immigrants ... right?

As we left the restaurant Myroslav looked sad, he insisted on following me to the bus stop and while we waited he told me that perhaps next time he would bring pictures of his son to show his successful endeavors. I was surprised that he wanted to meet for another interview. Perhaps there had been something in it for him anyway? When I stepped onto the bus, he raised his hand and waved at me, that sad expression still lingering on his face.

“I am Educated so They Treat me Well”

Unlike Evhen and Valentyna, Myroslav managed to recuperate something that resembled his former life and profession. Nevertheless, the link between
academic credentials and professional identification was not fully re-established in his case either. His diploma had not been recognized and his position was within the same sector but less skilled. Yet, like others interviewed here, Myroslav constantly referred to himself and his peers as professionals. Unlike those who – like Evhen and Valentyna – were employed in low-skill jobs and who had not been able to buy their own housing, Myroslav claimed that most of his professional peers had flourished. “We started working quickly”, he said. However, no one in my material had been able to carry on with his or her former profession in a rapid way. Neither did anyone who rapidly converted their titles and went into business appear in newspaper articles, a medium that instead tended to feature stories of victimized, white, skilled, and professional subjects who had suffered Argentine governmental neglect (see e.g Fedyszak 2006).

The question at hand however, is not whether Myroslav was correct in this estimation or nor. Rather it is important to note the contrast to how Evhen regarded the arrival, undertakings, and subsidence of his professional peers as a failure. In their Bonarense litanizing narrative, Evhen and Valentyna located themselves in the subject position of failed professionals, locating the causes of this to Argentina. Nevertheless, it seemed that despite Evhen’s experience of having been stripped of everything but his embodied educational capital, he could still articulate a professional identification. Myroslav articulated the same professional identity, however assigning it a different kind of meaning.

Where Evhen articulated his identification with the subject position of a professional it was a way to frame claims to entitlements, Myroslav, on the other hand, seemed to articulate professional identification as means of a personal ethical framework rather than a claim for material wellbeing. He did not share Evhen’s explicit resentment; instead he oscillated between a subtle contentment with his life in Argentina and expressions of disappointment with things not entirely turning out the way he had expected. He said he was content and happy, however when uttering how he still felt “like a doctor on the inside”, he looked sad and his voice changed tone. He said it would “feel better” to have a diploma, but at the same time, he felt “too old” to start all over in Argentine academia. Even if Myroslav could be considered “successful” in terms of exercising a similar profession, enjoying personal freedom, and social recognition from clients and his employer, he still shared with Evhen the lack of formal recognition of his professional identification.

I argue that in the two interviews presented in this chapter there is a fine line between professional identification and the dislocatory experience. To
be placed in the subject position of a professional implies social rights; it 
entitles its enunciator to the professional subject’s life trajectory – a trajectory 
that is actually different from understandings of what the typical migrant’s 
trajectory usually consists of. As Myroslav said, his and his peers way to – and 
their life in – Argentina might resemble that of “ancient immigrants”, yet his 
articulation of a professional identity differentiated him from former peasant 
immigrants – and also from discriminated contemporary migrants from 
Latin American countries. Using a historical perspective one can understand 
why it becomes important for him to differentiate himself from former waves 
of Ukrainian migrants.

In the historical scenery of migration to Argentina, many immigrants 
have been seen as “brazos” – manpower to be placed where labor was needed 
(Moya 1998:234). This tends to be the case also in modern economies where 
migrants are integrated into informal or unwanted sectors of labor markets. 
As Myroslav said about the tensions in relation to former diaspora groups: “They had come in a different way and just like they had risen from zero, they 
wanted us to go through those stages that they did”. The Ukrainian peasants 
of the first wave of overseas migration were “poor, illiterate and unskilled” 
(Kuropas 1991:231) and as such constituted a labor diaspora that sought paid 
labor and agricultural opportunities (Satzewich 2002:47). Evhen, Myroslav 
and their peers did not come in search of land, as these unskilled “ancient 
migrants” did; rather they came to exercise their professions.

At the time of mass immigration to Argentina, the nation’s new export 
economy’s demand for cheap labor and unskilled workers as well as peasants 
outnumbered skilled workers such as artisans or teachers (Helg 1990:45). 
This divide between mobile subjects of different kinds, that is, between the 
unskilled worker and the educated, is a divide institutionalized through 
migration policies, and present in Myroslav’s self-understanding. The 
ancient migrants, he said, went looking for land; they were peasants, yet “us 
who came in post-Soviet times were specialists and trained professionals”. 
Thus, the former migrant route was not supposed to be for them – they were 
not manpower “brazos” (Moya 1998:234). Rather, they were professional 
subjects who went not in search of land, but to inhabit the free world and 
enjoy the outcomes of their professional titles. This kind of articulation is also 
found in the North American Ukrainian diaspora where newly arrived 
migrants responded to the established diaspora’s animosity through mocking 
previous waves for their peasant background and lack of educational merits
In Lemekh’s interviews with recently arrived postsocialist Ukrainians in New York it is also clear how they distanced themselves from previous waves of Ukrainian migrants (Lemekh 2010:132f).

It is clear that downward mobility was not something Myroslav had imagined for him or his generation; it was not entailed in his relocatory trajectory. His and his peers’ hopes and aspirations were set for a different path. I suggest that the way they articulated professional identifications, regardless of whether they actually occupied this professional position or not, constructed their expected trajectory as a different one – it made them professional subjects in a world that could be theirs to conquer. Compared to discriminated groups of Latin American and internal migrants in Argentina who live in precarious, violent, dangerous, and polluted territories, they are of course partly right in this. As can be seen in Myroslav’s story, the fact that he and his wife were educated professionals was actually a condition that saved them from the hardships they were living in for a brief period among other postsocialist migrants in the church’s facilities. Accordingly, education enabled their mobility from a precarious situation to a decent formal work that was related to their professions and unlike many of their peers they were able to buy their own housing in the city of Buenos Aires. Unlike Evhen and Valentyna, they did not live with constant risk of homelessness or shantytown dwelling as an ultimate option.

However, many of Myroslav’s peers, like Evhen, did not share this experience even though being educated. For many of the postsocialist migrants, having higher education proved not to be a condition that acknowledged rights and a good future in their new society. This is an important node in the relation between professional identities and marginalized dwelling and migranthood. The rupture between the expected trajectories, empowered by the signifier “professional”, and their current marginalized condition was like an irritating itch, and had to be negotiated in production of meaning. Many seemed to alternate between the juxtaposed positions of being a “professional” or a “migrant”. However when one occupied the position of the professional, the subject still lacked the rewards of expected social economies inherent in this position. And when one occupied the position of the migrant it seems that the oxymoron of being white and educated was one that always had to be explained. For example, even if living in marginalized circumstances, Evhen and Valentyna, had received help from the Italian community, something they attributed to their shared Europeanness. They had also had their son accepted to a European school. Thus, ideas about race
played its part in their everyday life as their white skin, blonde hair and education gave them privileges even in a marginalized setting.

This alternation between seemingly contradictory positions can also be found in Adib and Guerrier’s investigation on hotel staff and the intersectional makings of gender, ethnicity, race, and class. They find that interviewees constructed dualistic group positions in order to navigate different structures and argue that the way female hotel staff moved between positions and the way they were positioned by others “illustrates the relational, oppositional and reductionist nature of category ascription in shaping identity” (Abid & Guerrier 2003:429). For example, a Spanish woman working in a hotel in the U.S found a way to avoid sexual harassment from a manager born in Costa Rica through emphasizing their shared condition as Hispanics and victims of discriminations in a white environment. Abid and Guerrier argue that through renegotiations of gender and ethnicity the woman could navigate potential abuse (Abid & Guerrier 2003:428).

In this way, race, gender, and ascribed belongings play into the social fabric of everyday work life. The location between the different positions “professional” or “migrant” seemed to be the point from where participants spoke to me. The similarities and differences between Evhen and Myroslav’s experiences points towards the role of education as a classed and raced phenomena, as well as what the contingency of educational capital does to possibilities and production of meaning. To be “educated” is not only about knowledge, but also about classed codes and ways of acting in the world. Myroslav stressed that he had never been discriminated against because he was an educated professional, a position he articulated in relational contrast to that of analphabets and shantytown dwellers. Even though he shared a working space with uneducated workers in the factory during those first years in Argentina he emphasized that he was different from them. To be able to position himself on the floor with them, he had to “give up everything” that he was before the dislocatory experience.

My argument is not that Myroslav articulated this difference in order to present himself as better than his colleagues at the factory. Rather, I suggest that the articulation of this difference fills a function of envisioning another future for himself and his family, to redirect their relocation trajectory. To articulate a professional identification clearly separated Myroslav from the analphabets and other marginalized subjects, as well as their history, their present situation, and their future. As an educated physician his expected trajectory and mission to be different, even though he would probably not exercise a physician’s profession on a formal basis again, his professional
identifications made him into a different kind of subject, tied him to another history and constructed another future in a world of uncertainties.

Migrant Trajectories

Based on the discussion above, the recurrent notion of aspirations for a good life would here entail the possibility to be recognized as a professional subject. In the balancing act between the differentiated positions of professional and migrant, participants spoke not only of historical migrants but also of contemporary ones, particularly those from bordering countries. As discussed in chapter 4, many participants used references to Peruvian, Paraguayan, or Bolivian coworkers or cotenants to describe how they were incorporated into precarious worksites or housing.

Positions of class and race, and thus possibilities, are never static; they vary in time and place, and intersect with other constructions of power formed in interaction between local and global power structures (Frankenberg 1993:1f; Lundström 2010:26; Mattsson 2010:16). All research participants with university degrees did indeed face downward mobility, but they all expressed that they were received in another way than migrants from neighboring countries. As Myroslav stated, sometimes how one is treated “comes down to the color” of your skin. As is discussed in chapter 6, many participants stressed how being white and European “opens doors” in Argentine society. Yet, the doors to professional recognition remained closed for most of them.

I suggest that education in this context can be understood as a signifier through which discourses on race, civilization, and modernity operate. As such it also serves as a marker of whiteness or an explanation of social inequality. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter also, the participants who had arrived as young adults articulated their education as a special condition. Postsocialist migrants in Argentina were indeed highly educated in comparison with other groups in the society, particularly with the sectors of populations the newly arrived migrants were aligned with in labor and housing markets during their first years. Still, the designation “educated” articulates a set of socially marked characteristics made meaningful by a logic of coloniality and discourses on race and civilization.

Social inequality is a major contemporary social issues in Argentina (Grimson 2015:198; Albarracán 2005:30ff). In a survey on social perceptions of social inequality in Buenos Aires metropolitan area, Alejandro Grimson finds that almost 30% of the respondents answered that poverty was to be understood as a condition caused by lack of education (Grimson 2015:201).
Whether this is to be understood as a fault of state governing or of the poor themselves is impossible to tell from the survey (Grimson 2015:201). However, it directs us towards the link between how poverty and the lack of education is framed within a discourse of race. As historian José Moya has pointed out, historically in Argentina and Latin America, the concept of having a “good appearance” or a “good education” has been a “euphemism(s) for Caucasian looks and bourgeois manners” (Moya 1998:213).

The role of whiteness also resonates through the experiences analyzed in this chapter. “The experience of white European immigrants tends to confirm the lethal insubstantiality of whiteness” as Rosi Braidotti writes (Braidotti 2007:33). As stressed in Myroslav’s case, many participants balanced between being educated and thus constructed as white subjects, while simultaneously occupying a marginal position – a subject position usually racialized as non-white. Their experiences point to how processes of dispossession and downward mobility intertwine with structures of race and class. I posit that the quite palpable discrepancy between the opening of doors for one’s embodied whiteness and the simultaneous lack of professional recognition was crucial for the older generation’s experience in Buenos Aires. Many research participants were caught between these constructions of whiteness in terms of having a good education and origins in Europe, while at the same time occupying a more or less marginal position in society. Their European origin and educational capital distinguished these research participants from being characterized as “burdening” migrants, or “barbaric” others as might be the case in other contexts. Nonetheless, as they lacked state protection or support from international conventions, Argentine authorities did not recognize their societal value while simultaneously granting that to physicians from Mercosur – countries that many migrants who suffer discrimination in Argentina originate from.

In my material there are various positions the research participants could occupy during interviews, some advocated their belonging to a collective white professional “we”, as was the case with Myroslav. Others, like Evhen who said he was “sick” of stumbling against institutional “high walls” he felt were constructed to hold him and his peers outside, talked about being subjected to discrimination. When Evhen talked of his route through Argentine academia he also expressed feelings of being superior to the Argentine native population. As the reader might recall, when Evhen remembered what happened in the odontology college, he said, “who actually came to here to teach?” This articulation of the lack of knowledge he perceived among his colleagues expressed the unfairness of the way he felt he had been
treated by the Argentine bureaucracy. Since the articulation of professionalism also frames claims of entitlements it constructed him as a subject a little more “worthy” not only in relation to the “ordinary migrant”, but also to the native population.

The various positions that the research participants moved between affected me as a listener in different ways, sometimes it seemed as though they were making claims to a wider audience, calling for recognition of their professional value as well as human suffering. Others just quietly confirmed being happy with how things had turned out “after all” as in Myroslav’s case. In her fieldwork on Iranian migrant men, Fataneh Farahani encountered a man who had suffered severe downward mobility yet he told her that most important for him was freedom and getting out of Iran – thus he was content and felt he had achieved what he wanted with his migration. However, Farahani then encountered some friends of his who accidentally told her about declines in his mental and physical health as a way to illustrate how rejection of one’s professional skills and education might affect individuals in new contexts. Reflecting on the role of the researcher and what she could do with these seemingly contrary accounts, Farahani found that she of course could never “verify all the details of the interviewee’s account” (Farahani 2013:158). Rather, the important task for an ethnographer is to understand how interviewees desire to position themselves in their interaction with the researcher (Farahani 2013:158).

During interviews, research participants positioned themselves in different ways while recounting experiences conditioned by gender, class, race, age, and educational background. As I have indicated in this chapter, research participants with higher education particularly strived to make sense out of the dislocatory effects on possible identifications formed by labor, education, and corresponding societal positions. Evhen and Valentyna strongly expressed that the way their lives had turned out was not what they had expected. Myroslav on the other hand said he was happy in Argentina, yet he did not sound or look content when he uttered these words.

Physiological problems and strong emotions in relation to experiences of downward mobility caused by migration processes can of course be found in much research on migration (Gans 2009: 1659; see also Nicklett & Burgard 2009). Nonetheless, the denigration of research participants’ educational capital was not only connected to processes of migration, but also related to reconfigurations of class and its former link to educational capital during Soviet times. Anthropologist Jennifer Patico has described how teachers in Saint Petersburg – formerly part of the mass intelligentsia through their
educational capital – struggled with the lack of link between their personal merits and present societal position in the late 1990s Russia. Just like Myroslav, Evhen and Valentyna, they were processing questions of subjective value and professional respectability. For example, they asked: “Was it because society was failing us, devaluing that which should be valued? Or were we less worthy than we had thought ourselves to be?” (Patico 2008:209).

Even though they belonged to different segments in contemporary Argentina, Evhen, Valentyna and Myroslav shared the experience of downward mobility and having expected another trajectory for themselves – the trajectory of a professional and not of a migrant. They had believed their education to be a differentiating factor in their relocatory trajectory, and in the case of Myroslav, it partly was. They had gone from being positioned as subjects beneficial to society, to being completely ignored by the state they had settled in. Work was central in the Soviet system and permeated discourses of citizenship, education, gender, and public rituals (Litwin & Lezhem 2008). When the Soviet system was disintegrated, Evhen, Valentyna, Myroslav and others like them, found themselves in a terrain where new meanings and relations between labor, personal merits, and social mobility were formed. The mighty technological state that had once certified their specialties was gone, and with it their professional currency had been devaluated. Evhen and Valentyna placed the fault on the Argentine bureaucratic structure, yet their peers who stayed in Russia and Ukraine, or who migrated to other destinations, also suffered downward mobility (Litwin & Lezhem 2008; Remennick 2006).

The implosion of the system and the turmoil that followed meant that their personal biographies were being dislocated in a way they had no possibility of ever foreseeing – the contingency of everyday life showing itself in quite a brutal way. The dislocatory events they lived through broke not only the links between their educational capital and its expected outcomes, but also between personal ethic and expected rewards. Contingency is a key word that characterized their stories and in the case of Evhen and Valentyna, their resentment. If education could formerly ensure a good future, then the dislocatory events, flexibilized labor markets and their subsequent unemployment seemed to have devaluated their educational capital.
‘Where are you from?’ asked the clerk at the food-place where we stopped to have a beer. I had heard that question so many times and long ago I had started to respond with something ironic. But before I had even reflected on what to answer Kyrylo replied instinctively. ‘We’re from Nigeria’ he said in a heavy porteño accent, ‘can’t you tell?’ He grinned at the clerk who laughed and gave him two glasses; ‘You kids have fun now’ he said and sent us off, accepting our belonging to the city of Buenos Aires without further questions.

The importance of labor in relation to dislocatory events, experience, and relocatory trajectory gradually emerged from the empirical material. In this chapter I will discuss how participants created meaning regarding their labor situation in accordance with neoliberal, racialized, and gendered discourses. In particular, I will examine how racial constructions are integral for the production of meaning. As Frye Jacobson has noted, “Race resides not in nature but in politics and culture” (Frye Jacobson 1998:9). One of the undertakings of the researcher is then to reflect upon “which racial categories are useful to whom at a given moment, and why” (Frye Jacobson 1998:9).

In the previous chapter, the experiences of professionals with long careers were discussed. Here, experiences of participants who did not have a background in highly skilled professional careers are analyzed. I have chosen to let Natalia speak about her life to introduce the theme. Natalia was one of many participants who spoke about what it meant to be a good worker in contemporary and past worlds.
Natalia and a Story of Work Morals

Born in Kiev, Ukraine in the early 1960s, Natalia had previously been employed in the Soviet textile industry. After arriving in Argentina with her daughter and husband in 1996, she had had various subsistence jobs. At the time of my fieldwork she lived with her new husband in a working class neighborhood in the province of Buenos Aires. Natalia was self-employed as a teacher of Russian language and suggested we meet at cafeteria downtown where she usually met with students. The city was bustling with energy that afternoon, people moving rapidly in the warm November streets. Natalia arrived dressed in a stunning green dress, with which she wore matching earrings. She was tall and blonde and immediately caught the attention of the guests surrounding us. She greeted the waiter by name and asked for her regular.

Natalia kept her eye on the people passing by while she started telling me that her experience as a migrant had been “terrible” and that she had “suffered a lot”. Natalia often let herself be interrupted, sometimes she would stop to answer her phone that kept ringing, or talk to the waiter as he walked by our table. Yet, when she started to recount anecdotes of how life under communism was all about survival, she suddenly became very focused. Her voice took on another tone as she told me:

Well, I have been in Argentina for seventeen years. Things are not going bad, the thing is ... how is that saying ... I’m tired of rowing, I’d like a boat with a motor. I mean, if you do not row you sink. That doesn’t mean ... This is important, this is not new for me. New in the way ... in my country things were pretty complicated. Always ... Eh ... The communist government made us live through moments, or how to put it, it wasn’t just moments, but it was life itself. It was a complicated thing, and sometimes it had nothing to do with external problems. They had made the problems, they created them, they were building problems.

Like most others I had met, she had first asked me how much I knew of Ukrainian or Soviet history, saying it was not easy to explain to someone who had not lived through it. Like in all other cases, I said that I knew some things but probably not enough. I found people then either took their time to explain, or like for example Myroslav, initially they were happy to ignore that part of their history, but would still touch on it at some point. Natalia, however, seemed to find it important to frame her current experiences with her background under Soviet times:
Like I’m saying, it wasn’t … let’s say … it’s not a joke, nor a figure of speech, no. Eh … they tried to make people focus upon … eh how should I put it, get people to focus upon survival problems /…/ Like for example, in 1933 there was a great famine /…/ These things that I will tell you aren’t from any manual, nor from a history class, because in history class everything is false. In which way? They provided the information that suited them. You would always hear only one campaign and it was always a lie. We all knew it but sadly we couldn’t say anything because no one would listen. If you did something strange they would send you to a … a … psychiatric ward and you would never get out again … Well, this is why I say, all the things that I am speaking about are from the history of my family.

That first day we met, Natalia seemed to be telling me extracts of past atrocities and suffering to make meaning out of who she had become in Argentina. “All is known through comparisons” she said and explained:

We went through some complicated situations, far more complicated than the things that happen here. /…/ Because in these sixteen years of my life I have relaxed quite a bit, I have become lazy, compared to the situation I used to live in. But I do not mean lazy in everything, I have always worked! We are a working kind. In fact, I do not feel good if I do not work, even if I would have had a lot of money I still would have worked, or I would have done something. Jenny: With ‘we’ do you mean Ukrainians? Natalia: Yes the women, Slavic women, /…/ Ukrainian, Belarusian Jenny: Yes Natalia: We are … This guy that came with me, he has a Russian woman. She’s worse than me in that sense. It’s a lot of work, he says: ‘you are all so complicated’ and I say ‘dear, but there must be a reason they are with us’. It must be that they like getting their butt kicked every day. (Imitating Slavic women:) ‘Behave nicely! Have some discipline!’ Because the Argentines aren’t like that. They are very relaxed, very calm, very everything. Well…

Having said this, she glimpsed at two Argentine men sitting some tables away, clearly listening in on our conversation. In Argentina there is a general idea that society is tough, everyday life is often mentioned as a struggle, thus Natalia seemed to signal that this was not a problem for her since she had come from something worse.

I would meet with Natalia several times over the next three years, and as with anyone, the determinacy with which she would state something would later change; those initial stories slowly manifested their many nuances and layers. She had embarked upon a relocatory trajectory, constantly re-negotiating meanings of the past and present as well as her positions in Argentine society. However, throughout this interview and during my participatory
observations, she would make many references to how honest, disciplined and trustworthy Slavic migrants were, women in particular. The manner in which she spoke of Slavic women and Argentine men is characteristic for a range of subject positions that will be described more closely in this chapter.

### Historical Legacies: Slavic Nature and Socialist Socialization

#### “In Their Blood”: Soviet History and Slavic Nature

Natalia was the first, but not the last, to say that having been brought up in Soviet times had been a preparation for the hardships to come in life. As can be seen in the quote, she referred to Soviet repression and the example of the Great famine\(^1\) to position herself as someone who had suffered to become tough. She was also the first of many participants that would emphasize how good workers they were. Like Natalia, many would speak of the brutalities of the Soviet system, but in the same interview also mention work morals as positive inheritances of a cruel history:

> The problems that the government forced us to live through, all of which make you a person who ... I do not know if I would say hard, but attentive to everything, always alert. You are always in a situation where you think how, ‘how can I anticipate this and how can I anticipate that’. I mean you don’t have time or possibility to relax. (Imitating Argentines:) ‘And well, we’ll see tomorrow, let’s go on with the easy life’ Never! **Jenny:** Mm **Natalia:** There is a saying in Russian that goes ‘Prepare the eh ... sleigh in summer and the rowboat in winter’ **Jenny:** Aha **Natalia:** That’s exactly how we live. My husband tells me that I am like a machine. I tell him ‘darling, all that you have, you have because you have a machine beside you, otherwise you would have had nothing’.

Natalia actively positioned herself as an exceptional subject in this first interview and the following ones. The exceptionality she strived to create seemed to be framed through references to Soviet history, as can be seen above, but also through references to how Slavic people were more beautiful, educated, or sophisticated than Argentines.

Likewise, Ekaterina, born in a Siberian town in Russia in the early 1980s and who arrived in Argentina after finishing her secondary education,

\(^1\) For a discussion on how the famine in Soviet Ukraine 1932–3 has figured in Ukrainian diaspora discourse, see Satzewich’s discussion on how the famine has figured “as a defining element in the historical traumas experienced by the Ukrainian people” (Satzewich 2002 178ff).
emphasized her exceptionality when she spoke about the many hardships she had suffered after becoming a single, divorced mother in Argentina. According to Ekaterina, her Russian upbringing had helped her survive:

**Ekaterina**: Well, I was raised in that way and it’s like I can see that it gave good results, it worked for me because when I fell .... When I was in a really bad situation, I managed to recover some strength to go on fighting. **Jenny**: Of course, yes. **Ekaterina**: In fact all Russian people, they already have that in their blood, they have it in their DNA, they have it, fall (caer) and get up again, keep on struggling and try to make it. Remaining on the floor isn’t an option, the floor is there to support you, but the ceiling does not exist, you can always exceed yourself. **Jenny**: Of course **Ekaterina**: That is why ... all my friends, everyone that came from over there, I can see that training of always trying to reach further in them, ‘I fell, ok, I am in a bottomless pit, well is that any reason to cry? No. Well let’s go forward then’… **Jenny**: I see **Ekaterina**: We are all like that but I think that has a lot to do with the fact that country was communist, they always told you ‘you are strong, you know how to’.

These narratives of “making it through” were often characterized by this sort of reference to history, blood, or even DNA. Natalia who was born in the 1960s had lived through the late Soviet period, while Ekaterina, born in the early 1980s must have had few memories of the USSR, still they used similar narratives. For example, Ivan, born in Ukraine in 1993, kept referring to the “nature of our people”. A “nature” that seemed to be both an inherited character as well as something formed by the Soviet regime. When Ivan spoke of his parent’s lost generation of Soviet professionals in Argentina he said: “I mean no one was left in extreme poverty, people rose up, but ... that was only because of the nature of our people”. Yet, he also emphasized how the Soviet government with its emphasis on education for everyone had prepared them for what was to come.

These narratives construct a certain postsocialist Argentinean subjectivity, characterized by past experiences and relational difference from others residing in Argentina. Some used references to sufferings in the Soviet past to explain why they were tougher, but would also highlight positive memories from their childhood or ways that the Soviet welfare system had instilled education and moral values in them, an embodied capital. In this manner, Soviet socialization became a way to frame their exceptionality. This way of using Soviet history to frame one’s exceptionality was also seen in Lemekh’s study on Ukrainian postsocialist migrants in New York. “If you can make it
there [the USSR], you can make it anywhere” was a common expression during her fieldwork (Lemekh 2010:127).

Historian Yulia Gradskova has noted how in life-interviews with women, the Soviet past “is regularly referred to as a time of extreme suffering, deprivation, and shortages”, while at the same time it might bring about nostalgic memories of everyday life that “appear to be in open conflict with some of the other recollections of the Communist regime” (Gradskova 2015:46). Likewise, Masseroni et al. found that while life in the USSR might have had a negative impact on them, postsocialist migrants in Argentina also remember life there with nostalgia and longing. They write that in interviews with migrants the Soviet “state can appear as authoritarian but also as an organizer and a guarantor of a stable social life and politics” (Masseroni et al. 2010:15, my translation).

As Pine has suggested, the “past contains the lessons we live by”, and therefore we imagine the future “through reference to both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ pasts” that helps us to structure “utopian dreams of what might be” (2014:96). Natalia and Ekaterina were engaged in a relocatory trajectory where constant everyday life struggles called for them to have a past in accordance with what they needed in present life. The pasts they drew upon constructed self-understandings and identifications that directed them towards certain futures.

“I Made it All on My Own”:
Postsocialist Subjects in the Neoliberal Present

The meanings constructed out of the past might thus vary depending on positions and contexts. Just like Ekaterina, participants spoke about first “having fallen”, and then over time slowly having “risen from zero” as both they and Argentina made their way into more stable terrain during the first decade of the new millennium. The capacity to “rise from zero” was often attributed to the Soviet past or Slavic nature, nonetheless it is also relevant to note how these understandings of inherited strength and resourcefulness were often paired with discourses of self-making and neoliberal constructions of the levels of one’s individual success being the measurement of one’s personal efforts.

Natalia who was born in the 1960s actively constructed herself as exceptional with references to the Soviet system she had grown up in, the regime had made her tough. An interesting paradox in these narratives is the emphasis many put on having survived, or “risen from zero”, in one’s individual efforts. Something Natalia did not link to the system she was raised in:
I’m going to tell you something that I don’t like to say but the fact is that they taught us to be humble. That humbleness was flushed down the drain here. I think that is good! Because otherwise I wouldn’t have made it to where I have made it. When I came here I knew about twenty words, fifty, a hundred, I don’t know. Very few. Useless words like days of the week, colors .... I had to learn how to speak. Otherwise I couldn’t get a job, nothing. Eh ... it’s strange that I started ... perhaps it’s because of my way of being. I think that’s why. Eh ... eh ... I started to express myself long before I could understand people. //...// People wouldn’t understand me. I didn’t understand them. First ... First year I think, life here was really hard for me. Eh ... it was hard with this ... I mean ... The language, all of that. But after two years I could express myself more freely. If I lacked a word I asked what it was. I lived with the dictionary in my hand. Eh ... After five years I spoke pretty well. After ten I spoke very well. I think I speak kind of ... I mean ... at a high level now. I learned it all myself, no one helped me.

Natalia seemed to say that her survival and success in Argentina was due to her individual capacity and working morals, in addition to her Slavic upbringing and the Soviet history. She was not the only participant to speak of the mixture of these factors. There is a tension in the empirical material between having “made it all by oneself” and having made it because of socialist socialization.

Indirectly, participants were speaking about two different economic, political, and ideological systems, moving between seemingly contradictory subject positions created within each realm. The socialist past and the neoliberal present2 however do not have to contradict each other. In her fieldwork at a juice factory in postsocialist Poland, Elisabeth Dunn finds that socialism was brought into the present both “in a devalorizing as well as a legitimating sense” (Dunn 1999:146). Production workers brought forth their experiences as workers under socialism to explain why they were more flexible and thus fit to meet capitalist production conditions (Dunn 1999:137f). In a similar way participants re-articulated the Soviet past and Soviet worker subjectivity to fit the neoliberal landscape they were navigating.

In their narrated memories of the Soviet past, the identifications constructed was here coupled with the typical Fordist American dream – an idea that promised that those who just work hard enough can achieve material

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2 Or perhaps “recent past” would be a more adequate description since the Kirchner administration in office at the time of the interviews did not explicitly govern with a neoliberal model. However the society was still characterized by global neoliberal hegemony.
success (see e.g. Lamont 2000:247). In their narrations, the Soviet educational system, as well as the atrocities of the regime, had created participants as tough subjects ready to work and fulfill the dreams of neoliberal society. Located in a postsocialist terrain they were situated in-between former utopias – the collective vs. the individual, the welfare state vs. the capitalist market, etc. Sitting in the park, Ekaterina told me about how she and her Russian friends all born in the early 1980s would meet at a friend’s house to get all their children together. “We want to recreate something of what we had when we were children” she explained and described how they would lock themselves into the house, let the children run around and play as they liked. They also told the children to address any woman in there as a mother. In public parks they were afraid to let their children out of their sight and could not relax among their friends. In this sense, Ekaterina and her friends needed a private space to re-create a sense of public collective childhood.

To a greater or lesser extent participants were involved in this kind of negotiation with the past, and also across generations. During the interview with Ivan’s parents, Evhen and Valentyna spoke about the problems of housing. Ivan then told me that housing used to be free in the USSR. Evhen, however, was very quick to contradict him:

Evhen: Here everyone thinks that they gave us everything, no! They did not give us a thing! Valentyna: Yes they gave but you had to... Evhen: You could wait ten years for them to entrust you with a house, you had to pay for it Valentyna: Fifteen years Evhen: It was a state rent, it is not that they just give you stuff.

The tone indicated that Evhen and Valentyna had explained this many times before, tired of having to defend themselves against an idea of having been “given everything” in the USSR. Perhaps the reluctance to ask for help, or having survived “without anyone’s help” is a position impossible not to occupy as a former Soviet citizen in a neoliberal present.

In her work on postsocialism in Poland, Wolanik Boström demonstrates how the younger generation employs a neoliberal entrepreneurial discourse, while regarding their parent’s generation as having been pampered by the system. Capitalism in postsocialist Poland required “hands on-action” and navigation through the market economy. Wolanik Boström writes of her informant Jarek who is ironic about former socialist slogans for success while at the same ascribing professional objectivity to the market’s rhetoric and its talk of “starting an enterprise, penetrating the market, getting profitable
orders” (Wolanik Broström 2005:214, my translation). All of which could be seen as “capitalist slogans for success”, Wolanik Broström contends, “(w)hile the socialist prescriptions for success appear ridiculous for Jarek, those of the market economy seem highly reliable (Wolanik Broström 2005:214, my translation).

Overshadowing the quote above is of course the role of the state, social welfare, and income distribution. Capitalist modernity is largely characterized by the idea of capable independent subjects who act out of economic interest, as if we were all shareholders. The independent economic subjectivity the entrepreneurial discourse enhances has an interesting relation to space and power. As others have discussed, representations and cultural imaginaries of the world cannot be separated from economic inequalities and Western economic hegemonies. Ethnologist Lena Martinsson has noted how this creates a Western superior economic subjectivity recurrent in neoliberal discourses on foreign aid where the “others” are to be helped or organized (Martinsson 2012:201). The idea of former Soviet citizens not being capable subjects in market economies is thus characterized by a logic of coloniality. The role Eastern Europe has been assigned in relation to the “developed” capitalist West after the implosion of the USSR is relevant here is.

As ethnologist Mats Lindqvist has suggested, the “West-East relationship now has a neocolonial character, as Western, capitalist, developed countries are contrasted with Eastern countries seen as disadvantaged, both democratically and when it comes to economic market know-how” (Lindqvist 2014:84). In relation to the postsocialist countries and their citizens, the “West takes on the role of assistance; the East, that of need” (Lindqvist 2014:84). This suggests postsocialist subjects need to position themselves as capable individuals with integrity and the individual capacity to get back on their feet through their own efforts (see Wolanik Boström 2005:71). Robert Service has directed attention to the number of Russians have turned the Western stereotype of the Soviet citizen as a being devoid of individualism on its head:

When things got tough, Soviet citizens had to use individual initiative in order to acquire what they needed in life. They might get support from family, work-group or patron, but in the ultimate resort they also had to fend for themselves. As the edifice of communism was dismantled, Russians had several qualities essential for survival in the new market economy (Service 2003:87f).
These are the qualities participants in my study spoke about and it illustrates how Soviet modernity, in a sense, produced neoliberal subjects. Evhen, Valentyna, Natalia, and others like them oscillated between constructing themselves as worthy capitalist subjects, individual survivors, and achievers, while at the same time drawing on or defending themselves against the ideas neoliberal society had about their Soviet past. Once again the position of “in-betweenness” is comes up – they are indeed recognized as white and European, yet they are not acknowledged as fully-fledged Western capitalist subjects. The geopolitical divisions between ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ Europe are of course at play here, where a logic of coloniality characterizes Western dominance and the idea of the East as constantly ‘behind’. As Redi Koobak has argued about this ‘lag’ discourse: “Spatial and geopolitical differences are projected onto a temporal plane, with Eastern Europe positioned as ‘catching up’” (Koobak 2013:104).

To Start At the Bottom: Neoliberal Subjects and Migrant Stories

Like everyone else, Yulia had met quite some difficulties during her first years in Buenos Aires city. When she arrived in 1999 she had recently graduated from a higher education fine arts program, yet her specialty was unknown in Argentina. She found herself presenting a degree with an unrecognized name, and like almost everyone in my material she had low-skilled subsistence jobs during the first years, for example distributing leaflets, cleaning, or being a waitress. She described her own and her peers’ experience:

With everyone we spoken to after becoming friends, it turns out everyone went through the same, living in horrible places, working in whatever, eh ... that is like a thing that unites us, we all went through it, no one started out living in the Sheraton Hotel, do you understand? We all started at the bottom, from not having anything.

To have “started at the bottom” is repeated in this way by participants of all generations. The social location from which they spoke at the time of the interview, however, was different. At the time of the interview Yulia had her own studio where she had managed to teach the art form she had been trained for in Ukraine. She was thus speaking from a more stable position, having been able to save enough money to buy a flat and a car. Yulia was the only one among the interviewees who arrived as an adult with a specific professional title and who then succeeded in developing a career closely related to
her academic merits. She was much younger than Evhen and Myroslav whose downward mobility experiences were discussed in chapter 5. All participants born in the early 1980s, who arrived in Argentina as young adults with secondary school or academic merits from independent Ukraine, over time managed to relocate themselves in a trajectory similar to the ones they had imagined for themselves. This indicates how age was one of the intersecting structural factors that played an important part in the possibilities for participants’ relocatory trajectories.

These narratives of “making it” and to be able to “rise from zero” through one’s hard work or individual qualities are connected to neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurial self-realization. The subject positions of the self-made entrepreneurial subject and of a person having survived because of a particular belonging, echoes two major political ideologies in Euro-American modernity that has shaped discourses throughout recent centuries – conservatism and liberalism. When participants articulated a particular “we” based on blood, “the nature of our people” as Ivan said, they call upon conservative ideas of being as the legitimate order of thing, meaning a king is born a king and so forth, blood decides who is rightfully in power. While when they articulated the self-made subject position, this is liberalism as we know it from modern times – an idea that you rightfully enjoy privileges or enjoy power because of individual achievements (see Björk 2012).

On a quiet porteño night I heard about the many hardships Vadim had suffered during the first years in Argentina. When he noticed how affected I had been by his many stories he was quick to assure that not all had been difficult:

I have lived through happy moments, I travelled, studied, and I am healthy. Everything else you have to achieve through making an effort. I never asked for loans from anyone, I always managed on my own to survive without anyone’s help.

Like Vadim, participants seemed to express a sense of pride in having made it all by themselves through hard work and their inherited toughness. This emphasis on having worked oneself up from the bottom can also be analyzed as a classical example of migrant stories – the narrative of the migrant who arrives in a new country and makes his or her way from zero through hard work and sacrifices. As Pine has noted, since migration is a process that is orientated towards the future, if it were not for the idea of ensuring rewards and a good life in the future, the many losses and personal costs of labor
migration, for example, would not be justified (Pine 2014:102; see also Fedyuk 2011).

Inherent in the dream of “making it” as a migrant, is the idea of this being achieved through hard work (Viladrich 2005:387). Argentina had turned out not to be the land of promise that Vadim had hoped for. Before assuring me that not all had been difficult he had shared many stories about hardships and how he had not succeeded in the way he wanted to. However, his having survived through “making an effort” constructed him as someone who fought and did not give up, and created him as a particular kind of dignified survivor.

Viktor, a Russian man born in the early 1990s in a northern Russian town, had arrived as a child with his parents, who were both white-collar professionals. We had some trouble trying to find time for the interview, he studied at the same time as he worked with home-delivery from a restaurant, and we had to wait more than a year before we could meet. When the day finally came, Viktor turned out to be an easy-going guy who laughed a lot. During our conversation we realized we had a lot in common and that we had lived in the same neighborhood for some years and even frequented the same kiosks for our late night snacks.

We were sitting in a plaza crowded by people out for an afternoon walk. Children were kicking balls, dogs were running around, and people were seated at benches sharing a cup of *mate* or just looking at others passing by. Viktor spoke about the different work places he had worked at and what it had meant for him to be Russian there. He recalled when he worked in an ice cream parlor and spent the night shift talking to the owner:

> The owner is German descendant, so he told me: ‘Aha, so you’re Russian, I like that’ and then he hired me. Anyhow he had also seen before how I worked, but the fact I was Russian helped. We used to have long conversations about everything. He is from a German family who arrived in Misiones and he would tell me of his life and I would tell him of mine. //...// He was really nice, a señor who, just like all of us, had started at the bottom. He came here from Misiones when he was 18 and he told me that he slept in the street until he could find a place to live. So that’s not the same as having a boss who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, so to speak. He had also made it from down low, and that was really helpful in creating our relationship, in addition to the connection we had through our countries. We would spend every afternoon just talking. It was incredible.
This is a story that contains class, space, and labor, three central concepts in these experiences of migration. These late night chats between two men with origins in Europe – transcending class borders usually found in the relationship between worker and employer – seem to speak to the very essence of what it means for the participants to be a migrant in Argentina. Being an external or internal migrant in the capital of Buenos Aires, working oneself up from the bottom, even if only ever reaching a lower middle class position, translates into being a resourceful and morally dignified subject, but it also speaks of a particular European subject in relation to labor and space. As historian Daniel James has noted in his work on a woman who lived and worked in the meatpacking immigrant community of Berisso province of Buenos Aires for sixty years: “The image of the laborer is inseparable from the image of the immigrant” (James 2000:12).

“We are Good Workers”: Subject Positions and Identifications

Alexei, who had arrived at the age of sixteen with his parents, was initially forced to work in various subsidence jobs, but his parents had then managed to pay for a private university education in which he then trained in computer programming – a growing sector with high wages and demand for qualified staff. When we met, Alexei held a position within this booming sector and was thus the only one among the participants who had embarked upon a relocatory trajectory of upward mobility. When he spoke about the first years and the Argentine crisis it was from a safe distance:

Anyhow to us that crisis just seemed ... I mean yes it was a crisis but compared with what it was like in 1991 in the Soviet Union with the separation and the money that changed from one day to another. We even had ticket books (talonarios), you would cut out money from these books (laughs) so in comparison it was not so serious. Of course it was serious for this country, for Argentina, but for us, I mean we were already used to it. You just had to work a little bit more, simple as that.

This statement accounts for how central the perspective of work was for many participants, no matter what happens to you, as long as you work hard you will survive and also remain a dignified subject. This resonates with the ethos of homo sovieticus as a hardworking selfless subject at the service of the collective. It does however also fit well into a description of the protestant working ethics where hard work and sacrifice is the only way to salvation for working class subjects (Weber 1978).
As discussed in Chapter 5, Evhen, Valentyna and Myroslav’s experiences and articulations of a professional identity are different, yet this emphasis placed on work morals can also be seen in their narratives, for example in Valentyna’s exclaiming: “We don’t need much, just a place to live, bread and work, that’s it! Use us!” A central category for these discourses is labor and the subjects created in relation to it: “You just had to work a little bit more, simple as that” as Alexei said. Alina, who at the time of the interview ran her own business, reflected upon her situation as a migrant and a widow: “Through work one can achieve anything, right? And you do not depend on anyone. You depend on his (God’s) strength and his way.”

Viktor was far from the only participant recruited or accepted for a job because of his place of birth. In my material there are many similar statements, where Russians and Ukrainians are constructed as trustworthy subjects, fitting the description of good workers, both by themselves and others. The reader might recall how Myroslav was “discovered” by an Argentine employer who came to the Ukrainian parish looking for bakers, because “he knew Ukrainians were good workers”. Likewise, Igor said that Ukrainians had “a good reputation in Argentina” and a status as being “dedicated workers”. In Vadim’s story of his many work places he often mentioned that the employers wanted to hire “a Russian” since they were known to work hard. This is thus the making of a racialized categorization of a particular kind of worker. A crucial question that I will come back to is, who were they compared with in this meaning-making process?

When talking about their first impressions of Argentina, many mention how there was a clash between their own superior work morals and those of their Argentine employers. For example, Alina, born in the early 1960s in Ukraine, spoke of differences she encountered between the Russian and Argentine work culture that “shocked” her: “I didn’t like it at the beginning, a different perception, a different view, a different way of feeling, of seeing, behavior, a different mindset. I arrived, a Russian woman ready to work, to stick to my word or accepting someone else’s word”. Likewise, Natalia said she had felt frustrated during her initial time in Argentina, struggling to find work and understand the “Argentine way”. She remembered her first reactions to her new country:

The famous Argentine lies! They tell you something and then they do another thing. They tell you ‘don’t be so strict, don’t act so crazy!’ Well I am sorry but I need to eat. You promised me a job and I have travelled a long way to see you, spent money I don’t have on the trip and they tell me: “No, come back tomorrow or yesterday or call again. No, no!”
Louise Baker finds that many of the Ukrainian diaspora members tended to identify with a higher work ethic than the Argentines, as well as a certain resourcefulness and positive contributions to the society, self-descriptions common also to other European immigrant groups in the region (Baker 2011). A similar emphasis on how postsocialist migrants’ work morals and ethics differ from Argentines’ is also found in sociologist Susana Masseroni’s interviews with postsocialist migrants in Argentina (Masseroni 2008). Masseroni argues that this can be read as the migrant’s way of reflecting the Argentines’ images of their own society:

Always in contrast with the Argentines, they recognize themselves as workers, responsible, serious, foresighted, and respectful of keeping their word /.../ Argentines are attributed such qualities such as: lack of manners, that they are ‘liars’, they cannot keep their word, they are not punctual, and not very responsible (Masseroni 2008:129, my translation).

This kind of description can also be found in Eurocentric narratives of “the others” in former colonies (see Pratt 2003; Berg 2012:127), suggesting it is an internalized logic of coloniality that characterizes Argentines’ images of their own society, but also something that postsocialist migrants struggling with their relocatory trajectories could use in achieving upward mobility. When Natalia told me: “We are a working kind”, it was presented both as a claim of some sort and also as a defense against something, in a similar way that the word “professional” was used by the highly skilled participants who had suffered downward mobility. What does it then mean for Natalia to be a working kind?

**Labor and Coloniality**

**White Workers**

What is it that participants are claiming when articulating the position of being a good worker, and what subjects are constructed in this process? To understand this I suggest a deeper examination of the concept of labor and its historical relation to the concept of race in the local Argentine context, and also in an extended global space. Labor is a central category that structures positions and possibilities. The differentiation processes of labor markets and labor divisions are intertwined with other structures, such as class, gender, and race. Who is expected to fill certain positions of a society’s labor markets, such as, cleaning offices or private homes?
Labor historians have indicated how race, class, and labor were intertwined processes that co-constructed each other in the formation of the U.S. Fordist industry (Ignatiev 1995; Frye Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991). This could also be said to be the case for Argentina. As discussed in chapter 1, 19th century Argentine intellectual Juan Bautista Alberdi’s famous words “to govern is to populate” indicate that the development of the independent Argentine nation implied populating it with certain types of bodies while invisibilizing or erasing others. The “cleared” spaces were then to be populated by “the civilized races of Europe” that would come to work the land (Moya 1998:49). This is of course in relation to the post-colonial booming export economy where the “cleared” lands gave way to cereal plantation and beef-production, thus increasing the demand for immigrated labor (Moya 1998:58f). Intellectuals of the period 1880–1930 were preoccupied with the influence of colonial miscegenation on the white nation, some hoping that the waves of white migration Argentina was receiving from Europe would carry with them “all the qualities that supposedly belonged to the superior race: work, culture, democracy, and modernization” (Helg 1990:43, emphasis added).

These are just some examples from a long history of colonality where subjects and bodies have been constructed in accordance with Western modernity and its conceptualizations of civilized and brutes. It is relevant to see 19th century Argentine thinkers clearly thought labor and race were interlaced. For example, Domingo Faust Sarmiento, believed that:

An influx of Northern European immigrants would prove the key to the development of the nation as an agricultural and industrial power. The attempted erasure of the indigenous populations of the arable pampas was reasoned within the law that instigated it as justified since ‘the presence of the Indian impedes access to the immigrant who wishes to work’ (Faulk 2013:32, emphasis added).

As can be seen in Sarmiento’s thinking, the idea of European immigration is constructed in relation to the framing of Europeans as particular working subjects. Labor had a crucial role in the transformation of the modern nation of Argentina and plays an integral part in contemporary legal regulations and

3 Historian Aline Helg has traced the idea of race in Argentina, looking specifically at three Argentine intellectuals between the years 1880 to 1930. One of them, sociologist José Ingenieros (1877–1925), was occupied with the strategic whitening of the population as a solution to Argentina’s supposed problems of ‘backwardness’.
cultural constructions of bodies. Roediger has noticed that notions of whiteness and working subjects are entangled and constitutive for colonial history and post-colonial modernity in the Americas:

The term white arose as a designation for European explorers, traders and settlers who came into contact with Africans and the indigenous people of the Americas. As such, it appeared even before permanent British settlement in North America. Its early usages in America served as much to distinguish European settlers from Native Americans as to distinguish Africans from Europeans. Thus, the prehistory of the white worker begins with the settlers’ images of Native Americans (Roediger 2007: 21).

He further argues that these images, legitimizing the dispossession of Native Americans from their land, were crucially related to moral ideals of work and discipline. “Settlers, whether or not they worked harder or more steadily than Native Americans, came to consider themselves ‘hardworking whites’ in counterpoint for their imagination of Indian styles of life” (Roediger 2007: 21). The notion of white Europeans being hard workers can thus be placed within a specific historical context of colonial settlement.

I suggest that the constant emphasis on work and superior work moral that the participants articulated was fueled by the colonial historical discourse of European superiority. Positioned as migrants, located in vulnerable social positions, they strived to claim their right to a dignified life through articulations that echo the history of racial thinking. The meanings they assigned to this particular category and themselves as good workers can be seen as a reflection of the logic of coloniality, particularly striking in the city of Buenos Aires with its explicit racializing discourse (Mulinari & Neergaard 2011; Viladrich 2005:391). However, this colonial history affects not only this particular group or Argentina, but also global understandings of racialized labor divisions and constructions of European superiority or white privilege (see e.g. Bonilla-Silva 2006). There is a link between colonial modernity and Western organization of labor division. To present oneself as a trustworthy worker can be understood as a strategic positioning of whiteness and the entitlements and trajectories a white position brings about in an unequal society.

This argument does not, however, imply that the participants articulated this in a strategically racist manner. Rather, discourse maps the way they can navigate the social terrain of everyday life, making possible or impossible the articulation they could make. In this case a logic of coloniality circumscribes the positions they can occupy and the articulations they can make, thereby creating these racialized articulations. Their affective investment suggests
how their insistence on inscribing themselves as good worker subjects is also fueled by their hopes of upward mobility. This means that processes of inequality play a role in the making of racialized subjects.

As Robert Miles has argued, racialization processes of migrant labor in post-war Great Britain created an ideological racialized fragmentation of workers, in addition to that of class. This fragmentation was related to divisions within labor processes, hence maintaining and fortifying capitalist stratification of labor. Miles suggests that conflicts and tensions between classes within capitalist societies must thus also be understood along the lines of racialization (Miles 1982). The effects of this, seen in the articulation of these participants, are locally anchored in place-specific contexts and historical discourses, but this is also a phenomenon that can be found globally. For example the Swedish working class can also be said to be fragmented according to racialized differentiation 4.

Constructions of Europeanness

The second time I met Natalia she said that it was no trouble to take time to see me again; because we had something in common she wanted to help me. We met at a café with mirrors on the dark wooden walls. She was dressed in a black dress and through the window behind her I could see the traffic jams piling up alongside the iconic Obelisco statue that crowns Avenida 9 de Julio. It transpired that the thing we had in common was the geographical places where we were born. “You are from the same continent” she said and through a long circumlocution assuring me she was not a racist, she confessed that she often felt alone because she held herself to be superior than the persons surrounding her “They are not on my level here” she said, and looked at me as if this was a sentiment we shared.

A year later, I sat across another café table from Yulia. Yulia had left her dance studio located only a few blocks away to meet with me. It was in a quiet residential part of the city and people strolled by outside the open café window. Yulia talked intensively and laughed a lot. She was easy to talk to and I felt close to her. She had discrete earrings that caught the sunlight when she moved her head around. After a while she started to speak about things she disapproved of in Argentina. She paused with the cup in her hand

4Neergaard & Mulinari (2004) have for example argued that, through discursive and institutionalized practices Swedish workers are divided into two groups, where those considered to be immigrants are permanently positioned as reserve labor, or subordinated in working places and within labor unions.
seemingly searching for words. Perhaps as a means to counterbalance all the negative things she had just told me, she said that maybe Argentina was not so bad, the misuse of alcohol in Ukraine for example bothered her. She said that “in our Nordic and Soviet countries” people drank too much and I agreed, a bit surprised and strangely happy she had made me part of her “we”. She continued:

It makes me sad, really sad, because historically we are a strong race, one of the first races and ... we should really take care of ourselves better so that we do not destroy ourselves. That is what I think but it is not always possible to discuss it with people...

My sense of happiness for being included turned into an awkward feeling. The idea of race was clearly something that constructed a sense of superiority in the case of Natalia and Yulia. It was also something that constructed my position as an insider, creating a shared “we” as Europeans or whites. Following this, whiteness seemed to be an important feature in most participants’ lives, but also a crucial category for understanding how meaning is created.

As Frankenberg has noted, race is a social construction that shapes people’s lives, regardless of being black or white. “White people are ‘raced’ just as men are ‘gendered’” and therefore it is important to examine how race and whiteness plays a part in lived experience (Frankenberg 1993:1). When discussing whether she had met any discrimination in Argentina Yulia told me:

It’s the other way around here, they ... they have a lot of respect for you. Here I understood that merely due to the fact that I was born with white skin I have a major advantage. I understood it here, in Ukraine I never noticed, there you were surrounded by white people, right, there you’re just one of millions, it’s normal. Here I understood that because I saw some discrimination and I said ‘ah I have to be really thankful that I am white, blonde and that opens doors for me in the world, only that fact.

Yulia described, “becoming white” in Argentina. Others have described how inter-racial interactions in the form of, for example, romantic love or friendship can create turning points for white people in understanding racial inequality and themselves as white (McKinney 2006; Frankenberg 1993). However, in Yulia’s case it is not so much the interaction with people racialized as black or less white, as the comparison per se that makes her realize the ways she embodies whiteness and what that does to her as a subject
positioned as a migrant. It was the observed discrimination of Latin American migrants and the urban poor that served as a highlighter of her whiteness. These are groups with whom she herself is compared at a subject position level. This comparison can be understood as related to how public discourse targeted Latin American migrants as scapegoats for the aggravation of economic and social problems during the neoliberal 1990s (Gavazzo 2010:19).

Yulia was not the only participant to make this comparison. When Ivan tried to explain the situation his parents were living in he juxtaposed it against their Latin American peers:

Most of our people couldn’t get up, start a life, there was no integration policies, luckily they treat us well, it’s a plus to be from Europe, they treat you a little bit better, not like those from neighboring countries, they make shit out of them, destroy them, I suppose you know what it’s like ... Luckily they treat us well.

Most said they had never been discriminated against, or that they were lucky compared to what other migrants were subjected to in Buenos Aires. This is also expressed in other interviews with postsocialist migrants in Argentina (Escoffier & Sellaro 2010:138). Yet at the same time, as described in chapter 5, Ivan and his parents would also describe the downward mobility they had suffered as signs of discrimination. It seemed that the acknowledgment of discrimination depended on with whom one was compared.

As Fataneh Farahani’s research on diasporic masculinities indicates, to present oneself as a victim of racist or discriminatory practices is something individuals might hesitate to do, regardless of experiencing degradation of their former work merits and titles (Farahani 2013:159). Farahani proposes that this can be understood as “men’s desire to present themselves as an indisputable part of a collective (white) we” (Farahani 2013:160, italics in original). Yulia and others like her described an experience, where white or black are not necessarily descriptions of one’s physical appearance, but also of someone’s educational capital, manners, or social status. Understandings of whiteness and the groups or individuals that can embody its traits are indeed contingent and vary over time and with circumstances (Jacobson 1998:10). Natalia also spoke of discrimination and racism during our encounters. The way her body looked and her geographical origin were features she could use in everyday life struggles:
Jenny: What is it like to be a European immigrant here? Do you think there are differences between how they treat you or a Peruvian, Bolivian or Chinese woman? **Natalia:** No, I think there’s a lot difference! Everybody wants to be European; they tell me ‘my grand grandfather on mother’s side, no my uncle’s, was German’. I say, ‘well, I am Ukrainian, I, not my ancestor that I can’t even remember’. Do you understand? I am privileged in many ways. Sincerely I am very happy to live in this country. //...// They treat me really different ... I don’t know. I practically have access to where ever I want to, green lights in the majority of cases. Today in this clinic of a crappy private health insurance there was a coordinator that just had to look at me and I just had to open my mouth and she took me where I wanted to go.

The woman in the health clinic had helped her only because of her appearance, implying the many, for white people, invisible privileges those who excel in performing whiteness enjoy in everyday life (McIntosh 1998). Others have discussed how national, gender, and class belongings can serve as a sort of capital that creates an embodied symbolic legitimacy (Lundström & Winddance 2011:77; Skeggs 2004:16). Even if Natalia was able to benefit from white privileges, she did still feel the need to describe her Europeanness as more authentic than the many descendants of European migrants in Argentina. This is relevant because it points towards something crucial in the material regarding race and labor that will be developed below.

In his work on European immigration, Frye Jacobsen starts from the premise that the most important factor for understanding the history of European immigration and settlement in the U.S is race (Frye Jacobson 1998:8):

> The European immigrants’ experience was decisively shaped by their entering an arena where Europeanness – that is to say, whiteness – was among the most important possessions one could lay claim to. It was their whiteness, not any kind of New World magnanimity, that opened the Golden Door (Frye Jacobson 1998:8).

The mere existence of this Golden Door to the Americas, in this case the U.S., was of course also made possible through massive military violence directed towards those who inhabited the land, followed by a framework of migratory policies inspired by racial thinking. Anthropologist Galen Joseph has examined the power relations between two constructions of identity that are crucial for contemporary Argentina: “el ser porteño/person from Buenos Aires City” and “el ser europeo/being European”, and she argues that racial identity is both ambiguous and central for national identity (2000). Race is a
category that creates meaning both at a global level as well as within the nation’s social hierarchies. Joseph suggests, “whiteness crystallizes as a form of ‘cultural capital’, a sign of belonging to an idealized European or first world community” (Joseph 2000:334).

This is a local construction, but this Europeanness is always ambivalent and also created in negotiations with constructions of whiteness elsewhere in the world. As Joseph demonstrates in analyzing the porteño middle-class and elite’s discourse of seriousness – just like porteños can be constructed as the Europeans of Argentina and Buenos Aires as a first world city of Latin America, porteños might very well be understood as Latin American, and Buenos Aires as a third world capital, depending upon the position of the beholder (Joseph 2000). Like the “European immigrants” in Frye Jacobsen’s analysis, participants in my study saw the doors open for them due to their origin. Alexei described the advantages of being European in Argentina:

Here, at least in Argentina, to come from Europe, or from Eastern Europe is an advantage, they treat you like a person of good quality, let’s say it like that eh ... they never ... Beside the time when I had to learn how to speak Spanish and they made fun of me because I said stuff that was not adequate, apart from that I have never felt ... any kind of racism or something like that, nor discrimination.

Frye Jacobsen points out the role of legislation in the creation of a desired Europeanness in the U.S. historical context. The call for “white persons” in the U.S. naturalization law was what fostered European immigration in the first place. In a similar manner, the migration agreement that allowed the wave of postsocialist migration to Argentina can be read as a continuation of similar Argentine racial policies where European immigration was desired. This underlines the mutual relation between state policies and racial constructions of everyday life. It also directs us towards the impact that labor demand has had on state policies and in extension, on racial constructions.

Similar to the U.S. context, immigration and labor are an integral part in the transformation of the modern nation of Argentina and play a fundamental role in the legal regulations and the way bodies are constructed and acted towards. I suggest that the participants’ ways of constructing meaning

5 Mulinari and Neergaard have also noted this ambivalent positioning of the city of Buenos Aires and its inhabitants, designating it as a “semi-peripherical” city in geopolitical hierarchization of the so-called “Third World” (Mulinari & Neergard 2011:58).
regarding their own position and value are related to this recent colonial history of how labor was divided racially (Barret & Roediger 1997:16). When they say they are good workers or that they are treated like persons of “good quality” they describe an actual reality influenced by a logic of coloniality. It can be understood as a way to secure positions in labor markets that simultaneously articulated a logic of coloniality. After Viktor had told me about his job with the German boss and their shared experience of working up from the bottom, he said:

A lot of people say that it is easier to get a job if you are Russian, because they say that Russians are very good workers, as electricians or construction workers. The thing is that there is so much discrimination towards the neighboring countries. Let’s say that you’re from Peru and already at the door they will tell you no, ‘no, we will not hire you because you are from Peru, I do not like how Peruvians work’. So already from the start they don’t treat everyone in the same way, and perhaps you’re really a good worker, but if you’re Peruvian they just ignore you.

Latin American migrants constitute an important relational position for participants’ constructions of identifications in relation to labor. When I first started to talk to acquaintances or strangers in Buenos Aires about my research project, I often found that they made a difference between postsocialist migrants and other groups. In particular I remember an upper-class porteño man who when he heard about my topic, similar to my landlord quoted in the beginning of chapter 2, said: “Oh, those are good people that Argentina need, a superior race than the Peruvians or Bolivians.” I posit that meanings of the present are anchored in meanings of the past. To make meaning out of a comment like this, one needs to analyze it through its re-articulating link to past settler colonialism. Likewise, the rumors of the land plots that were to have existed within the agreement, as well as the rhetoric of filling empty Argentine lands with European immigrants, resembles the same logics of coloniality that shaped the modern republic of 1853. This points to how the racialization of postsocialist migrants, constructed as hard-working white subjects, re-articulates a colonial logic and thus creates a present characterized by coloniality. Further, it also illustrates how the postsocialist migrants, in spite of the strategic whiteness they strived to

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6 A world system theorists would probably also draw parallels to is the mita, the Inca mandatory labor system, and how the Spanish conquistors’ encomienda, a racialized labor system, was a reworking of the mita.
construct, were expected to occupy a certain class position – as workers and not as professionals.

A crucial factor here is the question of social inequality, one of the major problems of contemporary social issues in Argentina (Grimson 2015:198). Natalia, Victor and others like them did indeed enjoy advantages of white European privilege, however, they were compared with, and favored before, Latin American racialized migrants when they competed in lower sector labor markets, not with Argentines. Natalia had initially worked in the Buenos Aires textile industry, one sector where many Bolivian migrants are concentrated (Gavazzo 2010:15):

I have university studies; I suppose that is how it could be described, as professor of tailoring and design. I am very good at sewing /…/ there were some moments when I made a lot of money /…/ but really, tailoring isn’t valued here. They do not appreciate this kind of work /…/ I worked with the big brands here, but really I saw a lot of work being done in an unfitting way, they do not employ educated personnel because they would ask for a bigger pay check.

The textile and clothing industry of Argentina has long been a racialized sector where migrants both employ others and work (Pacecca & Courtis 2008:38f). Natalia held an underpaid position there until she had the possibility to change for a workplace with better conditions and wages. Those who continued working there however did not have that possibility. In competition for un-skilled or semi-skilled positions participants could enjoy white privileges, for example being favored before others. Whether that would have been the case for Evhen and Myroslav if their titles would have been accepted is hard to say, but one might suppose that the more skilled position, the embodiment of whiteness, would come less down to who was actually born on European soil than who could enact the right kind of professional subject.

In my own experience in Argentina, I had never felt a need to position Europeanness in the way Natalia did. However, unlike Natalia and other participants with whom I shared experiences of being positioned as a white and educated person, I had myself never had to compete in low-skilled labor markets. With a strong government state behind me, I had the opportunity to live in Argentina while occasionally enjoying support and loans for students from Swedish welfare programs. Likewise, Alina who shortly after arriving had married a man from the local elite and thus had lived a privileged life in Argentina did not speak of herself as European; neither did she
mention using her origin as a conscious strategy in everyday life. As I asked her about racism in Argentine society she told me:

Well, if you listen to my side of the story, it will only be all positive. It’s my way of being, start from where I am, but it is also what’s in it for each one of us, right? I had a wonderful life. There are things I didn’t like in Argentina, but I always took another way then/…/ I always tried to see the positive things, it doesn’t matter if I am here or in Brazil or Bolivia.

Alina thought Argentina had a “foreign spirit. Not in every country can you find that”. Perhaps it does, but that is probably a spirit more palpable for those with economic means who can avoid the difficulties of de-regulated labor markets. Tesfahuney and Schough have noted how Western nationalities enjoy “global travel privilege” which mean the world appears to them as a welcoming environment (Tesfahuney & Schough 2010). Alina did not enjoy the privileges that a Western passport brings along in terms of possible mobility, yet the social mobility she could achieve through economic resources placed her in a favorable subject position, from which she could look at the world as a “room of possibilities” (Grandin 2007:329).

To Be a Dignified White Subject: Relational Meaning-Making

For Natalia and other participants who like her had gotten by with subsistence jobs and still struggled in marginal circumstances, it seemed more important to be positioned as a good worker or European. Natalia described Slavic migrants as being hard working people making a clear reference to the many impoverished street vendors in Buenos Aires:

Jenny: What do the Argentines know of Ukraine? What knowledge do they have? Natalia: That they are working people. Everyone that came here, we never walk around like that in the street, begging, selling socks. No, no! We look for a job. That is the first thing they know //…// Jenny: Do they make a difference? Do they make distinctions between the ones that came with your wave, let’s say between Romania and Ukraine? Natalia: No, no, no, no! Not Romania, no, they are all brown people /…/ They are people who beg in the street, they play the accordion and walk around with a sign where they ask for money.

The most crucial thing for Natalia when she makes a distinction between Ukrainians and Romanians are that they are not white. “Morocha” is the
actual word she uses and it means dark-skinned. In articulating this distinction she is, however, not only talking about how the migrants from Romania look, but about their behavior and a social classification where the Romanians are not considered to be dignified subjects. As Frye Jacobsen has demonstrated, becoming a respectable white subject is much about whom you are contrasted with (Jacobsen 1998:16). For whiteness to make sense as a privileged position, someone has to be less white. This can be compared to James R. Barrett and David Roediger’s work on how Eastern and Southern European immigrants were racially located in-between when arriving in the U.S. in the early 20th century:

But if the world of work taught the importance of being ‘not black’, it also exposed new immigrants to frequent comparisons and close competition with African Americans. The results of such clashes in the labor market did not instantly propel new immigrants into either the category or the consciousness of whiteness. Instead management created an economics of racial inbetween-ness which taught new immigrants the importance of racial hierarchy while leaving open their place in that hierarchy (Barrett & Roediger 1997:15).

This illustrates how capitalist production and lacking labor rights reinforces racialization of working class subjects. The contempt for the Romanians that Natalia expressed could be analyzed as part of the same racializing relational mechanism operating in the wake of social inequality7. Discriminating treatments in labor markets and unequal wages for other racialized and discriminated groups, such as Bolivian, Paraguayan, and Peruvian migrants have been extensive practices in Argentina (FitzGerald & Cock-Martín 2014:331). A survey from the years these interviews were conducted indicates how Latin American migrants and particularly Peruvians were highly likely to suffer discrimination in various everyday life situations in Buenos Aires (Grimson 2015). As is clear in the quote from Natalia, in order for her to be positioned as a dignified subject she has to create difference from racialized and discriminated groups since the comparisons threaten to make her less white and respectable. That is the most strategic choice that discursive structures of labor and race present her with.

7 It is probable that Natalia confuses the national epithet Romanian with Roma, as she describes a classical image of the Roma community as street beggars. This also has an interesting parallel to the impact of policies as Argentina’s traditional migration policies where the Roma constituted the only exception to the free immigration policies (FitzGerald & Cock-Martín 2014:330).
Similar to Natalia’s creation of distance, Louise Baker emphasizes how the diaspora Ukrainian community she studied created distance to Bolivian, Paraguayan, and Peruvian migrants, who they held to be “irrational”. Baker writes that the Ukrainians established in Argentina for generations “situate themselves as an example of successful, dignified European immigration to Argentina, in relation to immigrants who cannot help themselves” (Baker 2011:11). In their fieldwork in Buenos Aires between the years 2001 to 2006, Mulinari and Neergaard found that one notion of “decent” subjects is constructed around images of former, supposedly, decent European migrants who made their way to a good life through hard work, juxtaposed against contemporary migrants as well as piqueteros, who were seen as not wanting to work8 (Mulinari & Neergaard 2011:66f). Thus when participants ascribed themselves to the category of good European workers, they were articulating this racializing discourse where social inequality is explained with the subject’s lacking decency. Natalia, for example, is very fast to point out that she works instead of begging or selling things in the street, thus making her a decent worker and a decent European migrant.

These kinds of contrasting processes were observed also in the 19th century U.S. contexts where, for example, Irish migrants would regularly claim that African-American workers “were lazy, improvident and irresponsible” (Roediger 2007:154). Roediger argues that they “were used to hearing such characterizations applied to themselves, and not only by political enemies but also by their own newspapers, that fretted over the need to develop a ‘work ethic’ among the newly arrived (Roediger 2007:154). One can then also attribute some of the tensions between the postsocialist migrants and the Ukrainian diaspora community, to these classed processes of racialization. Baker contends that tension was constructed in the context of contemporary government and media coverage where the newly arrived migrants and their harsh conditions where aligned with Latin American migrants, thus degrading “the immigrant values historically upheld by Ukrainians in Argentina to display themselves as successful immigrants with a unique past and a unique set of values as a nation” (Baker 2011:3). Hence, the arrival, and

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8 The heterogeneous piquetero-movement surfaced in the 1990s and was constituted by those who most suffered the consequences of the neoliberal reforms; displaced persons, day laborers, unemployed, sub employed etc. (Alcañiz & Scheier 2008:273). In need of decent work and social assistance they occupied roads or public spaces, hindering traffic with for example burning tires, vehicles or their own bodies as an ultimate resort to making their claims heard (Villalón 2008:259).
following despair, of the postsocialist migrants threatened to make the established diaspora communities appear as less white, less decent.

After our visit to the lunch place in the harbor area, Kyrylo drove us back to the city. We talked about the Argentinean concept of Ukrainians and Russians being good workers. Kyrylo navigated between jammed lanes, cut in between taxis, and nearly got run over by buses. In Buenos Aires traffic, the bigger vehicle, the more rights you have, and Kyrylo seemed to live by this rule. He steered his big truck and smiled when they honked their horn after us at the same time as he remembered when he had employed some Ukrainians who had arrived at the same time as his family. “They say we are workers, that might be. But I’ll tell you that I had some compatriots working with me and never again. Never again”! We stopped at a traffic light; some old ladies were slowly making it across, dragging their dogs behind them. Kyrylo watched the ladies while he explained that those he had employed were drunks who did drugs and made a mess out of his workshop. “Now I understand the old ones, the old Ukrainians that when we had recently arrived and we went to them to ask for a job, they said: ‘Not here guys’. I really understand them”.

Kyrylo was talking from an established position, the position of an employer that can choose. He was thus more aligned with the established diaspora community and Argentina as a society. The light changed, I held an old copy of the bus guide GuíaT in my hands, looking for the best place for him to drop me off. He saw it and memories from his first years in the city came pouring out of him. We shared stories from different bus routes, remembering situations when we had been lost. Many years had passed since that had happened to either of us and when we realized that we laughed together, an easy laughter of belonging. Politely trying to decline his flirtatious invitation to continue drinking beer – “that would have been nice but I am working” I told him – I found a suitable spot for him to drop me off. Before I got out of the car Kyrylo gave me a nicely crafted mate-cup he had made himself, I held it in my hand as I walked towards my flat. Just another white woman, performing gendered, classed, and racialized decency, belonging to this cosmopolitan city in the global South, so characterized by social inequality and moral economies.

Moral Economies and Poverty
A constant process of negotiation characterized participants’ relocatory trajectories; they were positioned as migrants, while assigned difference in
relation to other migrant groups. They were positioned as Europeans, yet were not considered European enough to have the gates to Western countries opened for them. They were well educated, something recognized by people they met in their everyday life, but still not accepted by the Argentine state. When they spoke about their relocatory trajectories through these kinds of negotiations and positionings they were very determined in positioning themselves as survivors on their own merit, without having asked anyone for help. I suggest that the act of asking for help would have created certain kinds of subject positions through a process of relational meaning-making.

Ekaterina is one out of four people in my material that described a situation where she had asked for help. We were sitting on a bench in a park. Ekaterina’s newborn baby was asleep in the stroller and Ekaterina had told me to hold the recorder in my hand, because “you never know”. In her narrative she first told me how she was pregnant, unemployed and homeless – circumstances that led up to her asking for help. Perhaps this can be understood as a strategy to prepare the listener for understanding how she could ask for help and still be a dignified subject. Desperate for help Ekaterina had then approached a Russian church where she was given shelter for free. Then her mother in Russia “found out” about her situation and started sending money. “She sent 200 dollars per month and with that I could manage to keep my phone, my social security, and there was something left so that ... with that I could start paying rent over time”. This can be seen as a reversal of the remittance economy, instead of sending money back from their new country, Ekaterina was one of three participants who in my material that said they had received money from relatives in Ukraine or Russia in order for them to survive in post-crisis Argentina. This phenomenon has also been observed by journalists after the financial crisis of 2008 in the Western countries (Schott 2009). Ekaterina continued her story:

Then I tried to get into a social benefits program, whatever they could give me, but here in Argentina you have to be a shantytown dweller with ten kids for the government to really help you. I signed up for different allowances and all ... I remember once in ANSES (National Administration of Social Security) I got into a fight, I stood up ‘Excuse me, do I have to be a black shantytown dweller (villera negra) and have a whole kindergarten of children beside me for you to give me some economic support?

Ekaterina had received some help from the Kirchner government’s child support system but that was taken from her after she had received a food
check from another program. It made her really angry to talk about her futile efforts to receive economic support and she identified the cause to be that she did not fit into the image of someone in a scarce economic situation.

While the Latin American migrants mostly figure as a point of relational reference in the participants’ stories about labor markets, the shantytown dweller seems to figure as a point of relational reference in Ekaterina’s story of competition for state benefits. Ekaterina’s usage of the words ‘villera’ and ‘negra’ designates a stigmatized position that is both racialized and classed. ‘Villera’ is a derogatory word for a female shantytown dweller, and ‘negra’ means black, but is also a common Argentinean way to describe people who live in marginal conditions or that are uneducated. To be identified as a villero or villera is a highly discriminated position in contemporary Argentina, even worse than discrimination towards Latin American migrants (Grimson 2014:51).

Furthermore, as Grimson has noted, the term “negro” has distinct articulations in Argentina. It can be said in an affectionate way to signal closeness to someone beloved, but it can also be used in a harsh and clearly racist manner (Grimson 2016:38). This is how it comes across in Ekaterina’s statement. Frankenberg noticed how race as a discursive ordering principle and racial hierarchical orders are always related to material relations of racism (Frankenberg 2005:21). Ekaterina’s quote has to be situated in a racialized discourse on social inequality, to signal someone as “black” is to ascribe them into a category that is determined in time and space. As Gavazzo suggests, “blackness was constructed in Argentina around characteristics other than the conventional African phenotype: in common language, to be ‘poor’ was to be ‘black’” (Gavazzo 2010:18).

Ekaterina believed that she had been denied help because of her ascribed whiteness. There is of course no possibility to ask the social worker how they reasoned in this particular case, but one might assume that this is the most possible conclusion presented by the discourses she is situated in. The position of marginality she had to embody in order to receive help was a position of marginality usually racialized as black, and localized to determined urban spaces – the shantytown with its many implications discussed in chapter 4.

This is impossible I told her, that the government, ok fine I am a foreigner, but I have become naturalized and I have Argentine documents, my children are Argentines, it cannot be that you have to go out to the street, that you have to protest, I mean belong to that people that block the
streets, who live in the shantytowns in order for the state to give you something.

With “that people” Ekaterina refers to urban poor or protestors like the piqueteros, all inscribed into racialized, classed, and gendered positions of not being worthy subjects or undeserving poor (see e.g. Alcañiz & Scheier 2008; Villalón 2008:). In this way poverty is made a racialized phenomena, it is assigned a color and marked by class for example in terms of spatial belongings to shantytowns, marginal spaces or places outside of the nation (see Anderson 2015b:80). Kyrylo spoke in a similar manner about the state’s welfare programs. Upon arrival his parents had asked a diaspora organization for help, but it turned out their help program was a “badly arranged scam”. He explained how he had reasoned when his wife a couple of years later wanted to ask for child support allowance from the state:

No, never again, no help from anyone, nothing at all, last of all from the state... I do not know if that is good or bad ... but no! ‘La flaca’ wanted to get child support, and I told her ‘no way baby, over my dead body! How much time will you have to spend in ANSES (National Administration of Social Security), in AFIP (Federal Agency of Public Income), in the bank? How much? And for what? Only for them to give you 400 pesos? No, that does not do. To be there with all the negritas? No. So that the child gets infected?’(laughs).

What is it that Kyrylo fears his child would get infected with? He uses the word “negritas”, a diminutive form for “black women”, to describe those who sign up for the governmental child support program. If whiteness is contingent and disembodied, something one performs rather than inherits, I suggest that it is their blackness in terms of the social stigma that he articulates through this phrase and which he is afraid of. The “negritas” Kyrylo imagines in ANSES are thus not necessarily black, their appearance has less to do with skin color, than with the racialized moral economies that ascribe meaning to their positions. Whiteness is a social construction rather than an actual phenotype, in order for participants to maintain a respectable (see Skeggs 1997) or dignified whiteness it becomes important for them to mark their distance to the urban poor and shantytown dwellers. Especially in the uncertain terrains of receiving state welfare – which could translate into not being a capable subject in neoliberal society.

Evhen and Valentyna had found some advantages from being Ukrainian, such as having their son admitted for free to a European private kindergarten.
However, obstructed by bureaucratic procedures, lacking intra-state regulation regarding academic titles, and economic impossibilities to dedicate time to studies, Valentyna was resentful with her and Evhen’s situation. “You won’t get anything for free here”, she said when talking about a European visitor who had been shocked they had not received any help upon arrival in Argentina. She imitated the surprise in the visitor’s voice: “‘Well what do you mean they don’t give you anything?’ Yes, they do give, they give to shantytowns because they scream, they demand, they squat houses”. This is a typical Argentine discourse that participants relate to when narrating their experiences of asking for help or not, always constructing themselves as different from the urban poor.

In the 1990s a series of social programs was launched in order to curb social protest. For example “Plan Trabajar” was often mentioned in public discourse as an example that the urban poor preferred receiving these subsidies instead of working. However, statistics indicate that only 13.7 % of the total of unemployed in 1997, when Plan Trabajar was in force, received economic support through a “Plan” or an unemployment insurance (Cerrutti & Grimson 2007:292). In 2002 a new series of social programs was launched. “Plan Jefas y Jefes de Hogar Desocupados” replaced “Plan Trabajar” and granted a small subsidy every month to a larger number of families who in return did community work or similar (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:293).

Stereotypes about poor people or about individuals who receive subsidies are of course nothing new (Young 1990). Seemingly persistent these tropes on receivers of subsidies appear around the globe, yet with local ingredients. In a former welfare state like Sweden, welfare recipients have sometimes been accused of “cheating” the system, perhaps even more so during the last couple of years when the neoliberal economy has tightened public spending budgets. A study from Canada, for instance, indicates how women living in poverty internalized the discourse of welfare recipients as illegitimate subjects that are dependent upon the state. The poor were understood as subjects that lacked willpower or knowledge, or were constructed as lazy or unmotivated, relying on the welfare system because of their lack of individual free will and capabilities (Reid & Tom 2006:409f). Others have noted, how in recent EU austerity contexts, subjects who fall short in new job market realities are constructed as responsible for social exclusion, their despair “explained by shortcomings in their identity, if not in their genes” (Johnson & Willén 2017:2f).

In this kind of discourse social problems, such as poverty and homelessness, are located as a fault within individuals; implicit in the discourse
Kyrylo and Ekaterina articulated is a criticism of the Kirchner government’s social program of transferring money to destitute mothers. Some participants, especially those in opposition to the Fernandez-Kirchner government, in office at the time of the interviews, kept referring to how the poor lived off subsidies in ways that echoed the opposition’s discourse and a traditional criticism of Peronist social policy. Implied in the liberal economy is the notion that economic growth enables wealth to be shared within society. Couze Venn has argued, “supplement of this view, inscribed in neoliberalism, is that the poor have only themselves to blame, because of their backwardness, underdevelopment, or their inadequacies as economic subjects” (Venn 2009:207).

The elite’s criticism of Peronism and its social policies do also have a history of racialization that is important here. As described in the background chapter, the many internal migrants who moved from rural provinces to the city during the import-substitution industrialization of Peron’s government were referred to as a “zoological flooding”, represented by the Argentine elite as bodies lacking adequate civilization for the city of Buenos Aires (Montesinos 2005:51, Joseph 2000:355, Sarlo 2009). Racialization plays a part in the formation of political identities and social divisions related to Peronism. Workers, the poor, people with indigenous traits, and provincial migrants were associated politically with Peronism: “to be ‘negro’ was to be Peronist and vice versa” (Grimson & Kessler 2005:122).

This is yet another example of how class and race can be forged in the same processes of social fabric. As Grimson has pointed out, when workers from peripheral spaces marched into Buenos Aires to demand the freedom of coronel Juan Domingo Perón on October 17th 1945, the Argentina social

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9 For many years, scholars constructed the supporters of Perón in a prejudiced way. For instance, sociologists like Gino Germani described Peronists as immature proletarians who, unable to maintain a political and social identity in a new urban environment, could be used and manipulated by populists (James 2002:279). Peron’s supporters were spatialized as not belonging to federal capital, and assigned barbarism. Historian Daniel James, however, argues that the political success of Perón is to be found in his expansion of the meaning of citizenship and his construction of a new political subject that included the formerly excluded (James 2002:282). Peron’s populist rhetoric can thus be understood as expanding the meaning of who belonged to the nation. Some argue that with Perón, marginalized groups were included in the national narrative and given a role in constructing the nation and defining the future. Women gained voting rights, indigenous people obtained citizenship and the large number of mestizo rural workers was given labor rights (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003:15).

10 A common way to construct migrants when they are perceived as a threat is to use these kinds of metaphors from nature.
classification system was shattered and renegotiated. New categories, such as the classed and racialized denominations of “descamisado” (shirtless) and “cabecita negra” (little blackhead) came into being while the meanings of “criollos” and “argentino” were re-inscribed (Grimson 2016:31ff). Participants were thus articulating a quite common Argentine discourse, related both to actual social policies at the time of the interviews, and also to racial imaginaries where certain subjects had been constructed as “blacks” due to their territorial origin or their social position. However, at the same time they were talking from a vulnerable position where their dignity as morally worthy and respectable subjects might be questioned as they, in this case, competed for the same resources. This indicates that social inequality turns people against each other and enhances racialization in the process.

Possible Pasts, Socially Unequal Presents, and Uncertain Futures

Historian Richard Graham has argued that when the idea of race became articulated as a scientific concept in the nineteenth century, it served a hegemonic function similar to how historians have argued that dominant classes have exercised over the entire culture of their society, making their ideologies accepted also by the groups controlled by them. Graham argues that this functioned both in nation states and across states as varying degrees of economic and political power could be maintained and justified:

Within colonial and neo-colonial regions of the world it often legitimated rule by the metropolis. The idea of race also made it possible, paradoxically, for mestizos and mulattoes – by identifying themselves with white elites as against Indians or black majorities – to accept theories that justified white domination over ‘colored’ populations (Graham 2006:1).

Postsocialist migrants and their conditions in Argentina were often, by themselves or by others, compared to Latin American migrants’ and shantytown dwellers’ situations in this way, where it is implicit that the Ukrainian

11 “Descamisado” when invented by Perón meant “poor”, “poorly dressed”, or the literal “without coat”, he associated the term with the French ‘sans-culottes’ (Grimson 2016:31). There have been various functions and meanings ascribed to the signifier “criollo”, usually it designates something national, originally someone born of European parents on American soil. The Argentine “criollismo” discourse has been articulated in manifold ways by various social actors, often in relation to spatial and national constructions of belonging (see Prieto 2006).

12 Grimson has argued that the idea of the protagonists of October 17 as Argentines was not a reference to their place of birth but a political recognition (Grimson 2016:33).
and Russian bodies placed in similar precarious circumstances represented an anomaly. They were “good workers” and thus should not be in the same marginal positions as the urban poor or discriminated Latin American migrants. However, when positioning oneself as a good worker as a means of articulating claims of entitlements and respectability, they reproduced former colonial and racist ideas tied to the concept of the good European worker. The quote with Yulia illustrates this in how she spoke about the post-Soviet crisis in Ukraine:

So well you could see really sad things, like retired people, and not only retired, but people with two or three university degrees that were asking for money in the street, they were selling stuff from their apartments, old stuff, they needed to live, they did not have enough money to live. And these were, I mean, I am talking about teachers, doctors, people who were specialized, people with titles.

These descriptions were very similar to the way people sometimes described the aftermath of the Argentine crisis. It seemed that the contrast between educated subjects, “people with titles” and the brutal face of poverty was a salient feature when people remembered what it was like, regardless of it being Ukraine or Argentina. It’s as if the effect dislocatory events had on the relation between education and a safe future was the most shocking. Yulia went on to talk about this link between educational capital and a stable future:

They knew that if you study you will receive a diploma and with that diploma you can get a job, and in addition to getting a salary you will have vacations. You could plan your life, maybe there were, not ugly stuff, but limitations like you couldn’t travel for example //…// In that way we had limitations, but it wasn’t, I don’t feel that it was a bad period.

The dislocatory events in Ukraine and Russia broke the link between educational investment and future revenues. This is a contingency that I suggest is hard to re-establish in relocatory trajectory, given that, for many, this link remained shattered. Yulia’s narrative is presented in a terrain that is more stable than those first years in Argentina, yet still insecure. The inability to recover the contingent link between education and future vindications of one’s merits make the present and its future uncertain. There is no possibility to “plan your life” and this thus also recreates the past. Berlant has argued that the conditions of increasingly precarious times, the withdrawal of the state from emergent economic inequality and legal rights has led to the loss of
“postwar optimism for democratic access to the good life” (Berlant 2011:3). Yulia continued:

No one is perfect, it has its negative and positive sides to live in the Soviet Union, but it must be said that my mom had and always felt eh … secure about her future, that she would still have a job tomorrow, she knew her children would be able to study. Tomorrow … we always talked about tomorrow like something in a future that was … real … and stable, right? Attainable. The 90s were like … let’s see, I don’t know, what will happen tomorrow, no one knew and a lot of people tried to escape from that, they felt that in other countries they would attain better positions, that they would be more valued.

This longing for security, stability, and predictability is also present in Masseroni et al.’s interviews with postsocialist migrants in Argentina. The interviewees long for the security of knowing that they could put food on the table, get healthcare, receive education and a corresponding job position, go on vacation, and predict the future (Masseroni et al. 2010:37f). Others have noted how in the postsocialist context, retrospective from a neoliberal present, the postwar period is remembered as a time of certainty and economic stillness (see e.g. Croegaert 2011). Pine suggests that ethnographic research from the postsocialist period was characterized by a “theme of loss of opportunity and abandonment of hope for entire populations of workers and citizens who had under socialism lived in a relatively calm, secure, and settled world where the future had been, or had seemed to be, certain” (Pine 2014:96).

Like so many others, after the dislocatory events Yulia placed her hope of a future restored meritocracy in a spatial location somewhere beyond the postsocialist region. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is not only relevant for the postsocialist region. Berlant argues that since the 1980s, when the social-democratic promise from the postwar period – that a good life is achievable – was withdrawn in favor of liberal capitalism, there is no longer a possibility for a democratic access to this “good life”. However, Berlant argues, people still hold on to these ideas, particularly to dreams about “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality”, included in this “set of dissolving assurances” is also meritocracy (Berlant 2011:3). Yulia then went on to tell me that the social inequality she was seeing in the street in everyday Argentinean life, however, was different from the one she had seen in Ukraine:

Not like here, here you can see a whole family, mother, father ... the average age 30 years and with 18 kids that beg for money in the street and
you just want to kill them, because they are, they are not handicapped, they have their bodies, they are young and they do not want to work. They do not want to work, they only thing they know is how to make babies, do you understand? They only know how to make babies and they beg for money, that’s life for them.

Here she was articulating elements of the Argentinean discourse discussed above, where poverty is turned into an inherent lack of individual qualities in subjects. Implicated in her statement is also the moral issue of motherhood and poverty. Bridget Anderson has demonstrated how constructions of poverty and “deservingness” are gendered phenomena (Anderson 2015b: 74). Above I discussed how Ekaterina was able to use her situation of pregnancy as a narrative strategy to position herself as a worthy subject while at the same time asking for social subsidies. In her remark about her meeting in the governmental office where her solicitation was declined, she created meaning about her own position in relation to racialized shantytown dwellers, “villeras negras” with a “kindergarten of children” who as such were seen as eligible for aid. Here Yulia, did the same, implying that women in marginalized situations had babies to get more subsidies.

These are gendered and classed constructions of parenthood, where poor mothers are racialized and understood as morally deficient. When Ekaterina and Yulia articulated these constructions they simultaneously positioned themselves as decent mothers and worthy citizens. In doing so it appears as if the problem is the moral standards that these women in marginalized positions lack rather than the structural conditions behind their poverty. An element of the discourse of poor women’s own responsibility for their fate is that they can be educated; learning from respectable subjects how to solve their problem (Reid & Tom 2006:410).

In my country, that happened for other reasons, the people who begged ... they weren’t vagabonds, it was not because they did not want to work, but because things changed so rapidly, 180 degrees and people who had lived with certain values for 50 years they couldn’t ... ah ... adapt nor reverse everything, nor find their place in this new world, do you understand?

Here Yulia constructed Ukrainians as worthy subjects, educated and hardworking people who had been made poor, and thus victims of circumstances beyond their control. While marginalized Latin American migrants and shantytown dwellers were positioned as responsible for their
situation because of their nature and their unwillingness to work. In this meaning-making process she also gave the moral decency a national and spatial assignation, anchoring it to Ukraine.

Grimson and Kessler have noted a similar phenomenon where race, class, and nationhood were conflated in the Argentine neoliberal terrain. In the 1990s Bolivians were understood as “the poor”, yet in the neoliberal 1990s the poor were absorbed into the category of “Bolivians” (Grimson & Kessler 2005: 127). They suggest that in this way the socially excluded were made into racialized others as a way to “de-nationalize” the negative social consequences of neoliberalism (Grimson & Kessler 2005: 127). This indicates how economic crises and austerity policies might transform racialization processes and increase racialized targeting of economically marginalized groups, when public discourse looks for scapegoats and individuals try to navigate the threats they are faced with to the best of their ability, in the way participants in this study did.

Bridget Anderson has examined how contemporary British debate about migrants constructs different positions for migrants, the anti-migration side arguing that migrants are foreigners that “grab British jobs” while the pro-side, for example, conceptualizes migrants as economically beneficial, “hard-working” that do not “claim benefits” (Anderson 2015b:68). Bringing these conceptualizations together with understandings of citizenship, Anderson suggests that the way “the migrant” is constructed as a policy subject has implications for understandings of citizenship. She argues, “the citizen is constructed from the outside by the migrant, but also from the inside by what I call the ‘failed citizen’, people who fail to live up to the values of good citizenship such as the criminal and the benefit claimant” (Anderson 2015b:69). In a terrain of social inequality it became very important for participants to differentiate themselves from both from the “bad migrants”, and from the “failed citizens”. Furthermore, I suggest that Yulia’s narrative where poverty is understood differently depending upon racialization of subjects, as in the case with shantytown dwellers, is characterized by a logic of coloniality. This logic make some subjects “undeserving poor”, subjects who are imagined as wanting “something for nothing” (Anderson 2015b:74), while others because of their assigned whiteness and imagined European decency are understood as wrongfully placed in a position of poverty.

Yulia concluded her story:

If you want to work, you can find work and I did not start to commit robberies, nor did I start to beg for money in the street ... Nor did I ask the
government to provide for me. I did not say ‘oh no I am an immigrant, I need to live from something, you have to support me’. No, none of that, I had to support myself, so all that I earned and all that I have obtained is because I have worked.

This recurrent articulation of being a self-made subject and a hard working subject must thus be understood against the backdrop of racialized and classed hierarchies where one possibility for postsocialist migrants to navigate their relocatory trajectories was to occupy the subject position of decent European migrant workers, in a relational meaning-making process where they were contrasted and vindicated by the imagined insufficiencies of the urban poor and Latin American migrants.

Beauty Economies: Gendered and Racialized Moral Decency

These constructions of race, class, and morality were also interlaced with gendered practices. For example, Natalia kept coming back not only to the outstanding working moral of Slavic women, but also to her Slavic exceptional taste, both in implicit and explicit ways:

So what’s wrong with Argentine women, it is not that they are bad, the thing is that they do not teach them … How could I say this … There are very few people that have good taste, real good taste, because not everybody can be fitted into every clothing. You have to pay attention to how you dress! /…/ No, they do not have good taste. If you compare this street with a similar street in Kiev, Argentine women would lose by far; because none of them (Slavic women) have stains on their clothes … they all have these kinds of heels. I also wear them, but actually I learned to use this kind here (points towards her sandals). Really I use high heels. The thing is I have to walk so much here /…/ I would say that Slavic women are prettier, in general, than Argentine women.

The majority of women in my material spoke of taste and beauty as something not necessarily in the body per se, but rather something that came with the right kind of upbringing, introducing moral and geographical dimensions in the way one presents one’s body. According to Natalia, Argentine women had not been taught how to construct tasteful femininity, while her own good posture, her way of walking and good taste “in clothing and bijouterie” was something that originated from her upbringing in Soviet Ukraine: “They taught us this way of walking in school, the way to dress, how to behave. It comes from there. How to walk straight. They teach at school to hold the right body posture. Actually it is good. We have this particular way of being”.

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The importance for working-class women to present morally respectable femininity has been discussed by Beverly Skeggs as an outcome of class hierarchies (Skeggs 1997). In this case, Natalia’s constructions of superior beauty are related to postsocialist constructions of femininity also observed by others (Lemekh 2010; Remennick 2007). Martina Cvajner analyzes how Ukrainian women employed as live-in care workers in a northern Italian town, consciously reconstructed the Western stereotype of hyper-feminine East European women, dressing in flashy clothes and behaving in ways that called for attention in public, in spite of the risks of reduced job opportunities. Cvajner’s interviewees spoke of their dress code as “the way a real women should dress and behave”, also framing their complaints of employers through critique of their lack of style and taste (Cvajner 2011:361).

Cvajner argues that enactments of a “higher and more intense femininity” are ways for the women to detach themselves from humiliating conditions and “to be recognized as a potential, and indeed desirable woman, and thus an individual to be respected and taken into consideration” (Cvajner 2011:363). Enactments of this kind of gendered symbolism with spatial anchoring could thus be analyzed as a means to present claims to social worth and respect. Besides Natalia, both Ekaterina and Yulia positioned Slavic women as bearers of a more tasteful and beautiful femininity. I suggest this can been seen as a strategy to navigate through some of the intersecting power relations they faced every day. They might have lacked a perfect Spanish, social network and porteño education capital, but they positioned themselves with a gendered capital – a more beautiful body originating from good upbringing and effort. By articulating Slavic women’s outstanding discipline, their ability to endure, their work moral, and their great taste they were positioned as subjects of higher moral quality and better aesthetics than Argentines and other immigrants. It can be argued that it is important for migrants who suffered downward social mobility to be recognized as morally worthy subjects (Cvajner 2011; See also Skeggs 1997).

When I asked her how she believed that Argentines imagined Russian and Ukrainian women she answered that she was not sure what women thought, but that men always found Slavic women to be “pretty” and “tall, blonde, blue-eyed”. Then she moved a little closer, looked me in the eyes and said:

According to them, I have blue eyes. Can you see how that is not true? They are all color-blind, most of them /.../ Argentinean men think that all of them (Slavic women) are like me. My mother had black hair. Well, according to us, because she was a brunette /.../ and dark eyes, my father had dark hair, my brother had dark hair /.../ a high percentage of the
people have dark-blond hair, which is this you can see in my hair near the roots, because I have to color it today.

She then indicated how her blonde hair closer to the head was dark. This points towards how whiteness, as well as beauty, is a construction that can be performed and bodily altered; and as such not something inherently “natural” in the body (See Dyer 1997). To construct beauty – or to deconstruct beauty not to call attention in public spaces – can be a strategy to cope with different power structures in everyday life. At play here were gendered positions of class where racial notions of Slavic bodies and appearances became important.

However, the respectable Slavic superiority, or white femininity, could always be renegotiated or reversed. Sitting in a cafeteria on the busy Corrientes Avenue, while trying to teach me Russian, Natalia also corrected my use of Argentine slang. “You shouldn’t say ‘quilombo’”, she told me, “it does not befit a foreigner, we have to be careful with the language and make sure to always speak correctly”. At another time she took a popular yellow newspaper I was reading while waiting for her and threw it away with a gesture of how impropriate it would be for a respectable person to read such news. The risk of losing respectability can also be understood as interlaced with losing one’s whiteness. Richard Dyer has noted a simultaneous making of whiteness, gender, and class in representations of white individuals in art history and old photographs. White men are generally represented as darker than white women - but working class women might be depicted as darker than upper-class men: “to be a lady is to be as white as it gets” Dyer concludes (Dyer 1997:57).

Roediger has showed how the notion of whiteness has been an integral part of the U.S. working class movement. He argues that white workers in U.S. history “developed as a self-conscious social category” mainly through comparisons to black workers (Roediger {1991} 2007:23). In the early 19th century, U.S. workers’ racial economy played a significant part in the making of worker class consciousness, in constant tension with the racialized slave system, white workers needed to reassure themselves they were part of the “free white labor”, and were not to “be mistaken for slaves or ‘negers’” (Roediger {1991} 2007:47).

In a socially stratified society, with much racialized inequality, whiteness fills the function of a non-removable asset. Participants lived like many other lower middle or working classes in Argentina, trying to get by in a country stricken by constant inflation and crisis. To actively construct oneself as a
morally worthy subject can be understood as a means of survival in a stratified society. Race was a category that created meaning, and that they could draw on to navigate their relocatory trajectories. It is important to note, however, that for their articulations of certain subject positions to make sense, their claims on entitlements and respectability had to be formulated in relation to other bodies and spaces (Laclau 2008). These articulations reproduced a colonial logic where one’s construction of superiority always depended upon, in this case, a racialized, gendered, and classed inferior position and the logics of coloniality.
CHAPTER 7

Concluding Discussion

In this dissertation I have examined the experience of fourteen postsocialist migrants who arrived in Argentina between 1996 and 2001. These individuals were born between the 1950s and the 1990s and constituted a heterogeneous group. They had begun their migration trajectories from different places in Ukraine and Russia, and their backgrounds and levels of education also varied. However, their narratives of the reasons for opting for migration as well as the hope they placed in their journey to Argentina were very similar.

Here I will look at the answers my analytical model has helped me to reach. I start by discussing the conclusion that can be drawn from the historical contextualizing model I have employed as part of my application of PDT to an ethnographic material. I then examine the conclusion that can be drawn from the empirical material with a particular focus upon dislocatory events, relocatory trajectories, subject positions, the migrant as a subject position, relational meaning-making, race, and whiteness and the logic of coloniality.

The Past is Part of the Present

I have argued that it is crucial to analyze the narrated experiences in relation to historical policies of migration. This is not only because European migration is a mythically important part of Argentine national identity, but also because a historical perspective on migratory frameworks enables us to develop a more complex understanding of the contingent and historically contextual position of “the migrant”.

Self-Understandings, Subject Positions, and Mobility

As indicated in the background chapter, much of the positioning of postsocialist migrants vis-à-vis Latin American migrants, or their positioning as “good workers” due to their European origin, can be traced to the former
quest of Argentine rulers to populate the conquered territories into a nation of European settlers. This was a political process permeated by colonial logics that are still at work today.

A historical perspective on contemporary migration also permits an understanding of how economic processes fuel schemes of migration. The great mass migration of the turn of the 19th century was triggered by many factors, and as people and commodities moved between the old and new world, intricate global economic networks were formed. This was a process whereby certain bodies were constructed as desirable in relation to the occupation of certain positions, such as labor positions. Like the meaning of other discursive objects, the meaning ascribed to certain bodies is always only temporarily fixed – and as such, also contingent (see Laclau & Mouffe 1985:111ff). Racialization processes are ultimately contingent, yet the sediments of colonial logics still linger, as can be seen in the privileged position of whiteness. As I have demonstrated, this means that the favorable position of one type of body can always change, and over time it might be articulated as not “white enough” or not “Argentine enough” depending on how it is made meaningful in a particular context.1

The descriptions of the fluctuating historical constructions of race and whiteness in relation to labor and nation-building provided in the background chapter serves, on the one hand to direct attention to how racialization of bodies and social types are tied to local economic interests and global processes, and on the other hand to indicate how this particularly affected participants’ possible identifications and self-understandings. Over the last two centuries, Argentine discourse has constructed different migrants as either constitutive of modernity and progress or as constitutive of social or economic problems. Re-orientating themselves in the Argentine society, participants emphasized their placement in the former category. Through racialized self-understandings they were positioned by others, and also strived to position themselves, in the category of the “desired migrant”.

This suggests that Argentine history, particularly with regards to former migratory frameworks, played an important role in structuring the subject positions that the participants could occupy, their self-understandings, and possible identifications with other subjects in Argentina. Discourses that structure migration create its subjects in accordance with local and global power structures, and I have demonstrated how in these cases, frameworks

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1 For instance, local elites desired neither organized labor, nor the racialized working class subjects of Peron’s first government.
were modified according to historical constructions of labor recruitment and colonial settlement. This had an effect on participants’ mobility, particularly in the spatial sense. Although their spatial mobility was limited in certain directions – when Western countries closed their borders for them it made the spatial and social mobility they had hoped for seemingly impossible – the Argentine migration program presented a possibility in another direction. In accordance with a long tradition of fostering European immigration and the Videla Law, postsocialist migrants were framed as an input of skilled manpower and thereby placed in the category of desired workers. Yet, simultaneously, this spatial mobility was obstructed for Latin American immigration to Argentina. This shows us how logics of coloniality and processes of racialization have concrete effects on mobility practices through migratory frameworks.

Past and contemporary migratory frameworks thus constructed possibilities and impossibilities for the participants. By using contextualization as a method I have demonstrated how former historical settings affected postsocialist migrants and the subject positions they could occupy in this context. The category of “the migrant” is, for example, a historically determined construct that directs and partially conditions the relocatory trajectories of the research participants. With De los Reyes and Mulinari I argue for the need to historicize the subject and thus anchor its possibilities of action in economic relations, hegemonic ideologies, and the way society is organized (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:23). Participants like Natalia who actively positioned herself and other Slavic migrants as “good workers”, complied with the roles assigned to them and could also compete favorably in the labor markets appointed to them. However, someone like Evhen, refused to comply with the position assigned to him and “smashed his head” against the system in a seemingly devastating fight for getting his former merits recognized.

By acknowledging the historical and contextually determined dimensions of discourse, we able to see how everyday life is structured by more than just the “here and now”, from the horizon of what contemporary discourse explicitly renders possible. Throughout the 20th century, migration policies and frameworks have differentiated between mobile subjects, and in accordance with, for example, labor demands have articulated some migrant subjects as desirable and others as undesirable (Cohen 2012:106ff). Who is desired, allowed, tolerated, invisibilized, rejected, or even shunned as a migrant is a question of political constructions, and thus varies with hegemonic discourses and political frameworks. This enables us to understand
how contemporary policies of migration are not a question of mere “management”; rather they are a contingent outcome of determined political and historical factors that have effects on people’s mobility, self-understandings, and possibilities. In this case it becomes clear how, for example, post-colonial history characterized by a lingering logic of colonially affected subject positions and possible identifications in the present.

Dislocatory Events and Their Effect on Participants’ Possibilities

Societal norms and social relations are anchored in materiality, and so are the lives of individuals who have invested affectively in various life trajectories. In this case, gendered roles in families, positions in labor markets, professional identifications, and self-understandings, all changed with the demise of the USSR. As I have previously argued, these dislocatory events had profound consequences for the participants in this study. At an individual level they experienced how their whole world and the trajectories they had envisioned within it was transformed and disappeared also in a strict material sense. – when “the walls had fallen” as Ekaterina said, using a material metaphor to describe how she had experienced the dislocatory events that made it impossible for her to envision a future in Ukraine.

The rise and fall of state socialism was one of the major events of the 20th century, and the unfolding of the social transformation throughout the post-Soviet region and the world encompassed all levels of life and culture (Kuehnast & Nechemias 2004:18). Located with their lives, as well as bodies and psyches, in important processes of global and local transformations, the experiences described in this study indicate how these historical shifts were lived and embodied in a determined local context.

Being Freed from the Past: Dislocatory Events

The demise of the USSR, and the following worldwide implementation of neoliberal governance during the 1990s, has often been referred to as a sign of the final victory of capitalism and the end of history (Fukuyama 1992). As such, this decade makes a unique and relevant starting point for an ethnographic investigation of how dislocatory events affected the lived experiences of these individuals.

In the Laclauian sense, the 1990s was a decade characterized by dislocatory experiences for many. The contingency in all social relations and power structures became visible as former worlds of meaning ceased to exist. For
the participants, the dislocatory events of the 1990s made former trajectories impossible, while also presenting them with new possible directions through time and space. For them the demise of the USSR meant that they were free – or rather forced – to start their lives all over again. However, after arriving in Buenos Aires they encountered a country heading towards a dislocatory event of its own, the Argentine economic crisis of 2001. This was not what they had imagined as part of their relocatory trajectories.

When Igor, Ekaterina and others like them arrived in Argentina they experienced a new set of possible subject positions. Among these was the experience of being placed in vulnerable positions in labor and housing markets, and thus consequently the possibility of being struck by poverty and perhaps ending up in a shantytown. I have demonstrated how their narratives of their first encounters with the shantytowns can be understood as a way of inscribing risk into space. Because of the conflation between class and race, the risk of falling into poverty can also be understood as the risk of falling out of whiteness. The lack of social policy and the context of crisis made the context of postsocialist migration to Argentina very particular. Given the range of the age span and the various backgrounds of the participants, their memories from the different occurrences that I have analyzed in terms of dislocatory events, and the way they conditioned their relocatory trajectories should differ. Interestingly, their stories of what they left and what they arrived to follow very similar patterns. Participants’ narratives are thus not only individual but should be seen as part of a larger collective narrative that articulates certain possible understandings of how dislocatory events are lived and made meaningful (see Lemekh 2010:10).

The participants make use of a certain way of narrating these events that indicates the repercussions they had in society at that time. Their narratives of the dislocatory events in the wake of the implosion of the USSR are very similar to post-Perestroika narratives (Ries 1997), yet have their own Argentinean perspective. This is what I have called the Bonarense litanizing narratives. The way they spoke about the dislocatory events in Argentina also echoes Argentinean narratives of an iconic crisis that at the beginning of the new millennium turned the country and its citizens into something new. Participants do, however, recount the events of the Argentine crisis at a distance, the subject positions they were able to occupy in labor markets were shaken by these events, but not their sense of being.
The Making of a Migrant

An important finding is the amount that expressed that their relocatory trajectory in various ways had entailed a process where they had been turned into “migrants”. This process where self-understandings were altered in accordance with the subject positions they were able to occupy took place within a complex universe of intersectional power structures where factors such as age, gender, class, economic resources etc. were intertwined and created different circumstances for individuals (see Ahlstedt 2016:28). Most studies on migration tend to address mobility from the global South to the global North with particular focus on hardships and difficulties entailed for non-privileged migrants (Knowles & Harper 2009:6). While the literature on privileged migration tends to emphasize migration, generally from or within the global North, as a lifestyle choice or as an opportunity (Ahlstedt 2016:29), the postsocialist migrants interviewed here are located at the intersection between these understandings of migration. On the one hand, they were placed in the category of “desired migrants”, and on the other, they experienced difficulties and hardships after their arrival in Argentina. When remembering their first years they described their mobility as an uncontrollable force that “turned them” into migrants. They had expected that their spatial mobility would also result in social mobility. However, finding themselves in a situation of “being forced” into the subject position of a migrant, they were positioned within labor and housing markets characterized by exposure and vulnerability.

There are many interesting tensions in my material that emphasize the contingencies of various categories, such as how the making of the “migrant” as a subject excludes other subject positions, like that of the “professional” subject. To have been made a migrant, in the cases of Evhen, Myroslav, or Vadim for example, meant that they did not have the possibility to choose how and when to exercise their profession. Bearers of higher education qualifications, they had not expected that Argentina would not acknowledge and benefit from their educational merits. Neither did research participants have the opportunity of spatial mobility in the sense they desired. This raises questions regarding the tension between spatial and social mobility as well as the factors that transform certain mobility into migration.

National belongings, citizenships, and interstate agreements are of course crucial for whether and how mobility is understood and received in terms of legal frameworks and rights (Ahlstedt 2016:26; Cohen 1977). But in addition to that, this examination of dislocatory events and relocatory trajectories
indicates how the category “migrant” is imagined, acted upon and made by various discourses, in this case nationalist, migratory, and neoliberal. In these interviews, the position of the migrant is linked to a set of conditions, practices and situations of vulnerability, and exposure. The way the becoming of a migrant is described by participants indicates that to be made a migrant means to have one’s mobility restrained. This might seem contradictory when the very condition of migration is mobility.

However, those who can enjoy the privileges of mobility as a given right are not usually ascribed to the category of migrants – mobility across international borders is conditioned by many factors and is a privilege of the few (Tesfahuney & Schough 2010:7; Syssner & Khayati 2010:40). Movement of certain bodies with determined skills is facilitated or obstructed by global regulation and national legislations. Since the early 1990s, a greater number of professionals are operating across borders than ever before – global careers is for example a term coined to define this movement (Reis & Baruch 2013). Or when white Westerners move across transnational space it is sometimes also called lifestyle migration (see e.g. Benson 2012; Cohen & Thulemark 2015; Woube 2014:).

In this sense, in current migration regimes, global mobility is tied to bodies inscribed into determined economies where those with economic capital, albeit perhaps small in national comparison, like lifestyle migrants or business people, move freely across international borders, while others, such as labor migrants or asylum seekers are obstructed (see Faist 2015). In this case, being placed in, the ostensibly, mobile category of a migrant seemed to have led to a particular kind of immobility – since mobility through space and upward mobility through social hierarchies was made impossible for participants through the migratory frameworks and national regulations for professions that conditioned their relocatory trajectories once they had been “turned” into migrants.

Global configurations of power that determine whether a movement across a national border is regarded as migration or as part of a global career were thus part of the meaning-making process that formed self-understandings and identifications for Evhen, Valentyna, Myroslav, and others like them. Already in the classic “Expatriate Communities”, Eric Cohen notes how expatriates – professionals within business, governmental or non-profit organizations, scientists, lifestyle migrants and so forth are not usually studied as part of studies of migration (1977). The countries of origin of these expatriates, Cohen argues, are wealthy and respectful, extending their help and protection to expatriates in foreign countries (Cohen 1977:79). This was
clearly not the case here; the reader might recall how Evhen travelled in vain between the Ukrainian and Russian embassies.

Furthermore, my findings suggest that racialized understandings of the relation between mobility and migration frame conceptualizations of the bodies that move across space. The role of race and particularly of whiteness in the meaning ascribed to postsocialist migrants in Argentina suggests how the tension between, on the one hand mobility caused by force or economic need, and on the other, mobility regarded as a possibility or choice, is linked to racialized positions (see Lundström 2010:50). As others have noted, the white body is usually not interpreted as a migrant, and vice versa (Ahlstedt 2016:27; Hübinette et al. 2012; Hübinette & Mählck 2015; Lundström 2014:2). The “migrant” has in Western societies been racialized as someone who has black hair and dark skin (Tolgensbakk 2014). As has been pointed out, the relation between, on the one hand, mobility and privileged positions, and on the other hand, immobility and racialized positions is characterized by colonial logics (Prashad 2010:iif).

The participants in this study were not business people moving with ease across transnational borders, nor were they, in comparison privileged, lifestyle migrants; rather their choices of mobility were limited and their conditions those typically associated with economic migrants. However, their embodiment of whiteness, for example through education, looks and manners, and European origin placed them in a more privileged position than other economic migrants once in Argentina.

The Intersections of Relocatory Trajectories

Whiteness in Every Day Life

Various constructions of whiteness, as well as the more place-specific Europeanness (Joseph 2000) are some of the features that characterized the participants’ negotiations of race and class in their relocatory trajectories. The participants in this study experienced becoming migrants upon arrival in Argentina. This was, however a position they would occupy or be assigned with a certain amount of contradiction. In relation to Argentinian historical constructions of migration they could readily fit into the subject position of European “dedicated workers”. On the other hand, when compared to

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2 Prashad points out how colonial rulers moved as they liked while their colonial subjects could not travel to Europe or the United States as they pleased. “If they came, they were allowed in for their labor, not for their lives” (Prashad 2010:ii-iii).
contemporary migrants from bordering countries their circumstances were constructed as different, and their positionings as white, European, and educated were emphasized as an anomaly. Participants experienced having been “made” migrants, but part of the negotiations of their relocatory trajectories was also an experience of becoming white. “I understood it here” as Yulia said about experiencing seeing herself as white. As other scholars have demonstrated, whiteness is something that is made, and as such it is not – and has never been – a fixed identical category of social identification across time and space (Jacobson 1998; Roediger 2005).

Regardless of age and former occupation, all participants had in common that they were understood as and positioned as white and European. This is an embodiment that is regularly favorable in migration contexts (Ahlstedt 2016; Armbruster 2010; Fechter & Walsh 2010; Knowles 2005; Knowles & Harper 2009). However, in this case many struggled with discrepancies between privileges assigned to white bodies by society, the limitations they experienced, scarce material possibilities, and personal expectations. Many research participants remembered their first years in Argentina as frightening and confusing. Their narrations of this period are strikingly similar to classical descriptions of Argentine immigrant life – often depicted through descriptions of similar kinds of harsh labor conditions and crowded immigrant housing. It seems that their experiences were more easily narrated in relation to those who had come before them – their “why’s” and “how’s” became important for understanding their own reasons and situations.

In these constructions of belonging, their own experience was linked to historical migrants from previous waves of migration from Europe. This is a kind of relational meaning-making that shows how historical and contemporary discourse on national belonging and migration has placed subjects in various positions, for example “peasants”, “workers” or “professionals”; thereby assigning them discursively established meaning and possibilities. Argentina is a country with an idealized image of past European immigration, and the subject position of the “European migrant” was there to occupy – something those who competed in lower skilled or informal markets readily did. Through the historical construction of European labor migrants being “good workers” participants had an advantage over migrant groups formerly constructed as “problem” and racialized as “others”.

The interviews were characterized by this paradox through a constant relational negotiation – “they were peasants” as Myroslav said when he referred to Ukrainian migrants from previous waves, “we who came in post-Soviet times were specialists and trained professionals”. Or the way Natalia
framed that she was the one who was Ukrainian and not some ancestor of hers, when speaking about how “everybody wants to be European”. In this there is also a conflation between racialized positions, European belonging, and class. Valentyna and Evhen, for example, spoke about how they had been mistreated as migrants, while also emphasizing how they read classical pieces of Russian literature. I suggest that this relational meaning-making process characteristic for participants’ relocatory trajectories stems from the possibilities and impossibilities inherent in the subject positions they had been assigned, the subject positions they wanted to make claims on, or the subject positions they felt at risk of being placed in. These articulations are part of a daily racialized, gendered, and classed struggle, and were tied to their positions in labor and housing markets.

Participants could use racial constructions to their advantage. Some participants, like Natalia expressed how she actively strived to maneuver the complex social terrain and unequal social situations through performing whiteness. Others hinted at it more discretely. Like Myroslav, who did not call it whiteness or Europeanness, but instead talked about how traits such as education gave him advantages in everyday struggles. This further indicates the role class played as racialized capital in the making of Europeanness. To perform whiteness is to be able to uphold certain privileges. It has nothing to do with a category of human beings who are white, but it is a social construct circumscribed by power laden symbols, representations, and values (hooks 1992:12; Tesfahuney 1998:15). All participants in my work can be said to have enjoyed privileges linked to their performance of whiteness, however in varying degrees depending upon their positions and claims.

To be conceptualized as white and European meant advantages in everyday life; being able to pass to the front of a long line in the healthcare center, not having to check in your handbag when entering a store where that was required, and so forth. Most importantly for many participants, it meant not being an open target for racist actions in public spaces or not being treated as “as bad” as the Peruvian, Bolivian, and Paraguayan migrants in labor markets. Nevertheless, the dislocatory events the participants had experienced and their mobility across social and physical space had disrupted their access to privileges linked to class. For instance, Natalia could construct a Slavic superiority in terms of beauty or working morals, but the whiteness she performed did not give access to larger economic or spatial mobility.
Gender and Age

In Lundström’s studies of white European women’s migration, she finds that women married to upper middle-class men could enjoy considerable social and economic privileges after their spatial mobility to the U.S. In this way “migration did not disrupt their access to structural privileges linked to race and class”, however, this was at the cost of gender equality as they became dependent on their husbands (Lundström & Winddance 2011:77; see also Lundström 2010). This is not the case in my findings, rather racial privilege was something new for participants; they experienced becoming white in Argentina, while on the other hand, former class structures were ruptured due to the dislocatory events. Women and men were assigned different subject positions in Argentine society according to gender. In the USSR women had high participation in the work force and were represented in a broad range of occupations (Logan & Drew 2011:26). Upon arrival, men and women among my participants suffered the same kind of downward mobility and denigration of merits. They described their initial phase of subsistence work in precarious labor markets – that for Evhen and Valentyna lasted up until the interview and for Alina had lasted less than a year – as partly divided by gender.

Some mentioned working in the same factories, while most were incorporated into gendered sectors of labor markets – women worked in domestic care and men in security and transport. Women also seemed to have suffered sexual harassment in the workplace and many spoke of how troublesome they experienced the catcalls in public spaces, while men seemed to have suffered the loss of their former social status as a blow to their masculinity – a blow they were able to recuperate in narration through stories of regaining dignity through violence or buying sex etc. While experiencing their spatial mobility in different gendered ways, their vulnerability was similar in terms of being placed in positions subjected to exposure. Ekaterina’s story of how she went around looking for shelter after becoming homeless and unemployed is, for example, similar to Igor’s memories of how he waited in vain at the airport.

Nevertheless, I suggest that age played a far larger role in processes of downward mobility and the possibilities of relocatory trajectories than did gender. Six out of seven participants born between the late 1950s and 1970s had suffered downward mobility,3 unable to accredit their qualifications or have time to return to school to “start all over”. In this way they were part of

3 Myroslav, Alina, Evhen, Natalia, Igor, Valentyna and Vadim
a “lost generation”, educated and employed in state socialism they had little possibility to transition with the so-called transition (Wolanik Boström 2005:214; Lindelöf 2005:28). Alina, who after a period of initial downward mobility had married a man from the local elite, is the only one of this age group who was able to recreate, or perhaps even improve, her former social situation. During our interview she was the owner of her own successful business within a sector she held educational merits for.

Those who had arrived as young adults, born in the 1980s, had recently graduated from Ukrainian higher education and initially they suffered the same downward mobility as the older generation. Nonetheless, over time they were able to study, or by other means, leave the subsistence labor market. In some cases, their parents remained in subsistence work in order for them to study. At the time of the interviews, Yulia and Kyrylo owned their own businesses and Ekaterina and Alexei were white-collar employees. In Alexei’s case his parents had been able to send him to a private institution of higher education where he was able to train for the booming computer programming sector.

Those who had arrived as children, born in the early 1990s, had passed through Argentine state school and their choices of study seemed to reflect Buenos Aires lower and average middle classes. Ivan followed in his father’s footsteps and studied medicine. Victor studied mechanics and worked at the same time. Jelena had recently acquired a white-collar position in the sector she had studied for. Of these participants, those who held good positions in the formal labor market were also more content with their life in Argentina, reflecting a more positive view of the country and its future.

This indicates that those who arrived with established careers suffered downward mobility, while those who arrived as young adults or as children found other possible routes in their relocatory trajectories. Age is thus a category that here acts simultaneously and gives an interesting perspective on the makings of race, gender, and class. My findings also indicate how gendered responsibility for children and providing for the family had an effect on one’s possibilities to study and relocate. As noted in other cases, particularly women took on this role (Logan & Drew 2011).

4 Yulia, Kyrylo, Ekaterina, and Alexei.
5 Jelena, Viktor, and Ivan.
Relational Meaning-Making

Race, gender, and class are social categories constantly in the making at intersections of other categories and structures. In their shifting relocatory trajectories participants tried to make sense out of being both European, white, and educated, supposedly needed by Argentina, and yet at the same time being positioned as migrants, marginalized, and unwanted in their professional realms or in Western countries. In their negotiation of subject positions, such as migrants, Europeans or workers, they mapped their life trajectories and circumstances not only against former immigrant patterns, but also in relation to their contemporary peers, and then especially discriminated migrants from Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

Race is a power construction and its use or meanings might vary at different geographical or social places, or according to the eye of the beholder (Frye Jacobson 1998:10). My investigation demonstrates how this contingency was lived and made meaningful among participants in the midst of social inequality. Upon arrival and through their integration in Argentina they “became white”, not so much due to their complexion, but rather because of their educational capital, their European origin and the defined “blackness” of those groups they were compared with. I argue that this is a particular kind of racialized meaning-making that is articulated against the backdrop of racialized class differences and social inequality.

The idea of racial differences is not something that just arises in people, it is connected to historical contexts, and as I have demonstrated, in this case a historical colonial discourse and forms of organizing labor. The colonial system was largely about which bodies were to be placed where in the chain of labor. This colonial logic still permeates an economic system that thrives on someone’s cheap labor and natural resources that are located in places peripheral to economic power. Economic discourses, labor division, and state policies are not neutral components in ideas of race. Racism, as historian Matthew Frye Jacobsen has noted, “is a theory of who is who, of who belongs and who does not, of who deserves what, and who is capable of what” (Jacobsen 1998:6).

When the participants articulated a morally superior whiteness or Europeanness they indirectly also racialized co-workers, co-habitants, and others with whom they were aligned. This does not mean that they were necessarily actively racist, or had racist intentions. Rather the way they were positioned in a social terrain of inequality and racialized conceptions of difference makes these kinds of articulations a possible way to navigate
everyday life. For instance, the participants’ emphasis on how they were “good European workers” was a possible route for them to take after having been placed in the vulnerable subject position of a migrant. As such it served as a way to position oneself as a respectable subject in a socially stratified terrain. Nevertheless, for their claims on entitlements and respectability to make sense they must be formulated in relation to other bodies and spaces. And it was particularly towards racialized groups in marginal positions such as Latin American migrants and urban poor that they directed their relational comparisons.

These are groups that have only figured in this study through the comparisons the participants make. I acknowledge that they figure only as counterparts of the constructions of whiteness, and as such their own voices or experiences have not been heard, something that can be troublesome in research that intends to challenge racial and social inequality (Tesfahuney 1998:140; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:92). Nonetheless, the scope of this study has been limited to practices and articulations that constitute race, class, and gender from a particular position. My findings indicate how whiteness is not a given monolithic position, but rather something that is constantly constructed through social practice in interaction with other categories, thus simultaneously constructing positions and possibilities for the “othered”.

It is important to note how the groups that the postsocialist migrants compared themselves with were characterized by their economic positions. For example, no one compared their positions with Korean or Chinese migrants, some of which had figured as their employers in supermarkets. Neither did the category of discriminated Latin American migrants include migrants from neighboring countries with more favorable positions in world economies. Gavazzo has for example demonstrated that when Chilean entrepreneurs attracted by the neoliberal model, followed their investments to Argentina during the 1990s, xenophobic discourse changed to a more positive approach towards Chileans (Gavazzo 2010:16). This indicates how racialized positions and social differentiation is linked to economical capital.

In an ever-changing world, labor rights and living conditions are contingent results of political struggles. At the turn of the century the neoliberal model had become increasingly hegemonic, constructing the global market economy as a historical necessity and successfully concealing political dimensions of global economies (Laclau & Mouffe 2008:28ff). The marketization of all levels of society is a global process that affects everyday life across the whole world. This makes racialized economic identifications,
such as constructions of Slavic superiority or Europeanness, appear as a natural consequence of a given order. The material examined here echoes many discourses, however it strongly indicates the role of former racial policies and colonial organizations for contemporary social inequality and racist practices. The global economy has a large impact on people’s mobility and everyday life, but so does local and national policies that shape the boundaries that are drawn between individuals and groups as well as how identities and possible alliances can be formed (see Gavazzo 2010:55).

The possible ways that the participants had to construct identifications were intricately interlaced with geographical hierarchies and economic realities; the neoliberal landscape provided a setting where it became more logical to distance oneself from those who compete for jobs or welfare assistance than to form alliances protesting against exploitive conditions (see Lindqvist 2014:91). We cannot do much to change the past, but given the interaction between discourses that breed racism, and shape labor markets and everyday life, we can indeed act to change regulations, state policies, and discourses.

**Downward Mobility and Self-Understandings**

The concept of relocatory trajectory also captures the affective dimensions of experiencing dislocatory events and the – temporarily or permanent – downward mobility suffered by participants. The participants undertook a journey where their spatial mobility was closely linked to aspirations of social mobility, or at least to the possibility of maintaining a decent life. Like refugees and other migrants in the world, participants were forced to start all over from square one. “Everything that I am” was left behind, as the former physician Myroslav said about his subsistence work in a factory. Myroslav and the others interviewed here testified of traumatic losses and pains that affected not only themselves, but also their children.

There are some key elements in the narratives of downward mobility, bound to be part of any story of migration – denigration of educational merits, exposure and hardships, communication problems, sacrifices made

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6 This study is representative for a particular postsocialist migrant experience, but this concept can also be applied to any human experience where dislocatory events force subjects to invest affectively to re-orientate themselves in new places or positions. We all constantly re-invent ourselves, this however is an examination of the specific experience of coping with the aftermath of dislocatory events caused by major political transformations.
for one’s children, the possibility or impossibility to buy property as a way to enforce one’s position in the new country, the images of successful migrants who have made it elsewhere, and so forth. All of these narratives produce certain kinds of self-understandings, framed in locally lived life, but also anchored in past worlds and memories. Perhaps it is relevant to refer to this as migrant subjectivity, or to describe such experiences through a concept like migritude (Patel 2012). There is a tension between, on the one hand, the very conditions of possibility and limitations of the subject positions participants were placed in after the demise of the USSR and upon arrival in Argentina, and on the other, the variation that constitutes the stories told from each participant’s personal relocatory trajectory. Every individual narration of their experience contains a particular social world, but is at the same time part of a larger collective narrative.

The postsocialist migrants’ relation to former diaspora communities from Ukrainian and Russian cultural associations is an example of this. Unlike those who had arrived before them, postsocialist migrants were not united in the making of, longing for, or belonging to a homeland overseas. Particularly those who had come of age in the USSR and who had suffered downward mobility in Argentina said they wanted nothing to do with peers who arrived with the same wave, transmitting a satellite feeling. All but Myroslav, who was a religious man, claimed they had no place of community that they visited. After the first years of hardship when they had received no or little help from these organizations they seemed to have closed the door to Ukrainian and Russian community spaces. They were all living in their own universe, still their stories were alike, and their narrative features similar. I suggest that this is because they shared the same experience of having been placed in similar combinations of subject positions – they were incorporated into the same structures, hence their narratives were collective yet individual.

Interestingly, there is a difference in generations here, where participants born between the 1950s and 1970s more actively created distance to their peers. Those who had changed partners or re-married had done so with Argentinean partners. Participants born in the 1980s and 1990s, on the contrary, spoke about having Russian or Ukrainian friends, or had married or had romantic relationships with peers who had arrived at the same age. This suggests how structural factors such as downward mobility in relation to age and changed gender relations might play a part in relocatory reorientation processes.

This interplay between structural limitations and individual agency is a crucial factor captured by the concept of relocatory trajectory. Participants’
decisions to leave, their choice of Argentina, and the possibilities of livelihood they encountered upon arrival were shaped by configurations beyond their influence. Their way through and beyond the dislocatory events discussed in this work was conditioned by contingent structural factors, such as possibilities of employment, accreditation of qualifications, possibilities to study, and access to housing. By using the interrelated concepts of dislocatory events and relocatory trajectory I have indicated how these structural factors affected not only subject positions and possibilities, but also self-understandings and identifications.

Migration tends to activate contingent features of the social world. In this case the interrelatedness between dislocatory events and relocatory trajectories conditioned by structures and subject positions made this contingency, as well as the sedimentation of for example racialized or gendered constructions, particularly manifest. As humans we are not slaves of destiny but we do live lives conditioned by structural factors. Our possibilities and impossibilities are shaped by these factors and our positions. In this way, participants’ relocatory trajectories can be equated to a maze where some turns took them forward, while others were dead-ends.

The Past and the Future
Self-made Subjects and Upward Mobility

Those interviewed in this thesis arrived in a country where migrants had constituted the bulk of the working force since the nation’s advent. During the last century, migrants have arrived at the shores in Buenos Aires with dreams about “making the Americas”. Many of the postsocialists’ predecessors also succeeded in finding a job, seeing their children advance from free state school and then perhaps become members of the mythical Argentine middle class (Adamovsky 2010). This, however, seemed difficult for postsocialist migrants arriving in the midst of the dislocatory effects the neoliberal dismantling of Argentine society had on livelihoods and labor markets.

When making sense of their experiences in Argentina many spoke of first having fallen and then slowly having regained firm ground under their feet. When making sense of the Argentine dislocatory events that conditioned their relocatory trajectories some spoke of themselves as tough survivors due to their Soviet past – a cruel system that had formed them into morally superior survivors – but also because of the inherent characteristics of Slavic people – “in their blood” as Ekaterina said. This way to make meaning out of a past in
the USSR has also been observed in other studies on postsocialist experience (Dunn 1999:146; Gradskova 2015:46; Lemek 2010:127). Particular for this case is the Argentine context of a particular racialized social inequality and a colonial history. I have argued that it in this Buenos Aires context, working oneself up from the bottom can also be translated into being a resourceful and morally dignified subject, but it particularly resonates with the articulation of a particular European subject in relation to labor and space.

This can be seen in the emphasis on how Ukrainians and Russians are “good workers” manifested in the interviews. Labor is a central category that structures positions and possibilities, as the processes of its divisions are intertwined with other structures, such as class, gender, and race. As discussed both in Chapter 2 and 6, coloniality, industrial expansion, and labor are intertwined processes in Argentine history. I suggest that the idea of white Europeans being hard workers can be placed within a specific historical context of colonial settlement in Argentina and thus the constant emphasis on work and a superior work moral that the participants in this study articulate are fueled by the historical discourse of European superiority and a logic of coloniality.

These narratives account for how central the perspective of work was for participants: no matter what happens to you, as long as you work hard you will survive and also remain a dignified subject. This resonates with the ethos of homo Sovieticus as a hardworking selfless subject at the service of the collective. Nevertheless, as in other cases (Dunn 1999) these understandings of inherited strength and resourcefulness were also often paired with discourses of self-making and neoliberal constructions of the levels of one’s individual success being the measurement of one’s personal efforts. As such, the narratives reflect liberal ideas about the hard working subject, making its own way to fortune and happiness through hard work and sacrifices. This can be related to ideas about what upward mobility should look like in migratory relocatory trajectories. The narrative of the migrant who arrives in a new country and makes his or her way from zero through hard work and sacrifices is related to participants’ self-understandings and their identifications – or dis-identifications – with previous migrants.

Underpinning the makings of these identifications and notions about upward mobility is also the question of how to make sense out of social inequality. Western modernity is characterized by the idea of individual control of one’s own destiny (Björk 2012:16). Liberalism, one of the major ordering discourses of modernity maintains an idea of individuals as being in charge of their own destiny, rather than being subjects of societal forces.
Where one is positioned as a subject is then presupposed to be nothing more than a mere outcome of one’s individual nature (Soper 1981:82; see also Björk 2012:18). In particular participants who had experienced downward mobility expressed having been “turned into migrants” or having lost control and agency, as if an uncontrollable fate had taken a hold of them.

Possible Futures: Achieving The “Good Life”

The participants in this study lost a social order that structured identities, professional and social positions, affective investments, and expected outcomes of for example educational merits. After 1991, they strived to re-orientate themselves and the directions they were going in. Setting out for Argentina can be described as part of a relocatory process where hope was given a spatial direction – when they made the decision to migrate it was informed by their aspirations to go somewhere where they could ensure their children a future and live a good life (see Berlant 2011:2). This was not necessarily a strategy for upward mobility, but can rather be seen as a way to maintain subject positions and possibilities that the dislocatory events had torn apart, such as exercising one’s profession or ensuring children received an education.

The dimension of hope within this process is also captured in the concept of relocatory trajectory. As others have noted, affect brought out by migratory processes is not only forged in social interaction, “but also by memories, imagination, expectations and aspirations” (Svasek 2008: 218). Dislocations bring about a kind of “forced freedom”; former social structures and sedimented practices are ruptured. Yet, what possibilities do subjects have to engage with this kind of freedom? The experiences of postsocialist migrants point to Laclau’s argument of the ambiguity of freedom (Laclau 1996:19). Many of the participants had hoped for political, social, and economic changes to come about in Russia and Ukraine, but the rapid transformation of former societal structure and the implementation of economic shock therapy policies resulted in increasing inequalities and massive unemployment. Their decision to migrate was thus both a necessity and also connected to the hope they had for the achieving, or perhaps just maintaining, a good life through spatial mobility.

With a “good life” they referred to living in a society where one’s qualifications are valued and where basic needs are secured – free public education, possibility to put food on the table, functioning affordable healthcare, the possibility to go on vacations, and accessible cultural events are among
the features mentioned. This longing has sometimes been referred to as nostalgia for the USSR and thus ridiculed as an impossible wish in the post-Cold War era. Like Evhen, who claimed he had been “deformed by communism” and therefore was unfit to live in the contemporary economic, social, and political terrain, subjects who wished for a more secure way of life were constructed as old-fashioned and perhaps even pro-Soviet. But the only thing Evhen and others interviewed here really wished for was to be recognized as professional subjects, useful members of society, and to live in a model of welfare – not unlike the former Nordic model. This wish was, however, made impossible by neoliberal discourse, both in its material structures such as the situations in housing markets and deregulated labor markets, but also in the way politics was spoken about. Many expressed having to defend themselves and their former lives, explaining to people that the Soviet model did not mean they were “just given things”. On the other hand, their past in the USSR, and their vocational professional pride, could also be used as a moral backdrop to the neoliberal present.

The participants’ understandings of what preceded the decision to migrate and the way they entered Argentine labor markets in the neoliberal years indicates how global economic systems impact locally lived life; entangled in the aspirations for a good life was also the idea of Western modernity and its promises. The Convertibility plan attracted migrants to Argentina in the 1990s. As all participants who had arrived as adults said, they believed the “one-to-one-economy” – meaning a U.S. dollar for an Argentine peso at the fixed convertibility rate – would grant them high wages and possibilities.

The neoliberal model supposedly was to bring forth modernity and place both the former Soviet republics and Argentina in the realm of the Western “First world”. For participants in this study the possibility of living this good life was, however, made impossible; first by the dislocatory events in Russia and Ukraine, then by the dislocatory events of the Argentine crisis of 2001. It is important to note how these are two different kinds of dislocatory events – the first was an economic and ideological system that imploded in a unique way, and the second was a financial crisis of a kind that has been repeated elsewhere within the capitalist system – yet similar in the impact they had on material and symbolic possibilities and understandings of future directions. The promises of Soviet modernity had not fulfilled participants’ hopes or desires, and as it turned out, neither could the free world of capitalist modernity.
Neoliberalism and Hope

Increasing poverty and inequalities in the 1990s were not limited to Latin America or the postsocialist region. Western countries were facing a similar process of marketization and deregulation. The last three decades have seen the reconfiguration of livelihoods through deregulation and privatization; in post-industrial societies all over the globe life and labor are increasingly characterized by a normalization of contingent conditions, the kind of conditions that formerly characterized labor markets of low-skilled workers and migrants (Ross 2011:119; Anderson 2015b: 647). Thus, the precarious conditions that used to characterize migrant life in the Western world, a group integrated into less desirable or informal strata in labor markets, now also affect select workers in formal employments who find themselves on precarious terrain (Ross 2011:212).

It is important to note how both the spatial mobility of the postsocialist migrants and the neoliberal restructuring of Russia, Ukraine, and Argentina activated the contingency of class positions. The participants suffered from a lost causal direction between education and good social position – formerly more or less ensured by investments in a good education in industrial societies. Through the dislocatory events of the neoliberal restructuring culminating in the crisis of 2001, the Argentine middle class was thrown out of its material security. In this sense, the economic crisis also manifested the brutal contingency of the relation between social safety and educational merits for many natives. Thus, what the research participants went through does not only speak of postsocialist or migrant experiences, but can also be read as part of a global process that involves many. The world that the research participants encountered was one where having a good education or being positioned in the middle class was not a guaranteed secure position as precariousness increased.

Many remembered how this insight gripped them, when narrating this they spatialized the risk to the shantytowns. The fear implicated in their indication of the shantytowns as a racialized spatial manifestation of the positions subjects who were unable to make it in the neoliberal terrain indicated how the impact of global economic systems was locally lived and anchored in space. I suggest that for the participants, it was a way to narrate their fear and exposure. However, when these constructions of meaning are articulated in accordance with discourses that construct the shantytowns as racialized places of poverty, this reinforced a colonial logic that is used to understand social inequality. In a similar manner, this logic was activated
when some participants spoke of welfare recipients or beggars as “black” and morally inferior. In this way race and class were conflated and poverty was translated into a racialized and moral condition. I argue that these articulations make individuals, rather than injustices, appear as responsible for classed subject positions (see Berlant 2011:2; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005:40).

Coloniality and Migration

Participants made sense of their dislocatory experiences in relation to different ways of organizing modern societies and in comparisons with other geographical places. They constructed meaning out of the neoliberal recent present through relating their experiences and subject positions throughout time and space. Was it perhaps different in the past? Could it be better somewhere else? Why are we better off than other discriminated migrant groups but worse off than our postsocialist peers in the U.S.? This kind of relational meaning-making comparison assisted in making sense out of their present and the directions their relocatory trajectories had led them in. Yet, their experiences were measured against other subjects and other spaces in ways that were connected to geopolitical hierarchies and colonial conceptions of modernity.

Their stories can be centered on a number of interrelated axes: Soviet modernity vs. Western modernity, Latin American modernity vs. European modernity, socialism vs. capitalism, and Slavic mentality vs. Argentine mentality. In their narratives, participants placed Argentina in various positions. For instance, the emphasis many participants placed on not being allowed to migrate to where they actually wanted to go positioned them as undesired subjects, but it also constructed Argentina as an undesired place and a second-hand choice. Argentina was not what they had expected or what they had been promised. By positioning themselves as “fooled subjects”, research participants could make sense out of their lives not turning out the way they were supposed to. Argentina is “twenty years behind the rest of the world” as Evhen said in anger when talking about his fruitless efforts to accredit his medical diploma.

In the case of participants who had suffered downward mobility, like Evhen or Natalia, Argentina was framed through a logic of coloniality as a space that lacked civilization and modernity. This is a “lagging” discourse similar to the one that is usually used to describe Eastern Europe (see Koobak 2013). On the other hand, participants like Alexei and Alina, who lived
privileged lives with economic resources, said that Argentina was a place as good as any. This indicates how subject positions and experiences of downward mobility played a part in reinforcing a logic of coloniality, and also how these factors shape the way future possibilities can be regarded. Those who, like Alexei or Alina, in many ways lived the “good life” imagined by others did not make sense out of their everyday life through articulations of racialized superiority, nor did they describe Argentina through a logic of coloniality. This indicates how economic positions play a part in understanding subjects or spaces.

Processes of racialization do not look the same in all contexts; rather they are tied to determined settings and places that have their particular history (Loomba 2008:29). All countries with a colonial past – Sweden included – share a colonial legacy with sedimented conceptualizations of race. This particular case of postsocialist experience in Argentina is one example of how local configurations of race, class, and gender, as well as the making of a logic of coloniality conditioned some individuals’ everyday life and “turned” them into migrants when they had expected something else.

People have always moved; human mobility is a constant, but national states and their borders are contingent political constructions. This does not mean that there existed such thing as a world of free movement before the actual organization of international borders, rather it means that constructions of those who belong and those who don’t are changing phenomena. Migratory frameworks are legal and juridical historically determined constructs. As such, they are ultimately constructed through social processes and thus they can be changed.
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**Reports**


Newspapers Articles


Unpublished Material

Observations

Field-diary (kept by the author).

Interviews

All names are pseudonyms. Recordings and transcriptions are kept by the author.

Myroslav: Born in the late 1950s in Ukraine. Formerly a physician. Arrived with family in 1997. At the time of the interview Myroslav was employed in the healthcare sector in a formal position not in accordance with his qualifications. Interviewed in November 2013.


Igor: Born in the early 1960s in Ukraine. Formerly employed in animal alimentation and reproduction. At the time of the interview Igor was informally employed in the transport sector. Arrived alone in 2001, followed by his family shortly thereafter. Interviewed November 2013.


Vadim: Born in the early 1970s in Russia. Formerly a bookkeepers’ assistant in bank. At the time of the interview Vadim was employed as chef. Arrived alone in Argentina in 1997. Interviewed through a chat conversation started in November 2013 and ended in April 2014. Written story of 28 pages (with my answers and questions – copied from chat).


Ekaterina: Born in the early 1980s in Russia. Secondary education from Ukraine. Arrived in 1999 with husband and his family. At the time of interview employed as an administrator at a smaller company. Interviewed in November 2013.


Ivan: Born in early the 1990s in Ukraine. All education in Argentina. At the time of the interview Ivan studied medicine. Arrived with his parents in 1996. Interviewed November 2013.
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How did the collapse of the USSR and the culmination of the economic

crisis in Argentina affect individuals who would, during the course

of their lifetime, experience both first hand? How did these events

condition their social positions and self-understandings, as well as

their understanding of the past and dreams for the future? This study

examines the narrations of a number of individuals who migrated from

Russia and Ukraine to Argentina between 1996 and 2001.

Based on qualitative ethnographic material this thesis investigates per-

sonal narrations about reorientation at a social and affective level. The

author works with political discourse theory, critical race studies,

autoethnography, and theories on coloniality to examine questions of

migration, social mobility, race, class, and gender in the processes of

re-establishing a life in a new context. Particular attention is paid to the

making of racialized subject positions, and identifications, as well as

constructions of whiteness and Europeanness.

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