

Södertörns högskola  
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# Living *la Inseguridad* and Making Sense of Urban Poor

- A Discourse Analysis of Space and Bodies in Buenos Aires  
Transformed by Neoliberalism

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# Abstract

In this thesis ethnographical interviews with women in Buenos Aires are analyzed with discourse theory in order to examine how discourses of safe/unsafe and urban poor construct places and bodies. A central element of discourse is argued to be the partially fixed inscription of danger in territories and bodies of the urban poor. Neoliberalism's impact on urban space has meant a transformation of public space and impacts on constructing reality. This transformation of meaning is connected to the neoliberal transformation of the labor market, once invested with rights and security, now deregulated and precarious. Urban poor are visible in every interviewed woman's everyday life, but the way of constructing them as subjects varies with level of closeness and identification. The Argentine historic construction of Europeaness, modernity and civilization as opposed to Latin Americaness, backwardness and barbarism can be found in many of the women's constructions of urban poor. So is the othering of them in relationship to motherhood and citizenship. The constructions of the urban poor are also analyzed with the Foucaultian concept of biopower.

Key-words: Argentina, Urban poor, Fear, Motherhood, Buenos Aires, Discourse, Space, Neoliberalism, Security, Crime, Racism, Subaltern classes, Cartoneros, Middle-class, Biopower, Colonialism, Discourse theor, Auto-Ethnography, Segregation, Exclusion.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Strolling through the neighborhood

As we are strolling down *Avenida San Juan*, in a neighborhood of central Buenos Aires known for many as unsafe, Augustina looks firmly at me and says “I have no problem with *la inseguridad*, I’m not afraid in my neighborhood, I’m relaxed when I go out”<sup>1</sup>. Eager to show me the block where she has lived the last thirty years, she was waiting for me in the street. It is a warm fall’s day at lunch-time; two pizza-delivery guys are relaxing against a wall in the sun. Getting off the bus, I took off my headphones as an unconscious security-measure. During the last decade talk of danger has increased in Buenos Aires. Politicians, news coverage, scholars and people in the street talk about the so called *inseguridad* – the insecurity.

The man who sells papers and magazines looks curiously at us from his stand as we take a road that will lead us under the freeway. “There is nothing going on here, besides, the police station is right there, as if they were providing any safety”<sup>2</sup> Augustina laughs. We walk by the police station, heading towards a tunnel under the freeway, and she points at an armored vehicle waiting to enter a central of a known security-company. “The only thing I avoid is coming here in the afternoon, because these trucks are waiting in line to enter, not that they would harm me, but you know maybe you get in the middle of a shootout if they are robbed”<sup>3</sup>. We walk slowly and as she speaks she gestures and points. I notice that her fingernails are painted in blue. She keeps repeating that there is nothing going on here and that it is not dangerous. *Acá no pasa nada*. Under the freeway she points towards a dead-end street: “They sleep here, at nighttime it’s full of mattresses, but they don’t do anything to you, they sleep here because they have no other alternative. I always used to walk my dog here and nothing happened, but of course you don’t go kicking them as you walk by”<sup>4</sup>. There is a sharp smell of

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<sup>1</sup> “Yo con la inseguridad no tengo problemas, en mi barrio no tengo miedo, salgo tranquila.”

<sup>2</sup> “Acá no pasa nada, es más, allá está la comisaría, bah no que ellos dan seguridad”

<sup>3</sup> “Lo único es que trato de no venir acá por las tardes porque los camiones hacen cola para entrar a su local, no porque me harían algo a mí pero viste si terminás en el medio de un tiroteo producido por un asalto”.

<sup>4</sup> “Acá duermen, de noche se llena de colchones, pero no te hacen nada, duermen acá porque no les queda otra, yo antes siempre sacaba el perro por acá y no pasa nada, tampoco los vas pateando cuando pasás”

human excrement, “they do everything here, that's why”<sup>5</sup> she explains pointing towards the dirty side-walk. Then she shows me her little handbag: “I go out with nothing on me; I have nothing in the purse, not even my identity card. Neither do I have earrings, no bracelets that they can tear off, no necklace, no rings, nothing!”<sup>6</sup>. The cars are passing at high speed over our heads and she repeats *nada*. Then she adds “The only thing that I'm scared of is that for some crap, for nothing, they will push me so I'll fall and hurt myself”<sup>7</sup>.

As we move along carefully on the broken side-walk, we pass some *cartoneros*<sup>8</sup> separating garbage in the street. “This is hardworking people; they come here because there's a place around the corner where they sell what they've gathered. But they don't pay them anything, it's a misery what they earn”<sup>9</sup> she tells me. We both look at them, their backs bended over the garbage in the sun. There's a constant rumble from the freeway in the background, the air smells of burnt rubber and somewhere an alarm has gone off. Over the phone she told me that if I was interested in *la inseguridad* I should really come to see her block. “Here we have a bit of everything”<sup>10</sup> she told me and laughed. Almost every day she makes the same stroll, picking up her grandson at school. Sometimes it is too far to walk and he will have to walk it alone, but she tells me that she always makes sure to pick up her other grandchild who goes to another school, “it's a girl you know”<sup>11</sup> she tells me with a face that implies all the dangers she is exposed of.

As we get further down the street she shows me the place where the transvestites work at night “They don't do anything to you, it's quite a show, and I say that its strange that they don't catch a cold, you know it's cold and you put a coat on but they have nothing to cover their breast, the whole night naked in the cold”<sup>12</sup>. She shows me a bar that looks like any other bar “this is where they come in the morning and you can see how their beard is growing out”<sup>13</sup>. She laughs and I feel uncomfortable not laughing with her. The street is narrow and

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5“hacen todo acá, es por eso”

6“Yo salgo con nada, en la cartera no hay nada, ni mi documento. Tampoco tengo aritos o pulseras que me pueden arrebatar, ni cadenas ni anillos, nada”.

7“Lo único, tengo miedo que por una porquería, por nada, me empujan y me caiga y me lastime”.

8 Informal garbage collectors described more closely in 2.2 Fear and Motherhood.

9“Es gente de trabajo, vienen acá porque a la vuelta hay un lugar donde se los compra. Pero no le dan nada, es una miseria lo que le dan”.

10“Acá tenemos de todo”.

11“Es una nena viste”.

12“No te hacen nada, es un espectáculo, y yo digo qué raro que no les den toz, viste hace frío uno se pone un saquitos y ellas están con el pecho al aire, toda la noche casi desnudas en el frío”

13“acá vienen por la mañana, ya se les crecen la barba”

dirty. Besides the mothers walking their children from school, people are sitting or standing around in groups talking. A dark-skinned woman walks by and Augustina whispers: “There’s a whole community of them here, they are Dominican, they get drunk and make messes, every day they fight and hit each other with bottles”<sup>14</sup>. The street is getting more crowded; we are just one block away from *Plaza de La Constitución*. I grab my purse tighter. She talks really fast and I wish that I could record what she is telling me. But everywhere there is someone looking at me, to take up the recorder feels as too much of a risk. As we pass a woman who is standing in a broken front door with one child on her arm and two others grabbing her skirts she tells me “There’s a lot of squatters here occupying houses, they get in everywhere. You know the politicians need votes and they put them there”<sup>15</sup>. She’s about to say something more but then we both step in broken brown glass from a beer bottle “Do you see, this is what I told you, every day they hit each other with bottles!”<sup>16</sup> she exclaims. We are standing outside a *cabaret*; a place where alcohol and sex can be bought, the door is open as a man is unloading beer. She looks into the dark room, the bright sunshine makes it hard to see anything but some blue neon lights, and she says “You know those people come here. The other day we were passing this place with my grandson and he told me that his mother said that this is a place where people come to look for girlfriends”<sup>17</sup>. And she laughs again. As we get back to her street she shows me the front door of a house where a friend of hers is living. The door is totally stripped of all metal-details that the old colonial-style doors normally have as ornaments. “They robbed this lady of everything, now she doesn’t even open the window”<sup>18</sup>. The window is protected by closed metal shutter and the usual iron bars. As we get back to her building she grabs my arm and points my attention towards the door: “We didn’t use to have iron bars, there has never been any problem, but now they’re saying in my building that we have to close it too”<sup>19</sup>.

After the stroll through Constitución I walk from the southern part of the city towards an interview in the wealthy neighborhood of Recoleta. And as I get closer to the northern neighborhoods the streets and the faces in them change. The sidewalks get broader and cleaner, the faces whiter and people’s clothes more expensive. As I reach the part of Re-

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14“hay toda una comunidad acá de ellos, son dominicanos, se emborrachan y hacen quilombo, todos los días se dan a los botellazos”

15“Acá abundan las casas tomadas, se meten por todos lados. Viste los políticos necesitan votos y los ponen ahí”

16“Viste, lo que te dije, todos los días se dan a los botellazos”

17Viste acá viene esa gente. El otro día pasamos acá con mi nieto y me dijo que su madre le había dicho que es un lugar donde vienen a buscar novias”.

18“Le robaron todo a la señora, ya ni abre la ventana”.

19“Antes no teníamos rejas, no hubo problemas, ahora dicen abajo en mi edificio que hay que cerrar”

coleta where I am to meet with my informant the sidewalks are impeccably clean and intact, the glass walls of luxurious vestibules shines and doormen in funny hats look suspiciously at me. I suddenly notice that there is a hole in one of my sneakers. The kids in dirty clothes have been replaced by ladies with shopping bags of exclusive brands. And as the urban landscape changed I can feel my fears changing with it. The hand that grabbed the purse is relaxing, but my body has gone tense in another way. In Constitución I felt exposed as a possible target for a robbery, as I step into an exclusive galley on *Avenida Alvear*, I feel exposed like an intruder. An intruder with a hole in her shoe.

The guards regard me with empty faces, the girls attending the different counters does not even lift their heads to look me in the eyes. In some stores there is no one attending, but the doors are open and there are laptops sitting on the counters. I find the woman I am about to interview among the many boutiques, and as we greet each other she exclaims how much she loves my blonde hair. We take a seat in what looks like a hotel-lobby. Totally at ease I let the recorder sit on the table. She has an expensive scarf draped around her neck. Her hair is blonde, her fingernails pink and throughout the interview she keeps referring to me as “love”. She lives seven blocks from where we are sitting – in the heart of wealthy Recoleta, but her story is that of someone living in constant fear.

## 1.2 Background

Buenos Aires, capital city of Argentina is a town marked by borders. There are borders between different public spaces, such as the inner city and its outskirts, between neighborhoods or between spatial uses during day and night. There are also borders between people of different gender, of different class, between whiter and darker skin, between native and immigrant, between European and indigenous. As well as between those who have some – or a lot – of money and those who have little – or none. As in many cities in the world, some people live in exclusive departments and consume luxury, while others live in the street and feed of what they find in the garbage. Buenos Aires is a city of contrasts and of different universes. Sometimes these universes crash into each other with violence and other times they remain indifferent, ignoring the other realities existing side by side in the city.

Argentina is often claimed to be the most “European” Latin American country. The many European immigrants that arrived to the country during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century have left their marks on the city landscape, as well as in the national imaginary where the

“Europeaness” of the nation and of Buenos Aires is often brought out. Implicit in this way of speaking of the nation and its history, as well as explicit in works of the nation's founding fathers such as Domingo F. Sarmiento, are notions of colonial thinking connected to social class – where Europe in many cases represents wealth and civilization and Latin America poverty and barbarity (Guano 2004, Joseph 2000).

Starting with the last military regime in 1976, Argentina has implemented a neo-liberal economic model. Especially during the 1990's when economic policies led to privatizations of public companies and services such as the state-owned gas, oil, phone, electricity, water supplies, railroads. Further a fixed convertibility between dollar and pesos was established. The dismantling of the public sector was followed by deregulation of labor market and rights. These measurements had a negative impact on society and the labor market, and during this decade poverty and economic inequality increased alongside with growing movement of social protest movements (Auyero 2000, Cerruti & Grimson 2007, Malagrecia 2007, Shefner et al 2007, Villalón 2008). In 2001, the protests of the despaired culminated as the middle class –since the 1950's a broad and wealthy sector in Argentina occupying a unique position in Latin America – took to the streets after being struck by the economic crisis (Joseph 2000:337). Protesting against the corruption of the political class, the reduction of welfare policies and their lost savings in bank accounts, they joined groups from lower classes ousting two presidents within one month (Villalón 2008, Carassi 2007, Grimson 2008, Auyero & Moran 2007:1344f). The first years of the new millennium was marked by social movements, protests and reformulating of politics in Argentina. Factories abandoned by its 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. But as the economy was stabilized and many social movements incorporated into the official politics of president Nestór Kirchner, elected in 2003, the alliance between classes was lost (Villalón 2008:260-6, Goddard 2006:276, Carassi 2007:47). Solidarity from the middle class towards the lower classes was replaced by annoyance as the latter kept protesting and thereby often obstructed the transit through the city as the middle-class returned to work.

Buenos Aires is a spatially separated city. The spatial organization of the city coincides with socioeconomic groups whereas the middle- and upper-class tends 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 levels and higher destitution level (Grimson 2008:504). As anthropologist Alejandro Grimson has noted someone from the middle-class can spend months or

even years without seeing a shantytown if it is located outside of his or hers everyday circuit (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:297). Buenos Aires is divided into different districts. The city – the federal capital – has about 3 million inhabitants, and also the highest middle income, and is often represented and lived as European, middle class and elite territory. The suburban metropolitan district – the conurbation<sup>20</sup> – has about 8 million inhabitants (Ibid.). Grimson has pointed out that neoliberalism changed the lived and imagined borders of Buenos Aires. The number of people living in shantytown inside the federal capital went from 39.897 in 1987-1990 to 59.977 persons in the years 1993-1995. While at the same time the number of luxury departments in the city was multiplied by four and the elites also moved out into gated communities in large numbers. 1994 only 1 450 families lived in gated communities but as the end of the 90's there were about 35 000 families<sup>21</sup> (Cerrati & Grimson 2007:298). During the 1990's, 44 % of all private investment in the Mercosur region went to development of gated communities (Libertun de Duren 2009:319). Thus a reorganization of space took place under neoliberal policies.

This is part of an international tendency where global cities have undergone profound spatial changes from public to private (McKenzie 1994, Blakely & Snyder 1997, Low 2003, Svampa 2001). In Latin America the crisis and decentralization of the state, the de-industrialization process, the increased urban fear of insecurity, and the increased chasm between favored sectors and excluded have led to a formation of similar landscapes in Latin American cities the last decades (Libertun de Duren 2009:317). The process of spatial segregation has been slower in Argentina than in other Latin American countries. This has to do with the fact that the country has had a socially more homogenous structure and a large, somewhat mythically known, middle class (Svampa 2008:14). However, at the end of the last century a spatial reorganization took place in Buenos Aires. The south and the west conurbation – traditionally industrial hubs – are now housing empty factories and an impoverished former working-class. The northern suburbs have seen the growth of gated communities – rich *barrios* – conveniently located besides marginalized areas housing their staff (Libertun de Duren 2009:319). One of the most notable changes of the Argentine labor market under neoliberalism has been systematic increase of precarious employment. For example, in 2001, 35,

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<sup>20</sup> The terms “federal capital” and “conurbation” are the ones that most resembles Spanish and best describes the local conditions and are therefore the terms I will use in this thesis. When I write of “Buenos Aires” I refer to both the federal capital and the conurbation, unless I explicitly speak of the province.

<sup>21</sup> These are numbers that Cerrati and Grimson get from Horacio Torres article “Cambios socioterritoriales en Buenos Aires durante la década de 1990” (2001) In: EURE Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Urbano-Regionales, vol. 27 (80): 33-57

8% of the salaried employees lacked labor benefits (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:287). This deterioration of labor market conditions led to an increase in poverty, social segmentation and social inequality. In 2002, 42, 3 % households in the metropolitan area lived under the official level of poverty (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:290ff).

### 1.3 Aims and Questions

The increased unemployment and high levels of social exclusion inherent from the 1990's have transformed everyday life and the ways people create meaning in Buenos Aires. Important for this transformation 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 (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:294). How can this be seen in some women's experience of everyday life? The aim of this thesis is to examine how discourses of safe/unsafe and meanings assigned to urban poor construct places and bodies in these women's everyday life. My interest in women is due to an analytical interest of women as agents in public space. Women are often excluded from public space, and their mobility is circumscribed in other ways than men's. Many times this restriction in women's use of public space is upheld with fear (Cf Högdahl 2003). I have narrowed down the selection of informants to women who are mothers. Motherhood has traditionally been the primary role for women in Argentina, reinforcing socio-political structures that have had spatial consequence in the separation of public and private spheres – men were actors in a public and powerful world of economy and politics while women dominated domestic organization and took responsibility for reproduction (Craske 1999:10f). How do this traditional pattern influence women and mothers' relationship to public space in Buenos Aires today?

In the following two chapters I aim to answer the following questions: What impact does the discourse of *la inseguridad* have on the interviewed women's everyday life and how does it construct urban space? What is it that the women fear? How is the "othering" of urban poor related to urban space? And, how do the women understand the urban poor they come across in their everyday life?

## 1.4 Theoretical Framework

This thesis can be located within a field of post-structuralism, inspired by the works of Michel Foucault. A departing point is that the world and our interpretation of it is socially constructed and conditioned by discourse. This is hardly any news to Swedish ethnology: discourse analysis is widely adopted and used within the discipline. But since the range of uses is so wide a clarification of the use of the concept discourse is necessary.

My approach to the concept of discourse is that it is a certain logic which limits understanding of what is possible, impossible, true, likely or desirable (Börjesson 2003:21). As an ethnologist I study experiences of everyday life and employing discourse analysis as a tool enables me to see through the presumed naturalness of these experiences. In this thesis everyday life practices are analyzed as something created within a discursive structure. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe refers to the discursive structure as “not merely 'cognitive' or 'contemplative' entity; it is an articulatory practice which constitutes and organizes social relations” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:96). What we speak of, to whom we relate, the way we act and our spatial practices are then articulations of discourse. With articulation they mean “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:105). This means that I approach the city of Buenos Aires, the stories of *inseguridad*, and the interpretations of the urban poor as discursive constructions constituted through knowledge of the city, its places and people. This knowledge of the city is for example constructed in daily talk between its inhabitants, in news stories, by novelists and poets, by politicians, or by researchers – my own research is also a discursive articulation constituting the city. Knowledge and power are interrelated in Foucault’s works; certain regimes of knowledge create notions of truth, naturalizing the state of things and the relations of power (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2001:19). However, discourse is not something imposed upon us, or controlled by a power that can be located. Power is exercised everywhere and in every relation, that is – power is productive and its validity rests in its ability to create discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Foucault 2002:104, Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2001:20). Ideas about the places and people we see every day are constitutive for our lives and reality, at the same time as we constitute these ideas by ascribing them certain signification. This means that by acting upon the agreed knowledge of a certain place, for instance that it is an unsafe place; we create this place as unsafe. In doing so

we are articulating discourse, which according to Laclau & Mouffe is “The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:105).

As we move in the city, we act just as much upon knowledge and stories told to us about certain places and people, than upon physical conditions of the city or personal experiences – thereby reinforcing discourse and confirming knowledge. In his early work, Foucault defined discourse as practical actions systematically creating the objects they speak of (Howarth 2007:16,59). This is also the approach I take to my empirical material. Laclau and Mouffe argue that there should be no analytical distinction made between discursive and non-discursive practices, since “every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:107). This means that what we call “reality” is discursively constituted through our language. This is a quite interesting approach when it comes to lived experiences of the city and of actors in public space. It does not mean that there is no reality, but rather that a place like a street or a neighborhood have no meaning outside discourse, they are rather the material consequence of discourses of what a city should look like and how it should be used (Cf Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2001:42). But language is not static, it changes and meaning can never be determined; resulting in conflicts and negotiations between different discourses trying to establish their meaning of how certain phenomena should be understood (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2001:13,36). All objects and actions are given their meaning through specific systems of difference (Howarth 2007:117). Hence, the federal capital is usually given meaning as a territory in a state of opposition to the conurbation or the rest of the country. But as different discourses are fighting to ascribe their meaning to this territory, it can be given a number of meanings according to which system of difference it is placed within. This has consequences for another concept I aim to use analytically in the thesis – bodies.

In this study Buenos Aires is conceptualized as a city of different borders and different bodies that intersect each other. Borders cross-cut human interaction and spatial notions of the city and are embedded in different discursive formations of meaning. Bodies are here understood as a discursively constituted. I see bodies as objects that are given meaning – and subjectivity – through discourse; the concept contains notions and ideas that are ascribed to certain bodies: knowledge of what a certain body is and why. Discourse creates desired bodies as well as unwanted bodies. Bodies can be thought of as subjectivity, an ascribed meaning or as discourse manifesting itself in space. An example is the badly maintained, and privatized, commuter trains or bus-service between the federal capital and the conurbation, preventing those of few resources – unwanted bodies – to move freely in and out of the feder-

al capital. In relation to this the Foucaultian concept of biopower will be examined and used in the analysis that follows.

No discourse can ever be a totality, the signification given to places or to a certain body is always contingent (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:106f). Since reality is constructed through our stories about it and in our actions towards objects in it, we are also able to change this reality and the meaning given to places and bodies. As Judith Butler (1990) has argued – gender is a performance, something we act every day. In the same manner we also perform social position, class or race through everyday actions and language. The body is always circumscribed by different intersections of power, always located in borderlands of hierarchies; we act positioning ourselves within or against these hierarchies (Cf Anzaldúa 1999). Implicit in this reading of bodies is a call for action and change. Hence, another theoretical departure-point for this thesis is a post-colonial framework that assumes the connection between colonialism, knowledge, inequality and discursive production of determined places and bodies. I approach the field and my material presuming that there are certain types of bodies and places in Buenos Aires inscribed in a “non-European” and “barbaric” sphere and vice versa. This association between bodies and territories is compromised by unequal power relations. The white and European body is, for instance, an idealized body in Argentina, as cultural hegemony often is canalized through Europeaness (Viladrich 2005:391-4). The construction of certain bodies as desirable or as bodies that render suspicion and fear is then connected to territorial hierarchies and power relations upheld through a colonial knowledge regime (Cf Mignolo 2005).

## 1.5 Methods

Working with discourse analysis implies a whole model of research methods and a corresponding approach to the empirical material. Accepting the post-structuralist view entails certain ontological and epistemological premises, hence the theoretical framework cannot be separated from the methods, Key premises are a critical approach to the production of knowledge and that interpretation and representation are historical specific and contingent (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2001:10ff). The post-modern debate within anthropology and ethnology that questioned scientific objectivity resulted in the imperative of reflexivity – to scrutinize the subjectivity of knowledge production and the role of the researcher in the field (Ehn & Klein 1994:10). As an ethnologist I am trained within this tradition, but I want to take it fur-

ther. I believe that scientific production is an act of constituting reality and therefore it has consequences for the society at large. These should be considered at a deeper analytical and methodological level than just the mere reference to reflexivity in terms of conscientious subjectivity when gathering the material.

I argue that every study should be placed in its discursive context and that the implications of scientific production as an exercise of power always be considered. Departing from my epistemological standpoint I argue that the scientific community has a responsibility for the reality that we are part of creating through our knowledge production (Cf Howarth 2007:80f). This thesis is an articulation of discourse, it can be said to speak through a contemporary regime of knowledge rather than of the reality it is trying to describe, and as such it should be questioned. This is obviously a dilemma for any post-structural researcher: How can I, as a researcher, ensure that my writing is not just another effect of discourse? When I write of *la inseguridad* or the urban poor, my writing is bound to reproduce the same discourse that it is critically examining.

There is no way out of discourse; the researching subject is just as entangled as the informants or the reader. But as a mean to deal with this dilemma I intend to work with an auto-ethnographic method. If there is no way out of discourse, there is at least a way – with methodologically awareness – to deconstruct the experiences that constitutes the researcher and the researched. Who I am, where I come from and my own experience of the city of Buenos Aires has great influence on the topic I choose, how I conduct field-work, the questions I ask, the interpretations I make, my analysis and the process of writing up my result (Saukko 2003, Malagrecia 2007). Paula Saukko argues that auto-ethnography can be compared to what Michel Foucault calls critical self-ontology – at the end of his career he directed attention to how we use power against ourselves instead of analyzing how discourse is imposed on people. It is a tool to analyze how the own experience is discursively constituted and thereby imagine and act towards the world differently (Saukko 2003:84). Ignoring my own discursive formation would be to ignore an analytical blind-spot. My research does not present the “truth”, the right way to live *la inseguridad* or understand the urban poor. It does not condemn the women that feel fear, I have no intention to compare their experiences with a “truer” reality; rather the intention is to critically examine the interviewed women and my own experience, always with the aim of understanding how this experience is constructed. Why do we feel what we feel, and why do we interpret our realities the way we do? The key-word in any study should be respect for the informants and a good way to start is to acknowledge the re-

researcher's shared discursive conditions (Cf Saukko 2003:57). For like the interviewed women, I am also a woman living the discourse of *la inseguridad*, and my interpretations of urban poverty are bound to my experiences and interpretations constructed by discourses of bodies and territories. It does happen that I feel afraid in certain places or situations, or that I interpret certain bodies as threatening. I want to understand why, and in doing so I hope to change the way I – and hopefully the reader – act towards or talk of places or people<sup>22</sup>.

My analytical interest is directed towards women of different social positions and of different geographical locations in the federal capital and in the conurbation. The purpose is not to compare their stories. In accordance to the multi-sited ethnographic method developed by George Marcus, the many locations are rather used to look at the discourse of *la inseguridad* and interpretations of urban poor from different angles and thereby deepening the understanding of these phenomena (Marcus 1995).

The selection of informants has been limited to women who are mothers and who reside in federal capital or in the conurbation. I have conducted 14 semi-structured individual interviews and 1 group discussion in different parts of Buenos Aires as part of my field-work conducted during February to April in 2011. 8 of these interviews are around 1 hour long, 2 are about 2 hours and 4 interviews are shorter. The group discussion is about 40 minutes long. 7 of the interviews were conducted with women living in middle- or upper-class neighborhoods in the federal capital. 3 of the interviewed women live in socially and economically marginalized neighborhoods in southern federal capital or in shantytowns in the southern conurbation, Finally 4 women live in working- or middleclass neighborhoods in western and northern conurbation. Names have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

The interviews are semi-structured and arranged in accordance to themes rather than direct questions. Every interview has been recorded and transcribed. All informants were informed about the kind of study I was conducting, the confidentiality of their participation and how the material was to be used. I found the informants through personal contacts, recommendations, and the snow-ball effect. Some of them received a mail with a detail explanation of who I was, and that I was interested in their opinions of *inseguridad* and *pobreza urbana*. I am well aware of that my explicit interest in these topics might have affected the importance they assigned to these phenomena in their everyday life. I approach the interviews, both in the moment of performing them as well in the analysis, as discursive events created by

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<sup>22</sup> I am aware of the risk of losing myself into therapeutic writing, and hope to avoid that, and stay true to my researcher's ethics through a maintained focus on discourse, society, and relations of power.

the informant and me from the first contact until the moment of the interview (Gray 2002:95). In order to keep as close to the informants experience as possible I have edited the spoken language very little. The translation to English is my own, and every quote can also be read in its original in Spanish in the footnotes. In connection to the interviews I also did four longer participatory observations of the walk-along kind, where the women showed me their neighborhoods and their routines (Cf Högdahl 2003:38).

The process that led up this finished text can best be described as a circular movement between literature searches, observing the field, and writing – one thing has led back to another and so forth. This belongs to a hermeneutic qualitative tradition traditionally employed by ethnologist (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994:42, Patel & Davidsson 2003:27). Throughout the process of field-working and writing up the results I have tried to stay in line with Vetenskapsrådets principles for research ethics (SOU 1999:4, Gustafsson et al 2005).

## 1.6 Previous research

Much has been written on globalization and security and its impact on urban life. Of particular interest is for instance Saskia Sassen's work on how the "global city" emerged; something she shows through an examination of how the cities of New York, Tokyo and London underwent massive changes as they were transformed by the new spatial organization of a global economy (Sassen 1991, 2006). The work of sociologist Ulrich Beck on the role risk plays in modern society is also important for this particular field (Beck 1992, Beck 1999). Related to this is also the work of Anthony Giddens on "late modernity" where he examines how security and trust relates to the concepts of danger and risk (Giddens 1990). Hans Skifter Andersen is another scholar who has investigated excluded neighborhoods which he denominates "urban sores" (Skifter Andersen 2003). Worth mentioning is also Edward Soja's extensive work of the history of the city and urban space (Soja 2000). The work of Loic Wacquant about urban poor should also be mentioned (Wacquant 2008). Regarding the regional context there is a lot written on security and urban poverty in Latin America. The last decades this region has undergone profound processes of democratization and neoliberalization of particular interest to urban research and many studies has been done on spatial segregation, new forms of social exclusion and processes of privatization (De Caldeira 2000, Podalsky 2004, Salazar Cruz 1999, Tironi 2003).

Concerning Argentina, sociologist Gabriel Kessler has done an exhaustive study of the feeling of *inseguridad* in *El sentimiento de inseguridad* (2002). Kessler's study is based in ethnographical field-work conducted in 2004 to 2007, and it has been a great source of inspiration in interpreting my material. Important to note is that Latin America has its own history of fear which, before it was associated to common crimes, has been understood and investigated in relation to terrorism conducted by the state (Corradi, Weiss Fagen & Garretón 1992). The anthology *A la inseguridad la hacemos entre todos* (2010) edited by Mariana Galvani, Karina Mouzo, Natalia Ortiz Maldonado, Victoria Recepter, Alina Lis Rios, Gabriela Rodríguez and Gabriela Seghezzo has also been a great inspiration. As well as anthropologist Emanuela Guano who has written several articles of spatial use and discourses of race and class in Buenos Aires (Guano 2003a, 2003b, 2004). Related to my research is also sociologist Maristella Svampa's ethnographic examination of the spatial segregation of middle- and high sectors of Argentine society – *Los que ganaron. La vida en los countries y barrios privados* – that fled to different kind of gated communities during the 1990's (2008 [2001]). So is the work of anthropologist María Carman who has written of ecologists discourse in relation to segregation of urban poor in Buenos Aires (Carman 2011). As for the discipline I belong to, Swedish ethnology, Elisabeth Högdahl's doctoral thesis (2003) of spatial use in Malmö and in Cape Town and particularly what she writes of urban fear in connection to this has been inspiring reading.

This thesis can then be said to extend over many fields where much already have been written and examined from different angles. My contribution to this body of knowledge is a particular analytical interest in the constructions of spaces and bodies in relation to questions of security and neoliberalism. As well as an analytical interest in the role of motherhood in relation to discourses of insecurity and urban poor.

## 1.7 Disposition

I have divided the analysis of my empirical material into two chapters. In the first one, "Insecurity" I examine the women's experience of *la inseguridad* and how their fears can be understood in connection with motherhood. In next chapter, "Spatial belongings" I analyze how the women make sense of urban poor in public space. The thesis is then concluded by a discussion of my findings.

## 2 Insecurity

### 2.1 Everyday life with *la inseguridad*

So what impact does the discourse of *la inseguridad* have on the interviewed women's everyday life and how does it construct urban space? Constantly repeated by mass media and politicians, the attention of scholars and experts directed towards it, and the persistence it has in people's conversations, *la inseguridad* should be analyzed as one of the biggest public concerns and an incorporated part of everyday life in contemporary Argentina (Kessler 2009:13, Galvani et al 2010). This is part of an international trend where the last decade has seen a rise in concern about security in Latin America (Kessler 2009:10). As in other big cities, there is a growing sense of fear and insecurity, which has led to spatial segregation and fortification of houses and private property in Buenos Aires (Grimson 2008:506, Blakely & Snyder 1997). Beatriz Sarlo argues that the new urban landscape of iron bars covering windows, doors or stores constitutes a city of fear (2009:84). She points out that the list of urban violence is seemingly endless, sensational journalists constantly report about new brutal crimes committed and fear has become an important factor in organizing the relations people have to public space (Sarlo 2009:90). This is a phenomenon that can be linked to the economic and social polarization that started already in 1976 with the military regime, and that the hyper-unemployment of the 90's increased, creating a new type of permanently excluded subaltern classes (Grimson 2008:506, Svampa 2008:37). But it can also be related to a new way of understanding crime and new forms of representing it (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:296).

As I started commenting on my interest in *la inseguridad* people around me reacted strongly. A friend of mine got so worried about why I had chosen such a "clearly right-winged topic" that he demanded to know my theoretical approach and that I show him how my work was coming along every time I saw him. A professor of literature got so worked up over my topic that she talked for half an hour of how "they" leave out the important things from "their" definition of *la inseguridad*. My landlord, on the other hand, got really happy that I as a European was to study such a "serious problem" and hopefully bring about a "change" in the "Argentinean mentality". *La inseguridad* is clearly a highly politi-

cized terrain. During my interviews the topic aroused strong feelings, explanations about how the nation come to be where it is today, and political positioning – though many women claimed “not to know” of politics the interviews has a highly political character.

Sometimes I only had to mention the word *inseguridad* for the interviewed to come up with a whole arsenal of stories about things that had happened to them or to others. For example Raquel, in her fifties, owner of a business and residing in the middle-class neighborhood Caballito in central Buenos Aires told me:

The security is really bad, it's terrible, it seems to me that the country is a disaster, and I live in Caballito, for example, I am even scared to go out Saturday mornings, or I'm really careful when I go out, and I think that the whole issue of more drug abuse collaborated to greater insecurity. And I think that the lack of a working culture and the lack of education, I mean, it seems that we are living a really bad moment right now<sup>23</sup>(Raquel).

This woman lives, works, does her shopping and recreational activities all within seven blocks of a central neighborhood considered to be safe. Once she had been robbed of her cell phone in the street, but that was the only crime she had been exposed to – that she told me about – but still she was living with a strong sense of insecurity. Both international and Argentinean studies show that there is no real correlation between the rising fear and the actual crimes being committed (Kessler 2009:67, Taylor 2009:132 ). Sociologist Gabriel Kessler has done an extensive study of what he calls “the feeling of insecurity” in contemporary Argentina. There has been an increase in crime in Argentina, for example, crimes against private property more than doubled between the years 1985 and 2000, and the homicide rate had been historically high at 7 per every 100 000 inhabitants between 1998 and the time of Kessler's study (Kessler 2008:68). However, as Kessler notes, this is fairly low for Latin America, where cities like San Salvador and Guatemala City have a homicide rate twenty times higher than Buenos Aires (Ibid.). Interesting is that between the years 2003 and 2007, there was no real increase of crime but according to the Latinobarómetro, crime and violence became the greatest concern of Latin-Americans in 2008, outnumbering concern for unemployment. In March of 2008, in a survey conducted by TNS Gallup for the newspaper *La Nación*, 83% of the asked Argentineans believed that the insecurity had worsened, or that it had been the same for the last 12 months. In 2009, 30% believed that it would get worse during the course of the

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<sup>23</sup>Y la seguridad me parece muy mal me parece pésimo me parece que el país es un desastre yo vivo en prácticamente a ... en pleno Caballito y a veces hasta me da miedo por ejemplo los sábados por la mañana o tengo mucho cuidado cuando salgo de acá y me parece que todo el tema del avance de la droga es que es como que eso colaboró en mayor inseguridad no eh y ... Y me parece que falta cultura de trabajo me parece que falta educación o sea me parece que en este momento estamos pasando por un mal momento.

year (Kessler 2008:70). In Europe the new millennium saw lower number of victimization, but like in Argentina, still there were a rising number of people concerned about insecurity. Kessler finds that *la inseguridad* does not include all crimes committed in the city; rather *la inseguridad* is about an arbitrary threat that might be upon any one of us in any instance. *La inseguridad* excludes phenomenon such as organized crime that is considered to affect only those involved in it. Given that this threat might be upon us in any minute everything happens as if *la inseguridad* was real even if few of his informants has been exposed of crime (Kessler 2009:11).

Maria, a housewife in her fifties and a mother of three, residing in the wealthy neighborhood of Recoleta, had a clear political standpoint against the national government and about the topic of *inseguridad*. Like Raquel, she mostly moved about walking within her own neighborhood, or in her car when she had to go to other parts of the city. Once, several years ago, she had suffered an armed assault in the street. I had hardly started my recorder before she started telling me about her experiences of *la inseguridad*:

People are living in fear, at any time when someone walks closely; you have the feeling that it's him that's going to snatch your purse. Everyone has someone in their family, someone close, a friend, that has suffered and act of street violence, you can call it robbery, snatching, anyway ... you can't escape it <sup>24</sup>(Maria).

Maria and Raquel had not been victims of crime in the last couple of years, but still they believed that this was the worst moment of insecurity ever in Argentine history. These concerns of women living in privileged areas, was shared by women living in working-class areas and shantytowns. However, they had actually been victims of crime during the last years. Julia, an industrial-worker in her sixties, had spent her life traveling six days a week between her work in the city and the shantytown of southern conurbation, where she had been living during the last fifty years of her life. She told me about the many times she had been robbed, and how her neighbors sold drugs in cooperation with corrupt police. As our conversation progressed I felt stupid for asking if she felt safe in her home. Calmly, perhaps taking into consideration my foreignness, she answered my question:

No I don't feel safe at all /.../ No, there's no security, we don't have security ... Before, at least there used to be a police at the river bank when we left in the morning, you know there was a

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<sup>24</sup>Se vive con miedo, a cualquier hora se tiene la sensación cuando uno camina que alguien que pasa cerca es él que le va a arrebatar la cartera. Todos hemos tenido algún familiar, muy cercano, a un amigo que ha sufrido alguna acto de violencia en la calle, llámale robo, arrebato, cualquier manera... no, no te salvás..

police car. Now they are not there anymore, I don't know why. /.../ No, we don't have any security /.../ and the kids take advantage of the situation without police and they rob you<sup>25</sup> (Julia). The urban poor in Latin America are much more likely to be victims of crime than middle- and upper-class, discourse on the other hand tend to focus on middle class victims and subaltern perpetrators (Taylor 2009:133). I interviewed Julia in her workplace and chatting with her foreman, he was eager to explain a recent discovery he had made – even if it was “hard to believe”, the poor were also being robbed – “I mean what is there to take from them?” he told me, doing a gesture of resignation.

Sociologist Javier Auyero has conducted ethnographic studies in the shantytowns of Buenos Aires and has showed how the shantytown residents suffer routine violence, crime, and extremely unhealthy living conditions to a much larger extent than the other Argentine population (Auyero 2002). Eva, a mother of seven, living in a socially and economically marginalized area in southern conurbation looked at me as if I was from another planet when I asked if she felt safe in her home and then responded:

No, no you don't feel safe ... You're not safe in any place, today with the society like this, you don't feel safe because the danger can ... its everywhere. They can come into your house and rob you ... that's why no ... I think no one feels safe no even in their own homes ... If one would feel safe one wouldn't be living behind bars<sup>26</sup> (Eva).

Eva accompanied her children back and forth to school every day since they had been robbed when they were on their own. She had also been robbed when she did her grocery shopping in the neighborhood, and she now went to another area to shop. Crime and violence can be said to form part of Eva's and Julia's daily life. Interesting is though how Raquel and Maria, who had not suffered a crime in many years, shared the same conception of *inseguridad* with Julia and Eva. Raquel, Maria, and Alejandra, who all live in middle- or upper-class neighborhoods of the federal capital expressed how they felt especially targeted by crime. For example, Maria told me, how it was more attractive to steal a purse in Recoleta than in Lanús<sup>27</sup> because in Recoleta the purse was bound to have expensive contents. This might be analyzed as a new cultural experience of crime, as sociologist David Garland has pointed out, where a central

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<sup>25</sup>No me siento segura para nada/.../ No, no hay seguridad, no tenemos seguridad... Porque antes por lo menos había un policía en la ribera cuando salimos por la mañana, viste había un coche de policía. Ahora no está más la policía no sé por qué./.../ No, no tenemos seguridad /.../ entonces los pibes se aprovechan cuando no hay policías te roban (Julia)

<sup>26</sup>No, no te sentís segura... No estas segura en ningún lado, hoy en día como está la sociedad, no te sentís segura porque el peligro puede... está en todos lados. Pueden entrar en tu casa a robarte ... por eso no ... creo que nadie se siente segura ni en su propia casa ... si una se sintiera segura no viviría atrás de una reja.

<sup>27</sup> Lanús is a former working class neighborhood in southern conurbation marked by unemployment and poverty.

position is given to the victims. This generates identification with the role of the victim and a feeling of victimization is extended to the whole society where everyone is a potential victim and the concern about insecurity is further nurtured, independent of actual circumstances (Kessler 2009:26).

Almost all my informants locate the beginning of *la inseguridad* to a “few years ago” or after the economic crisis of 2001. This corresponds to the experience of the informants in Kessler’s research (Kessler 2008:72). And like Kessler’s informants, they also have different explanations and opinions about *la inseguridad*. Some women locate the fault to the government and their lack of action, such as more police and tougher punishments, towards the problem. Others locate it within a social context of unemployment – a “Latin-American reality”. Others speak of the lack of education. Others blame immigrants from other Latin-American countries. Many speak of the drug *paco* as a cause of more crime and violence. Only one of the interviewed women explains *la inseguridad* with the lack of a supposed order upheld during the last military dictatorship, “I hate the military, but at least you didn’t get robbed in the street”. Three of them do the opposite of this woman as they associate the discourse of *inseguridad* with the fear installed by the last military dictatorship (Cf Kessler 2008:238). Twelve of the fourteen women, some of them though actively questioning the concept, relate to *la inseguridad* as something existing and use the concept as a way to categorize their reality.

Two decades ago no one spoke of the problem of *inseguridad* in Argentina. Kessler traces the feeling of insecurity during the last decades, and I will refer to his historical retrospect to deconstruct the presumed naturalness of the discourse and to show how all meaning is contingent (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:106f). Kessler singles out three periods in the recent history. There is no data from the years of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), but as Kessler notes, the marks of state terrorism endure in recurrent fears. The first phase he sets from the turn of democracy in 1983, until the hyperinflation of 1989. During this time the crimes mostly observed in media were crimes connected to the dictatorship in confirmed as well as suspected cases, for instance some sensational kidnappings. The central feeling of fear was that of a wicked heritage from the dictatorship – *una herencia maldita* – haunting the new democracy (Kessler 2008:74f). A survey from 1987 shows that 45% of the Argentines feared there would be another military coup. However, Kessler does note that people also feared crime in the streets, and here he makes an interesting observation: During the time of the surveys those who expressed most inquietude concerning crime were women and individuals

from lower classes, but not until years later, when this anxiety reached men of middle-, and upper-class it turns into a national problem (Kessler 2008:75).

After the hyperinflation of 1989, crime rate went up, and the “social question” became a central element of the discourse of crime. Kessler argues that between the years 1989 and 2003, the “social question” was associated with crime, and in relation to this *la inseguridad* was constructed as a public problem embracing certain crimes. From then on, *la inseguridad* takes the form of a descriptive category; a way to comprehend reality (Kessler 2008:77). This is also reflected in my material, where all women talk of social issues in connection to *la inseguridad*. During this period crime started to occupy a new space in media coverage – it is now to be found not only in the yellow press, but also in the political section, or in the front pages of the most important newspapers in Argentina.

In the third phase of the recent history, starting in 2003, Kessler shows that *la inseguridad* is consolidated in media as a public problem. In this same period there is also a debate about the reliability in the media coverage; do their stories really reflect what is happening or are they exaggerating? This can be seen in many of my interviews, all of them with middle- or upper-class women, who question the ways media cover their reality. Two of them do not use the concept of *inseguridad* as a category at all in creating reality. Iris, a researcher in her fifties with an active standpoint for the national government, was actively fighting against what she considered to be political manipulation. She believed the topic of *la inseguridad* to be “ridiculous” and “dangerous”. She told me:

For example one day I went to see my mum ... and we we're going back, it's alright, everything was much darker and quiet at a time that when in Buenos Aires it never used to be dark and quiet in Recoleta. We came from dinner /.../ Sunday ... midnight /.../ I didn't say a word but I followed my mum to her house and then I told her I was leaving. And she says, alright girl /.../ something about walking alone /.../ And I really felt that what they were telling me was so ridiculous ... because there were no signs of threat around us ... if you're scared it's because there is a threat, but the threat here is in people's head/.../... I don't know ... and it makes me really angry that the city changes its rhythm /.../ that they give up doing things they like because they are afraid of what the television have told them to be afraid of. And what's more they really have a political reason to install fear in the people<sup>28</sup> (Iris).

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<sup>28</sup> Por ejemplo un día fui a ver a mi vieja ... entonces volvíamos, está bien, estaba todo mucho más oscuro y quieto en una hora que antes en Buenos Aires no iba a estar nunca oscuro y quieto en Recoleta. Salíamos de comer /.../ domingo... doce de la noche /.../ Yo no digo nada pero le acompañe a mi vieja hasta la casa y le digo que me voy. Y me dice, ah bueno nena, /.../ algo de que andar sola /.../ Y yo realmente sentí que lo que me estaban diciendo era tan ridículo ... porque no había señales de amenazas alrededor, vos decís tengo miedo es porque hay una amenaza pero la amenaza está en la cabeza de la gente/.../ No sé ... y me da rabia aparte que la ciudad haya cambiado su ritmo /.../ que se priva en hacer cosas porque tiene miedo a lo que dice la televisión que hay que tenerle miedo. Y además realmente tiene una razón política esto de instalar en la gente el temor (Iris).

What she describes is how a certain way of talking about dangers in the city has changed the way people move in the city. The emptiness of the streets of Recoleta can be read as an articulation of discourse (Cf Laclau & Mouffe 1985:105). So can her resistance to this meaning ascribed to the city at night-time be read as an articulation of a conflicting discourse, she is actively assigning another meaning to transiting the spaces of the city at night. Nora, a retired upper-class lady, living in Recoleta, also actively refused the concept of *la inseguridad*. She told me she “was not with the national government” but that she believed that this was a concept made up by the opposition. “They have never robbed me, neither my children, nor my husband” she exclaimed. Once her car was stolen, but that was “many years ago, in the epoch of Alfonsín”. She considered Argentina and her neighborhood Recoleta to be a safe place and was eager to point out that she had been robbed in Copenhagen, Denmark, last year, “supposedly one of the safest countries in the world”. That she mentioned Denmark, as an ironic example of the only place where she had been robbed, can be traced to a hegemonic colonial discourse of modernity, in which the north European countries are located as “modern”, “safe” and “advanced” places. Many informants supposed that I had been a victim of crime in Argentina but never in northern Europe.

Other interviewed women questioned the media coverage of *la inseguridad* and they had different strategies to avoid media and form their own opinion. Natalia, a young mother and a yoga-teacher living in a well-accommodated neighborhood of the federal capital was eager to tell me that she did not live in fear, and she questioned the “political interests” and “manipulation” behind *la inseguridad*. Another young mother, Magalí, living in a rich area of the northern conurbation had decided not to have a TV in her house. Her family went looking for information when they needed it, as a way to “control their own minds”. “I know it’s unsafe, I don’t need them to rub it in my face” she told me. She also questioned the concept of *la inseguridad* making reference to urban poor and children living in the street, “what kind of security do they have?” she asked. Also Augustina, the woman who took me on a stroll through Constitución, was clearly contesting the discourse of *la inseguridad*, filling her local environment with her own meaning. After the walk through her neighborhood, as her son and grandson were having lunch at the same living-room table, she told me of different situations in public space where she had been afraid because “they have told her” so. One time a man on a motorcycle asking directions scared her as he stopped just as a car was entering a garage. Another time she thought an ice-cream delivery man was planning to rob her as

she was waiting on a bus– “because they tell you watch out with this or that”<sup>29</sup>. In sum, many of the women were upset with media. Contemporary Argentine news media is clearly divided between those in support of the national government of Cristina Fernandez Kirchner and those in opposition. This is something that can be seen in all my informants’ answers. As they invest meaning in the stories of the news, they engage in a discursive struggle to establish different meaning through the talk of crime and safety. Some argued that the public news media was “covering up” the crimes committed in the country and “pretending that everything is alright”, while others meant that the privately owned news media was “inflicting fear” or “using *la inseguridad* against the national government”.

Kessler notes that a comparative study shows that Argentine newspapers report more about crime than does the media in countries with a higher percentage of crime. However, he indicates, that this could also be interpreted as a result of crime not being a part of everyday life in Argentina. Starting in 2003, the representation of crime revolves around two central ideas: One is a fascination with new forms of crime, for instance kidnappings – *secuestros exprés*, or *motochorros* –the thieves on motorcycles that made Augustina mistake the ice-cream delivery man for a thief. The other central element in the discourse of crime that Kessler points out, is one that remains stable and that is consolidated – this is the image of the *pibes chorros*: youngsters associated to subaltern classes, exclusion and shantytowns, characterized by the way they dress and the music they listen to (Kessler 2008:83).

The discourse of *inseguridad* had an impact on every interviewed woman’s daily life. For those who actively refused the concept it was an annoying fact that “everyone was talking of it” and they tried not to be a part of it. Others were living with a constant feeling of insecurity which limited them from doing things they used to do. But for most of the interviewed women it was an internalized fact, a way of moving in the big city that did not really limit them in their everyday life, but still constituted a structuring element of it. There were things or places they would avoid, or things they would do in order to prevent crimes from happening. Among these practices are holding on to personal belongings in crowded streets or in public transportation. Not to walk in public spaces with their purse open. Moving around in the city at the same times as other people and not walking alone after dark in places of risk. Many women also mentioned not driving with their windows down and with their purse at the

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<sup>29</sup> Te dicen tené cuidado con esto y el otro.

floor as daily security measures. Many women spoke of the effect that fear might have on the daily life. For example, Andrea told me:

The insecurity changes a lot of things for you ...But it's not like I stop doing things because I'm scared, but you're there trying to have the cell-phone on you and not in the purse or in your backpack as before, eh, you leave some money inside the trousers in case of robbery<sup>30</sup> (Andrea). But there were also women who had structured most of their everyday routines around safety and ways of avoiding being exposed to a possible crime. Another woman, Ana, whose husband had been assaulted as he was taking out the car, avoided going to parties, movies or the theater out of fear of crime. She had never experienced an assault herself, but still she had her daily routines structured around how to avoid a possible crime:

I try not to go out /.../ for example between 13.30 and 15.00, at this time in summer there's no one in the street and it's a dangerous.... And then I always try not to go too close to the street, more inside (on the sidewalk) /.../ And I try not to walk on empty streets /.../ ... Luckily, and I walk quite a lot, nothing's ever happened to me but ... that's why, I try not to get to the house late /.../ Then I try to do a thing I read once, that is that one should change the routes you walk, not always go on the same side, you should change and walk one day in one street and the other in another<sup>31</sup> (Ana).

After the interview we sat in the garden in back of the house and she told me how she used to let the cat out late at night, but that her husband had told her to stop doing that because “you never know who will be outside waiting for you”. She explained that they “study your routines” and then they await you. In her gardening course she had learnt not to put big plants right next to the front door, because “they might hide” behind it. Ana lived in a complicated area in western conurbation characterized by unemployment. This sensation of insecurity and constant threat was however shared by Maria, living in wealthy upper-class Recoleta:

At 21 or 22 I have to take out my dog and walk it around the block. I always used to go out alone because my husband works, he's tired /.../ now I always ask him to accompany me. I can't bring myself to do it on my own ... and even if I'm walking with a dog (she laughs) you can never be sure if they all of a sudden will be standing there with a knife threatening me to open the door for them as I'm entering /.../ I don't feel safe to go out alone /.../ if I have to go somewhere alone /.../ I go with fear ... First of all I try to go out earlier /.../ I don't go with my car because it seems as too much of a risk taking it out from the garage and then driving it back in at

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<sup>30</sup> La inseguridad te cambia muchas cosas ... ¡Ojo! no dejo de hacer cosas porque tengo miedo, pero ya vas por ahí tratás de llevar el celular encima cuando antes lo ponías en la mochila o en la cartera eh dejar algo de plata adentro del pantalón por si te roban (Andrea)

<sup>31</sup>Trato de no ir /.../ entre las una y media y las tres de la tarde, ahora en este tiempo en verano es hora cuando no hay nadie en la calle es una hora que es peligrosa también... Y después siempre no ir cerca de la calle, más bien para adentro/.../ Y no ir por calles que estén muy solas y por calles que haya que haya gente porque... a mí por suerte, yo ando caminando un montón de veces, a mí no me ha pasado nada pero... que yo por eso trato de no venir muy tarde de.... no ir por lugares que estén medio solos viste ... Después trato de hacer lo que una vez leí, que hay que cambiarse cuando vas caminando tratar de cambiar siempre el recorrido, no ir siempre por el mismo lado (Ana)

night-time. I leave and return in a radio-taxi, because neither would I stop a taxi in the street<sup>32</sup> (Maria).

The precautions the interviewed women were taking have a spatial and periodic character. Some places appear as particularly dangerous no-go areas, especially after dark. We move around in the city with cognitive maps in our head, shaped not so much out of experience but out of cultural agreements of what certain places are like. Ethnologist Elisabeth Högdahl has examined how people live and thereby “make” place in Cape Town of South Africa, and the Swedish town Malmö (2003). She notes how the topic of possible dangers and delinquency are constantly present in people’s everyday life in Cape Town and how it alters their relation to the city and their neighborhoods. “The fear” in Cape Town, she argues, turns into a description of reality and an internalized prescription for how to act in different spaces (Högdahl 2003:107). This can also be formulated with Foucault’s definition of discourse as practical actions creating the objects they speak of (Howarth 2007:16,59). As we speak of certain places in the city and act upon them in accordance to this speech, we are articulating discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:105).

Natalia, a young mother who was questioning the discourse of inseguridad, told me she was not afraid but “of course she would not drive into a shantytown”, neither would she drive through the central neighborhood *Once* at nighttime. Ana, living in western conurbation only travelled to federal capital when some administrative bureaucratic process made it inevitable because she did not want to pass the train-station in *Once*: “it didn’t used to be so horrible but now ... you should see the faces and their aspect”<sup>33</sup>. Discourse constitutes everyday life and everyday life also constitutes discourse, it is a mutual process creating the urban landscape according to how bodies are positioned – the one you are in and the ones you run across. *Once* is a neighborhood constantly mentioned by the interviewed women as a place they avoid. The stations in *Constitución* and *Retiro* are also mentioned. These are train-stations connecting the city with the conurbation and millions of people pass them every day. At night they are desolated and dark places echoing the busy morning and afternoon rush-hours filled with commuters trying to make it home. These stations are also places of great

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<sup>32</sup>A las 21 o las 22 tengo que sacarle (a mi perro) y darle la vuelta a la manzana. Yo siempre salía sola porque mi marido trabaja, está cansado /.../ ahora le pido que me acompañe. No me animo a hacerlo sola... por más que vaya con un perro je (se ríe)/.../ nunca sabés si de repente, con qué argumento van a estar con un cuchillo y me van a amenazar para que yo abra la puerta cuando esté entrando /.../ no me da ya seguridad no salgo sola... /.../ si tengo que irme a algún lado sola /.../ salgo con temor... trato de salir más temprano primero. /.../ No me voy con mi auto porque me parece arriesgado salir de la cochera y después volver a entrar a la noche a la cochera. Voy y vuelvo en radiotaxi tampoco tomo un taxi en la calle (María).

<sup>33</sup>No estaba tan feo pero ahora sí con las caritas que hay ... con el aspecto que tienen.

concentration of urban poverty with street vendors and people living in and around them. Augustina told me that when she goes to the station of Retiro she always watches out so that the kids – *los pibes* – does not run by and snatch the bags of her. She also mentioned Plaza Constitución as a place where the “most dangerous ones” are the kids, because they are “out of it” and they “might shoot you to rob you of something with no real value”<sup>34</sup>. These are places marked by certain kind of bodies – those of the urban poor – and the connection to territories ascribed with meaning in opposition to capital federal (Cf Howarth 2007:117).

Anthropologist Gabriela Rodriguez and sociologist Gabriela Seghezzo have undertaken a study of the discourse of *inseguridad* in Argentinean newspapers between 2007 and 2009 and their findings confirm that certain spaces emerge as producers of *inseguridad*. These are spaces associated to urban poor, such as the shantytowns, marginalized zones in the conurbation, or train-stations such as Constitución (Rodriguez & Seghezzo 2010:115). As Kessler has noted, the conurbation is often represented in news media as a paradigm of danger (Kessler 2009:17). With Laclau and Mouffe these are spaces that could be understood as *nodal points* within the discourse of *la inseguridad* – any discourse is constituted in an attempt of domination of meaning, ascribing a certain meaning to a certain place is then to stop the flow of differences and to construct a center where a certain logic is installed (Cf Laclau & Mouffe 1985:112). The places of the poor are places with a partially fixed meaning, “privileged discursive point” (Ibid.) constructed according to the logic of *la inseguridad* as unsafe territories from where unsafe bodies originate. Since all identity is relational the supposed safety of private homes and of federal capital would not make sense without this spatial fixation of danger, and the discourse would not be a validate logic for making sense of everyday life.

The cartographies of the city are not only spatial, but also organized according to time – going to the neighborhood of Once in the day might be uncomfortable, but it is not necessarily associated with danger. Not stopping at red light after dark in the conurbation is a security measure taken at night and not in the daytime. Some of the interviewed women say that they do not take much notice of *la inseguridad* because they move in public spaces in daytime when everyone “is in the street”. This aspect of time associated to fear in public spaces shows the constant change of meaning invested in places. An absolute fixity or non-fixity of meaning is impossible according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985:111f). Natalia tells me that coming home late the few hundred meters from the garage to her front door is a “torture”.

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<sup>34</sup> “están sacados de la cabeza”, “capaz te pegan un tiro para sacarte nada” (Augustina).

Day and night can then be said to have different prescribed behaviors and expectations (Cf Högdahl 2003:112). Spaces filled with partial practices like that can be analyzed as *floating significant*s in the discourse of *la inseguridad*. Laclau and Mouffe argue that every discursive field is bound to be overdetermined; every nodal point is overflowed by intertextuality, and all discursive identities thereby floating (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:113). Space is then lived and acted upon differently according which discourse makes the most sense. As well as for the bodies that inhabit this space. For example, a female body in public space – often interpreted in terms of moral, sexuality and vulnerability, have a different meaning at night than in the day (Cf Högdahl 2003:176).

Interesting to note in relation to how places change meaning, is how many of the women express that places that used to be “safe” or that could be controlled by taking reasonable precautions according to categorization of place, is now altered by *la inseguridad*. Maria told me how a visiting Italian relative, staying in on the “best zones” of central Buenos Aires, was robbed in a taxi going to *Barrio Norte*. Maria felt ashamed for her country, and expressed that now “you can never be sure” because crime is not related “to the neighborhood, nor to the zone, nor to the place”<sup>35</sup>. With *la inseguridad* crime is out of place, it can be anywhere. If one of the central elements of the discourse is the territorialization of danger, it is located to shantytowns and conurbation, and invested in the bodies originating from these spaces – then the appearance of crime in a supposedly “safe” area in the richest neighborhoods of federal capital creates a sensation of chaos. When I asked the women how to know who to avoid many described *villeros* – young men in marginal positions, but many also added that “nowadays you can never be sure”, “they” might come well-dressed or even be women. Andrea, self-employed beauty worker in her forties residing in another middle-class neighborhood in central Buenos Aires told me:

The insecurity is increasing a lot, during more or less four years it’s been advancing. Maybe it was more in the suburban neighborhoods before, but now it’s everywhere, you shouldn’t go to this or that place because something might happen, now you don’t even know where. And even in the middle of the city, you know the street Florida, everyone says you should be careful, don’t go to Florida, I always go with my purse in front of me<sup>36</sup>(Andrea).

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<sup>35</sup> Ya no pasa ni por un barrio, ni por una zona, ni por una lugar (Maria)

<sup>36</sup>Creció mucho la inseguridad, hace más o menos cuatro años que está avanzando más, capaz que era más afuera, no sé, en los barrios suburbanos antes, pero ahora en todos lados que no vayas a tal lado porque te puede pasar algo, no ahora ni sabés dónde. Y en pleno centro. Viste la calle Florida, todos te dicen cuidado, no vayas a Florida, yo voy con la cartera adelante (Andrea)

This sensation of chaos might be found in the way discourse prescribes behavior. The knowledge of the city, structured in accordance to the discourse of *la inseguridad* tells us that there are unsafe places and bodies, and how to act towards them. If you just keep out of Once at night time you will be safe, for example. But as meaning cannot be fixed and discourse is always overdetermined (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:112), places can always be positioned by different discourses, thus creating ambivalence and uncertainties about how to act and whom to trust. Places in federal capital created as safe by a partially fixed discourse of territoriality in Buenos Aires is now positioned as unsafe as crime allures all over. And if danger is even to be found in Recoleta how then is one to act to keep safe? As Mary Douglas would have noted, things are out of place in Buenos Aires, a certain type of crime and a certain type of bodies are appearing in places where they are not expected; danger allures, threatening life and property. Even in the most fashionable neighborhoods, or with private security, one is not to feel safe (Douglas 1966). Maria told me of how her fears had been transformed the last year:

We have a weekend house in a neighborhood that is semi-closed, there is police control inside and security that goes around constantly. Many times I've stayed there alone and everyone was telling me /.../ "Aren't you afraid staying there alone? But what's there to be afraid of? At night I close everything, it's a secured house with iron bars everywhere, what kind of danger could there possibly be? The dog is there and it alerts me, I also have an alarm and if I was to find something strange in the garden I would just push the button. This year I stayed alone but I just wasn't that relaxed anymore /.../ J: No? Why? What had changed? M: Because the year 2010 was so filled with tremendous news, to hear that all the time (she laughs) changes your psyche, that is, you start to change without noticing, I don't know it's a ... all the time you see that they break in, that they rob and always with total impunity /.../ This calmness that came from being in such a lovely place, full of trees and supposed peace ... eh I didn't feel it this year, already at 20 /.../ I closed the main gate and already I was locking myself into the house/.../ I didn't mention it to my kids /.../ but at night I got up and I went to the table where all the spotlights are controlled and I turned them on so that the garden would be lit up and I could see ... because you know there was a noise, the wind or some tree I don't know ... That's fear... I didn't used to be like this<sup>37</sup> (Maria).

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<sup>37</sup>Nosotros tenemos una casa de fin de semana dentro de un barrio /.../ semi-cerrado, tiene control policial adentro y una seguridad que da la vuelta continuamente /.../ Muchísimas veces /.../ yo me quedaba sola ahí en esa casa /.../ y todos me decían /.../¿no te da miedo quedarte? Ay pero qué miedo puedo tener, qué sé yo, a la noche cierro todo, la casa tiene todas rejas es una casa segura /.../ ¿qué peligro puedo tener acá? Más, está el perro que me avisa, yo tengo una alarma que en el caso de encontrara una cosa rara en el jardín apretaría la alarma, qué sé yo... Este año me quedé, pero ya no me quedé tranquila. Y no sé si me animaré a quedarme el año que viene/.../J: ¿No? ¿Por qué? ¿Qué cambió? M: Porque fue todo el año de 2010 muchas noticias tremendas, escuchar continuamente (se ríe) te cambia la psique o sea la comenzás a cambiar vos sin darte cuenta /.../ No sé es una ... esto es lo mismo ves todo el rato que entran, que roban con total impunidad/.../ entonces esa cosa de calma que yo tenía por estar en un lugar tan lindo, tan lleno de árboles y de paz supuestamente .. eh Ya no la sentí este año, ya tipo 8 de la noche/.../cerraba la tranquera, ya me iba guardando hacia adentro de la casa viste y ya y después inclusive estaba eh después no le comenté porque no quise poner tan preocupación a mis hijas ni nada, pero de noche me levantaba e iba al tablero donde están todos los reflectores y prendía para ver un poco el jardín, que me iluminara bien porque por ahí sentí algún ruido no sé si era una rama o un viento o qué /.../ Eso es miedo/.../ cosas que no iban conmigo viste (María)

In news media *la inseguridad* is represented as a public problem that requires political solutions. Anthropologist Gabriela Rodriguez and sociologist Gabriela Seghezzo have examined Argentine newspapers between 2007 and 2009, and they found that the journalistic discourse is not unison, a variety of positions are taken concerning policies that the national government are implementing. The scene is then set as one of a dispute between the government and the opposition around issues of security and thereby reaffirming the importance of *la inseguridad* as a political priority. Different actors call for different solutions according to their political programs and news media constantly report about crime against life and property, calling out for political action (Rodriguez & Seghezzo 2010:78,92).

Alejandra, living in the heart of Recoleta, would not walk the seven blocks to her work. She was too afraid, and expressed that there were not enough police in the zone. Her husband gave her a lift, and if he could not she would take a taxi. Her purse had been snatched several times and she had also experienced an armed assault on her car; for her Argentina was a violent country, with a lot of aggression where one should “keep a low profile and survive”. She thought that the national government was responsible for the problems of security. Like Alejandra, many of the interviewed women locate the cause of the problem in the politics implemented by the local or the national government. Gabriela Seghezzo calls attention to that the talk of insecurity in Argentina started at the same time as the neoliberal model was consolidated. Neoliberalism affirmed the necessity to protect private property and physical integrity, and proposed “modernization” of the state’s structure as a solution to social conflicts (Seghezzo 2010:59f).

Summing up, *la inseguridad* has grown into a discourse with great impact the last decade; constantly in the news, centered by political debate and as a way to categorize reality it is part of organizing how Buenos Aires is lived and experienced. Some women live in fear, organizing their everyday life to avoid crime; others are contesting the news-media’s way to inform or the whole concept of *inseguridad* and the political intentions behind it. The discourse of *inseguridad* prescribes way to act and to interpret the city and conurbation – as we act upon the discourse certain kind of spaces and bodies are created. A central element is the partially fixed inscription of danger in territories and bodies of the urban poor, this is a hegemonic understanding of shantytowns, certain neighborhoods and urban poor. But as the discursive field can hold no absolute fixity – contingency is always present – as crime appears “anywhere” – in the wealthy neighborhoods earlier considered to be safe – a sensation of chaos is produced (Cf Laclau & Mouffe 1985:111ff). Finally, it is important to note that I am

not questioning the interviewed women's conceptions of reality and of *la inseguridad*. Arguing that all objects and reality is constituted by discourse does not mean denying crimes being committed or people's experience of it. Crime does exist, but the meaning invested in these crimes and the experience of them depends on a discursive structure fueled by productive power creating knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:108, Foucault 2002:104).

## 2.2 Fear and motherhood

What is it that the women fear? A recurrent example is being assaulted when driving the car in and out of the garage. Ana, who lived right next to a shantytown, was afraid of cleaning the sidewalk in front of her house for maybe "they would come" and make her let them into her house. Another source of fear for women independent of where they lived was traffic and the way people drive. Some also mentioned the fear of the police. These were fears shared independent of place and class. Mercedes though, a retired woman in her sixties, living in a marginalized area of southern federal capital, was afraid of being evicted from the department the *Instituto de la Vivienda* had presented her some years ago. She spoke of the impotence she felt regarding the crimes in her neighborhood:

The other day a neighbor /.../ was leaving for work and they assaulted someone who was walking ahead of him, and what did this man do? ... He went back home and the other poor guy was left there to defend himself on his own, they had a gun pointed at him ... And as he saw that, it gave him such a feeling of powerlessness but what was he to do? He's a father, he has children and a wife and well...<sup>38</sup> (Mercedes)

The most common fear, that almost every one of the interviewed women mention is the fear of being subjected to physical harm or being killed. These are fears that have been constant in human history (Kessler 2008:21). As seen in the quote above, talking about *la inseguridad* often raised concerns about one's family. I asked Alejandra what she feared the most:

And what I fear the most are physical harm towards me and my family, when you're a mother you will always look after your children, your family, nothing matters you will risk anything for them<sup>39</sup> (Alejandra).

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<sup>38</sup> El otro día me contaba un vecino que salía a trabajar y adelante de él iba otra persona y la asaltaron y entonces ¿qué hizo el hombre? Se volvió a la casa y quedó el otro pobre defendiéndose como podía y le tenían a punta de revolver... Y él viendo eso y la impotencia que la da pero ¿qué va a hacer? Es padre, tiene hijos, tiene señora y bueno... (Mercedes).

<sup>39</sup> Y lo que más temo son daños físicos en mi persona, ahora si es mi familia, cuando uno es mamá vas a ver por tus hijos, por tu familia, a vos no te importa nada te jugás (Patricia).

Like Alejandra, many of the women pointed out the centrality of their families and children. Some talked about how material artifacts stolen really had no importance when compared to one's own or a loved one's life. The lives and safety of their families was the only thing that really mattered. Veronica described a forced entrance to her house in a middle-class neighborhood of northwestern conurbation:

If you're not there, you get home and find your house made a mess /.../ but you didn't have to live through the situation of having to be there. This house has been burgled twice /.../ they entered breaking a window that supposedly was unbreakable /.../ and they got hurt, blood had been running down over the window... /.../ We lost a lot of stuff and the insurance company didn't recognize all of it, but the most important thing for me was that we weren't at home. The material things are worth only so much<sup>40</sup> (Veronica).

She also mentioned that "they" had never found her son's savings, but if they would have taken them she would have replaced them. Eva, a mother of seven, living in a socially and economically marginalized neighborhood right next to a shantytown in southern conurbation told me that her daughter did not have a cell-phone because "maybe they will kill her for it, those things happen"<sup>41</sup>. Every interviewed woman, except one, expressed concern, worries or fear for their children.

As Nikki Craske has shown, motherhood is a central identity for women in Latin America, cutting across class, ethnicity and nationality (Craske 1999:2). Motherhood is here understood as a discursive construction assigned to the biological functions of a body with a healthy womb. It is the cultural meaning assigned to pregnancy and childbirth (Cf Craske 1999:10). Motherhood has been interpreted as the prime – and natural – role of women in Argentina. As in many other countries of the world, women are expected to take care of children and households. There is also inequality in the paid workforce with gender-segregation placing women, in professions for example related to teaching and health. Unemployment and underemployment brought on by neoliberal policies in the 1990's especially affected women (Borland and Sutton 2007:706).

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<sup>40</sup>Si vos no estás, bueno, llegás y encontrás tu casa revuelta /.../ pero no pasaste por la situación de tener que estar. En esta nos robaron dos veces. /.../ me robaron todos los anillos que yo tenía de oro todas las pulseras todo lo que fuera de oro y... y entraron rompiendo un vidrio que se suponía era blindex que era irrompible. Le dieron con un palo y le hicieron un agujero porque no se rompía todo viste. Entraron por ahí... se lastimaron porque había hecho chorreas de sangre en el vidrio... /.../ Perdimos un montón de cosas, del seguro casi no me reconoció nada de lo que tenía, pero no estábamos nosotros que para mí es lo más importante, que las cosas materiales ... tienen valor hasta ahí (Verónica).

<sup>41</sup> y bueno no tiene celular mi hija por el motivo de que por un celular capaz me la matan porque esas cosas pasan (Eva).

This divide between public and private space, where women are traditionally inscribed into the latter, and the gender-segregated distribution of paid work, can be understood as the material character of discourse and is also found in my material. Five of the fourteen interviewed women took care of their homes and families and worked occasionally as dance- or yoga-teachers, or in catering etc. One woman worked in her home as a beauty therapist. Two were housewives. Two were full time employed in unqualified work. One woman ran her own family-business with various employees. One woman ran her own small business with one employed. One woman was a qualified researcher. Two of the women were retired, unclear from what. Common for all of them, except for the researcher (who did not believe that *la inseguridad* existed) is that they talked about their concerns for their children in relation to *la inseguridad*. It must of course be stated that all of these women were informed of my interest in interviewing women who were mothers, which might have led them to talking more about their children than they might have done in other occasions.

Regarding *la inseguridad*, almost all women with grownup children expressed the same fear – that something would happen to their children as they were taking public transportation to school, when they went to work in inconvenient hours, or as they were coming home late at weekends. Andrea gives an example:

And my children, that's the thing, that I have children that are already teenagers ... a daughter that's 24 years who also goes out a lot and she goes to work early ... sometimes she leaves at six in the morning when it's still night in winter and I'm afraid until she takes the bus and she tells me that she arrived<sup>42</sup> (Andrea)

Andrea also has a son, but she did not tell me of her worries for him. Most of the women spoke in particular about their worries for their daughters and not their sons. As Ana and me were having tea and chatting about life in the last summer sun in her garden in the western parts of the conurbation, she told me of how worried she was about her daughter that was to enter a later shift and would have to take the last bus home. “The night buses are really ugly” she said, gazing at the cat that was climbing the high wall surrounding the little plot of land. Then we talked about the new house her daughter was constructing, and what kind of iron bars they would install, she was particularly worried since the window was at the first floor facing the street. Ana also had grown up sons, but she did not express the same kind of worries for them.

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<sup>42</sup>Y los chicos míos, este es el tema, que tengo chicos son adolescentes ya ... una hija de 24 años que también sale mucho y se va a trabajar muy temprano se va ... a veces sale a las seis de la mañana todavía es de noche /.../ (en el invierno todavía es de noche ... y tengo miedo hasta que toma el colectivo y viste me dice que llegó (Andrea)

Many of the interviewed women were also grandmothers and they expressed concerns about their grandchildren. Maria showed me the front page of the newspaper *La Nación*, where the headlines announced that schoolchildren were being robbed on their way from class in Recoleta. “It’s terrible” she exclaimed and went on to tell me about how awful it was that her grandson sometimes watched Marcelo Tinelli’s TV-programs where he learnt to talk and act in an uneducated manner. She was taking measures to ensure he could not watch these kinds of programs. Raquel who also was a grandmother, told me about her grandchild and how she was taking time off from her work at the family-business to spend time with him.

Talking about one’s children or grandchildren is, of course, also a way of socializing. But it can also be seen as positioning oneself as a good mother and grandmother. To worry about their education and safety is – apart from being a consequence of the love one feels for them – also a way to emphasize the cultural value given to motherhood in Argentina. For example, when Veronica mentions that she would have replaced her son’s savings had they been stolen she is positioning herself as a good mother. And as the discourse prescribes preventing behaviors, part of being a good mother in a society where *la inseguridad* is the prime public concern, is then to advice children of how to avoid crime. As Andrea told me:

I always tell my kids this as well... you shouldn't be talking at your cell-phone in the street or listen to music, they live with music and they don't pay attention to who is behind them, they are not scared ... But they robbed my daughter three times more or less<sup>43</sup>  
A young mother, Magalí who was living in Vicente Lopez, a rich area of northern conurbation, was actively resisting the way people and media talk about *la inseguridad*, but when her child was born she started to experience new feelings:

I was afraid that something might happen to my husband and what was I to do with her then ... You know that made me feel more of *la inseguridad* and the fears, /.../ Last year I was a afraid, they had stolen a girl, and all mothers we went into this shared paranoia for our children you know ... in the supermarkets they are stealing children /.../ you have to be careful in the supermarkets because they come and they grab the kids and they tell them anything and they take them from you ... they cut their hair they change them they put them in the bathroom J: No, awful, to sell them? M: To sell them. For organ transplantation, for child prostitution. /.../ and after

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<sup>43</sup> Y se lo digo también a los chicos ... no estés con el celular hablando por la calle o escuchando música, que viven con la música y no se fijan quien está atrás, ellos no tienen miedo... Pero a mi hija la robaron tres veces más o menos (Andrea)

that I always have to have her close to me /.../ in the supermarket ... I can't relax /.../ or in the park I always pay attention and look<sup>44</sup> (Magalí).

The social movements had important impact in changing gender roles in Latin American societies. From the 1970's on women started taking to the street in Latin America, protesting against authoritarian regimes and extending their private space into the public. Scholars of Latin America have called this "militant motherhood", as women actually occupied public space as political activists in their role as mother. An example from Argentina is the struggle of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* – women who extended their private role as mothers to public space reclaiming their missing children and thereby also protesting against the dictatorship from a social position the military regime could not openly attack (Craske 1999:17). Many aspects of women's subordination have been questioned in Argentina and the presence of women in social movements and in institutional politics has led to some changes in discourse and women's rights. Nevertheless, motherhood remains a central feature of participation as many women participating in politics do so fulfilling their prescribed role as mothers (Craske 1999:131). Being a good mother can be understood as being a good citizen in this context. As the mothers advice their children, or take certain actions and measurements to make sure they are safe, they are also articulating the discourse of *la inseguridad* creating a certain reality and investing a certain meaning in what it means to be a woman and a good citizen.

In relation to fear it is important to look analytically at women's ambivalent position as agents in public space. As I showed above the meaning ascribed to places and bodies is never fixed, rather it is ambivalent, positioned by many discourses and constantly changing (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:111f). However, in the traditional discourse on gender, women's inferiority to men and their vulnerability can be seen as what Laclau and Mouffe would call a nodal point – a partial fixation of meaning (1985:112). This has importance for the meaning invested in their presence in public space. Kessler writes that in all international studies women express a greater amount of fear than men about the case scenario of a possible crime (Kessler 2008:160). But why is this? Kessler considers the hypothesis of women expressing more fear because standard questionnaires do not consider hidden variables, such as fear of

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44Me dio miedo qué a mi marido le iba a pasar algo y ¿qué iba a hacer yo con ella? ... viste, ahí me daba más la inseguridad y los miedos, /.../El año pasado estuve con miedo, que pasó que robaron a una nena, entramos todas las madres como en una paranoica colectiva del miedo a los hijos viste... en los supermercados que roban nenes /.../ hay que tener cuidado en los supermercados porque vienen, viste agarran a los nenes les dicen cualquier cosa y te los afanan... les cortan el pelo los cambian los meten en el baño J: No qué feo ¿para venderlos? M: Para venderlos. Para trasplante de órganos, para prostitución infantil /.../ y después en el super siempre la necesito tener cerca a ella a mi lado, no me puedo relajar ... /.../ en la plaza también hay que estar atento viendo (Magalí)

sexual violence. When women are not asked specifically about sexual violence they do not mention it, but they do consider it to be part of the scenario. But when asked specifically about different kind of crimes, women were more afraid only in cases where sexual violence was mentioned as an explicit threat. This is also the case in Kessler's material: The women in Buenos Aires are not more afraid than men that a bus will run them over, but yes that they will be raped by a burglar (Kessler 2008:160f).

None of my informants spoke of fear of sexual violence. Neither did I ask about it. But it can be understood as something implied in the fears they mentioned, such as having to live through a forced entry in their home or an assault in the street at nighttime. The threat of sexual violence is a way to regulate women's behavior in public spaces; it is an implicit and incorporated discourse that regulate our spatial practices and our understanding of bodies in public space. When Augustina, the woman who took me on a stroll through Constitución, told me that she always makes sure to pick up her granddaughter from school, this threat was implicit – she raised her eyebrows and I understood immediately what she referred to. Elisabeth Högdahl draws a parallel to what Foucault calls a normalizing sanction. In this case, this sanction directed against women creates an understanding of certain ways of acting and of certain places to avoid – for instance, do not walk alone and drunk from the bus stop to your house late at night. A victim that acted outside of these prescriptions can then be made responsible for her own victimization. It also creates certain bodies as it not only regulates women's behavior and relation to space, but also criminalize men whose bodies are constructed as possible perpetrators (Cf Högdahl 2003:175). Högdahl compares “the fear” of Cape Town, with women's fear of being raped when walking home at night in Malmö, and finds that the feeling of risk and the discursive prescribing behavior is the same (Högdahl 2003:175). Interesting here is how none of the interviewed women explicitly mention sexual violence as a potential risk in their spaces, but sexual violence appears as localized to the territories of the “others”. Some women brought up sexual abuse as a problem of poverty and as something that occurred in shantytowns or in the homes of poor families, something that I will discuss more in detail in the next chapter.

Finally, an interesting phenomenon related to *la inseguridad* and neoliberal discourse is the industry of security, a market that is growing exponentially and in diversified forms in Argentina. Kessler writes that private vigilance, electronic control, and other services have led to an urban landscape divided in safe and unsafe zones (Kessler 2009:13). Alejandra living in Recoleta, had her house in Pilar – in northern conurbation – monitored with alarm

systems connected to internet which enabled her to see her house at any time from her cell-phone. Raquel had her fabric monitored and her son could see it on the internet from his home the hours that they were not there. Maria had an alarm system installed in her weekend-house. Andrea had recently had an alarm installed in her home. Veronica had an alarm that had alerted her many times when “some kids” jumped her wall to steal things from the garage.

Michails Liano and Mary Douglas argue that the world has not gone more threatening; rather our sensibility to different kind of threats is greater. According to these authors, this is due to new technology which control different levels of our everyday life and turns us all into suspicious subjects (Kessler 2009:61). The women who mentioned technology in relation to *la inseguridad* were all women of middle- and upper-class sectors. As poverty increased in the 1990’s many of those who gained from the economic policies moved to live in closed or semi-closed neighborhoods with private security. Maristella Svampa sees this new spatial segregation as radically emblematic for the process of the country’s privatization (Svampa 2008:11). This socioeconomic organization of space is part of an international trend based on the globalization of economic activities. As Saskia Sassen has pointed out this has led to the emergence of the “global city” designed to attract foreign capital and where the real estate market is distorted (Svampa 2008:51). Neoliberalism has profound impacts on the way we organize space and in the concepts we use to understand the world. In the neoliberal urban landscape security is turned into a private matter and an individual responsibility, a spatial right that the individual can buy. Anthropologist María Carman regards the massive consumption of security as an antidote in a cultural system of fear extended over Buenos Aires. As an example emblematic of this she takes the case of a closed neighborhood where they used hungry lions to guard the borders at night time (Carman 2011:207f).

Our language is also altered as what used to be economist jargon is turned into *lingua franca*. Gabriella Seghezzo emphasizes how terms like “modernization”, “efficiency” and “management” is used in relation to social issues and security in the discourse of *inseguridad* (Seghezzo 2010:62). Kessler highlights that before the word insecurity was used to describe crime it was most frequently employed in social science to describe phenomenon in labor markets, such as the eventual loss of jobs due to technological innovation, or later precarious working conditions (Kessler 2009:29). Luc Boltani and Eve Chiapello argue that in its organizational phase, 1930 to 1990, capitalism had to respond to the question of security through planning, protection of and benefits for the masses, but in the 1990’s this is left aside as the concepts of change and risks replaces the appreciation of labor security. Kessler notes

that as the demand for civil security has grown, the call for security in the work market is decreasing. (Kessler 2009:29).

Concluding, most women fear their own or someone in the family's physical harm or death. They make sense of la inseguridad through their identity as mothers or grandmothers. As they affirm their character of good mothers articulating the discourse of la inseguridad, they are also positioning themselves as good mothers, women and citizens. The threat of sexual violence can be analyzed as an important organizer in the way women make meaning of space and crime; it constructs men's bodies as offenders and women's as potential victims thereby organizing their spatial practices. Thus, none of my informants spoke explicitly of the risk of sexual violence in the spaces of their everyday life. But mentioned it as a problem localized to shantytowns or associated to urban poverty. As the discourse of la inseguridad constructs secure and insecure territories, neoliberalism presents buying safety as a solution. The interviewed women who consumed security-products were all of middle- and upper-class. Neoliberalism's impact on urban space has meant a transformation of public space to private space. But it has also colonized the way we make meaning of social issues, society and the actors in it. This transformation of meaning is connected to the neoliberal transformation of the labor market, once invested with rights and security, now deregulated and precarious.

## 3 Spatial belongings

### 3.1 Urban poor and exclusion from public space

In this chapter I want to discuss how the “othering” of the urban poor can be understood in relation to space. As Beatriz Sarlo has noted, there has always been marginalized people in the city of Buenos Aires. But the crisis of 2001 implied a new kind of urban poverty where whole families living in public space testified of the economic and social disaster the country was living (Sarlo 2009). Iris, residing in Recoleta, remembers one day of autumn 2005:

After 2001 there was an enormous amount of people living in the street ... /.../ My partner and I were taking a walk /.../ it was a Sunday afternoon and it was really a terrible and sad panorama /.../ the way that they were installed in the street, I mean the way they were inhabiting public space and how they made a house out of a corner ... but a house where you had one place to put clothes, another place where people slept, another place where they ate. For instance I remember sitting in a bar looking through the window /.../ at a man that was living there in the street ... it must have been autumn ... because ... he wore two different outfits as the afternoon passed. At one moment when it was warm he wore shorts /.../ and after he wore trousers. Well it was people who evidently before that was not living in the street and they had routines of people who have a home /.../I don't think I will ever forget that<sup>45</sup> (Iris).

After the failure of the neoliberal economic policies in Latin America in the late 1990's, many economists reformulated their theories. One of the most famous economists to change his view on the economic system was Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize-winner in economics and former chief economist of the World Bank. He emphasized the “disastrous” (Stiglitz 2001: quoted in Venn 2009:207) consequences for the countries that had imposed neoliberal policies and particularly how these consequences were “borne disproportionately by the poor” (Ibid.).

Regardless of economic and social position, place of residence or political opinion the presence of urban poverty is something that can be noted in the interviewed women's

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<sup>45</sup>Después del 2001 hubo una enorme cantidad de personas viviendo en la calle/.../ Con mi pareja dimos un paseo/.../ era un domingo a la tarde y realmente era una panorama terriblemente desolador/... cómo estaban instalados en la calle, es decir la manera de habitar el espacio público y hacer de una esquina una casa... pero una casa donde vos tenías un lugar donde se ponía la ropa, otro lugar donde la gente dormía, otro lugar donde la gente comía. Por ejemplo me acuerdo de haber estado sentado en un bar mirando por la ventana /.../ a un señor que vivía ahí en la calle... debe haber sido otoño... porque/.../ vistió dos atuendos diferentes a lo largo de la tarde ...En un momento que hacía calor tenía un shorts /.../ y después se había vestido con un pantalón largo... Y bueno gente que evidentemente antes de eso no vivía en la calle y tenía rutinas de gente que vivía en su casa /.../Creo que no me voy a olvidar más de eso (Iris).

everyday life. As Iris recalls this painful memory she tells the story as an observer, someone who remembers watching something distant. But at the same time, she told me, it was something that had scared her in the moment that she realized how close she had been to suffering the same fate, with three kids to support and no job. Many studies have been done on the impoverished Argentine middle-class during the 1990's, and many show how their loss of social status and impoverishment sometimes has been given meaning through discriminatory attitudes towards the poor (Joseph 2000, Guano 2003, Guano 2004, Viladrich 2005, Grimson 2008, Villalón 2008). Anthropologist Emanuela Guano notes that as the middle class was losing its position, resulting in blurred borders towards the lower sectors; poverty had become a real threat that they "strove to fend off by enhancing difference while discursively reconstituting their own white, and modern, middle-classness (Guano 2004:73). This means that they constituted their bodies in a certain way to withhold the distance to the bodies representing the threatening poverty. Discriminatory attitudes are only articulated by some women in my material, but there are other ways to construct difference.

The interpretations of urban poverty and the way of explaining it in my material obviously differ with social position and place of residence, but most of all it has to do with political standpoint. Iris, who had taken an active stance for the national government, believed that the situation had changed to the better with lesser people in the street and some people going back to more or less secure jobs. Maria, living in the wealthy neighborhood of Recoleta and with an outspoken opposition towards the national government had a different interpretation of urban poverty:

This is the moment with most poverty ever ... there has never been so much poverty J: No? And what happened? Why? M: I think it's due to what I was telling you before... that it generates ... when people receives the famous subsidy ... per children ... the worst thing you can do is give a person something and not teach them something /.../ and that's what they are doing because it's convenient for the government to have poor people depending on them because then they will vote for them<sup>46</sup> (Maria).

The "famous subsidy" that Maria refers to is the *Asignación universal por hijo* implemented by the national government of Cristina Fernandez Kirchner in 2009 which grant 220 pesos per child or pregnancy a month— about 340 Swedish kronor – to unemployed or informally employed mothers. In earlier forms of this social security reform the subsidy was given to the

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<sup>46</sup>Y este es el momento en lo cual más pobreza hay... no hubo tanta pobreza nunca J: No... Y ¿qué pasó? ¿Por qué? M: Y que yo creo que viene de eso que te decía antes. J: ¿Lo que me decías? M: de que genera... la gente recibir el famoso subsidio... por hijo... lo peor que puedas hacer para una persona es darle algo y no enseñarle algo/.../ y eso es lo que hacen porque al gobierno le conviene tener pobres dependiendo de ellos porque entonces le van a votar (María)

fathers and not the mothers<sup>47</sup>. In Marias interview the urban poor are constructed totally as others, alien to her reality and to society. On the contrary, Julia, an industry-worker about to retire after a whole life of traveling six days a week between different jobs in the city and the shantytown in southern conurbation, where she lived, had quite a different answer when I asked her about urban poverty:

Nowadays it's really difficult for everyone to live here in Argentina ... Because you used to go and buy something, let's say at 4 or 5 pesos and the next day you go and buy and pay 7 pesos. One kilo of meat costs 30 pesos and the roast beef which used to be the cheapest meat, now it costs 30 pesos. A family that used to buy for 10 pesos and do *milanesas*, or a stew for the children, but now a lot of people doesn't buy meat because it's really expensive. And I don't know what they live off ... spaghetti, rice, boiled potatoes/.../ I think it's really good what (the president) is doing because ... /.../ The mother who has a child and they will pay her the *asignación universal* when the child is born. They are helping people who aren't working so their kids can study and do something in the future<sup>48</sup> (Julia).

These are two opposite social and political positions and experiences, which is not surprising in a polarized country like Argentina. This can be analyzed as different discourses positioning and constructing different subjects in relation to urban poverty (Cf Laclau & Mouffe 2008:172). An interesting dimension in interpretations of urban poverty is that what used to be spatially separated has now been made visual as some of the clearly marked borders of Buenos Aires was eroded in the 1990's; resulting in urban poor appearing in middle-class territory (Guano 2004:71, Grimson 2008:506). Andrea, living in Palermo, a middle-class neighborhood told me about the changes in her block:

And even here in the city, in my neighborhood, even here there is a squatters settlement /.../ well there was a time when a lot of *cartoneros* had installed themselves there (on the other side of the train rails). It was not that they came to prepare and separate the garbage there, you know like a place to separate, no they just stayed there and lived there, every day there were more of them, and since they do not want to go to the province, almost everyone wants to be in the city. ... Well, they stayed there until they were evicted because the elections were coming up or something happened, you know what it's like/.../ And then they just started coming back, little by little /.../ and then they had the whole block again. /.../ no one wants to walk by there, be-

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.argentina.ar/es/pais/C2616-asignacion-universal-por-hijo.php> (Checked 8th of August 2011)

<sup>48</sup> Hoy en día es muy difícil para todos vivir acá en Argentina... Porque vos ibas a comprar una cosa, ponéle cuatro cinco, pesos y mañana vas y comprás una cosa y pagás siete pesos. Un kilo de carne está a treinta pesos y que el roast beef esa era la carne más barata y ahora está a treinta pesos. Una familia que antes compraba diez pesos y hacías milanesas, hacías un guiso para los chicos, hoy en día mucha gente no compra carne porque está muy cara. Y viven de qué sé yo... fideos hervidos arroz hervidos o papa hervida /.../ Me parece muy bien lo que (la presidenta) está haciendo porque /.../ Aquella madre que tiene un hijo y le va a pagar la asignación familiar en el nacimiento de su hijo. Gente que no trabaja le están dando una ayuda para que esos chicos puedan estudiar para que puedan hacer algo el día de mañana.

cause... and moreover it isn't that it's poor people, but they are afraid of robberies because there were robberies and car thefts<sup>49</sup> (Andrea)

*Cartoneros* are people that live out of recycling garbage, they first appeared during the crisis of hyper-unemployment in the 1990's, and they have been subjected to class discrimination and racist attitudes (Grimson 2008:506, Guano 2004). The majority comes by foot, dragging over-loaded carriages through the city where they go through the garbage taking with them things that can be sold or eaten. They are subaltern informal workers, the majority crossing the borders to the city from the conurbation, or the "province" as Andrea says. That is a common way to mark distance from the city of Buenos Aires and define territorial belonging. The word *provincia* in this context often refers only to the marginalized neighborhoods in Gran Buenos Aires, and not for example to the gated communities in northern suburbs (Galvani & Mouzo 2010:126). Emanuela Guano has examined the discourse and practices of Buenos Aires impoverished middle class in the late 1990's and shows how certain cartographies of belonging was mapped onto different social groups. Buenos Aires is usually constructed as a European city – the Paris of Río de la Plata. When constructing the modern nation, the liberals of the 1880's, among them Domingo Faustino Sarmiento inserted a division between civilization and barbarism that is still in vigor in today's national mythology. Sarmiento's generation of politicians and intellectuals turned the gaze of the republic towards Europe and opened the country to European immigrants in order for them to bring civilization and "sophisticated" culture to the barbaric continent (Guano 2004:71).

This dichotomous divide between civilization and barbarism has left borders in the nation and the city, associating certain territories as belonging to certain bodies. Ana, herself living in *provincia*, in a working-class neighborhood in the western parts of the conurbation, also expresses a clear view of how the poor does not belong in federal capital. The quote is taken from a conversation about the violent eviction of a squatter's settlement in the park *In-doamericano* in December 2010:

It's disgrace /.../ "now I want a house for free". No it's not going to be free ... and they don't want a plot of land where we have all the land, so much land, /.../ I'm not going to give you

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49 Inclusive acá en la ciudad, en mi barrio donde estamos nosotros también hay un asentamiento de gente acá/.../ bueno hubo una época que se había puesto un montón de cartoneros que se instalaron ahí. No es que venían y preparaban, separaban la basura ahí, viste un lugar para separar no ya directamente se quedaban, vivían ahí y cada vez había más y como no quieren ir a la provincia ellos, casi todos quieren estar en la capital... Bueno hasta que después los desalojaron a todos porque venían elecciones o algo pasó /.../ y después de eso empezaron de a poco a volver/.../ Y toda una cuadra otra vez. /.../nadie quiere pasar por ahí porque, además no es que gente pobre, pero tienen miedo a los robos porque hubo robos y de autos (Andrea)

something in the entrance to the Congress, everyone wants to live in the capital, but no darling, we need people to go to the countryside, to the countryside.<sup>50</sup> (Ana)

Maria, living in Recoleta, expresses quite clearly a similar view of what the urban poor are and where they really belong:

there are a lot of places where they need workers, they don't have to concentrate here in the city /.../ but it's really suits them to come to the city. No they should be sent to the provinces, to the provinces where they can do hard work and really ... eh learn with the soil that this country is blessed, you throw a seed and anything flowers ... There isn't any real reason that this country is poor, there is a lot of corrupted people<sup>51</sup> (Maria)

Maria constructs the urban poor as inadequate economic subjects, unable to take rational decisions and as subjects who came to the city living of what corrupt politicians give them – and in doing so also occupying a space that does not belong to them. To her, the poor represent bodies that belong to barbaric territories and as such they should be sent to do hard manual work. She blames the politicians and also the backwardness and underdevelopment of the poor which she constructs as others to the city and the nation – if they are sent to work the land they will really learn that Argentina is a blessed country. This expulsion of urban poor from the federal capital has a long history and Carman writes of it as a spatial injustice:

Ya que no solo agrava procesos de segregación sociourbana ya existentes, sino que también expresa una concepción autoritaria respecto de qué sectores sociales merecen o no vivir en el corazón de Buenos Aires, pretendida capital cultural de América Latina<sup>52</sup> (Carman 2011:170).

Maria, Augustina, Alejandra and Andrea also expressed that they pay taxes not “to have to deal” with urban poverty. They shared a feeling of injustice and considered themselves to be good citizens whose life was being obstructed by urban poor that blocked traffic, spread garbage in the streets, squatted houses etcetera. Especially Andrea felt that it was unfair that her block was occupied by squatters. Carman analyzes the same attitudes in newspapers, where squatters are constructed as social intruders that should be satisfied with living in the province and not aspire to live in exclusive spaces with high value in the market (Carman 2011:189).

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<sup>50</sup>Una vergüenza/.../, “ahora yo quiero una casa gratis”. No, gratis no... y no quieren un terreno allá donde tantos campos hay, tantos campos, /.../ /.../ Pero yo te voy a dar pero allá lejos donde yo necesito que vaya gente a vivir... No te lo voy a dar en la puerta del Congreso, todos quieren vivir en la Capital, no querido, necesitamos gente que se vayan al campo, al campo (Ana)

<sup>51</sup> hay muchos de lugares que se necesita gente para trabajar, no tienen que concentrarse todos en la ciudad... /.../ les vienen muy bien venir a la ciudad. No a las provincias mándalos, a las provincias a que hagan trabajo fuerte en que realmente eh ... aprendan con la tierra que este país es bendito, tirás una semilla y brota lo que quieres, /.../ no hay nada que haga que este país sea pobre eh lo que hay es gente corrupta (María)

<sup>52</sup> In my translation: “Not only does it make the process of already existing socio-urban segregation worse, but it also expresses an authoritarian concept of which social sectors deserves to live in the heart of Buenos Aires, aspiring to be cultural capital of Latin America”

The urban poor are also constructed as others through fear. Kessler writes that in a democratic society, border against the “others” cannot take ethnic, class or national form, the border can only be justified if the “others” are considered dangerous (Kessler 2009:61). Andrea, the woman we met above, was worried about her family’s safety in relation to the squatter-settlement installed in her block. After the interview I asked her if she had 15 minutes to take a stroll around the block. As she grabbed her keys and opened the front door she looked at me and announced that she would only go to the corner and not around the building since that was where the squatters’ settlement was. As we got to the corner, she stopped and pointed towards the other side of the street, and said: “That’s where the settlement that I told you about is, they go in and out through the windows in the wall by using small wooden ladders”<sup>53</sup>. I looked and could not see anything else than a brick-wall and green leafs moving in the wind on the other side of the windows.

For Andrea, as many other women I interviewed, the urban poor are intruders in her neighborhood, they have no right to be there and she fears them, associating their presence with criminal activities. Urban poverty grew at the same time as the new urban fears expanded in the city of Buenos Aires (Grimson 2008:506). As I showed above, there is a notion of crime being out of place, this constructs a sensation of chaos as the women experience that they are not safe anywhere. In the same way it is bodies that are out of place in Andrea’s experience. Kessler highlights that young people, social protests of marginal sectors, and in a smaller amount figures associated to social marginality such as *cartoneros* or individuals who clean windshields of cars, are represented as part of *la inseguridad* and as producers of chaos (Kessler 2008:85f). This is not something that is unique for Buenos Aires. Guano notes that the criminalization of the poor and discourses of new crimes is characteristic of neoliberal socio-spatial reorganization in societies where the polarization is increasing (Guano 2004:82). Regarding the squatters coming back to her block Andrea told me:

Sometimes I called the government of the city of Buenos Aires to tell them about those that settled here around the block. It isn't just that I want them to leave because it looks ugly or the garbage/.../ But rather to say OK they should have somewhere to live because they aren't living good, they have no roof and they take their light from the street. And they tell me that yes they will talk to a social assistant and I called three or four times and they said the same thing/.../Did you see that they are constructing this new building there. Maybe when they are finished with

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<sup>53</sup>“Viste ahí queda el asentamiento que te dije, entran y salen por las ventanitas del muro, ponen escaleritas de madera”.

that construction, because they are stuck right on it, so maybe then they will relocate them because it looks bad, such a building and everything...<sup>54</sup>(Andrea).

There is a contradiction in her story. At the same time that she gives reference to the social problems and shows concern for the way the squatters are living – that they do not have water nor a roof – she also speaks of them as not belonging to the space they are in. The people living in the squatters settlement represents something that does not match the aesthetics of the new building under construction – to which they are “stuck” as if they were vermin. These bodies are something that would “look bad” next to this new building and she figures that the city administration might be waiting to relocate them until the construction is finished. All meaning is constructed within in a field of differences (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:113) and implied here is then that the squatter’s bodies are the opposite of the new modern building. Their bodies belong to other territories, and other times – as in opposed to modernity. They crossed a border that they had no right to cross and are in a place where they should not be. Historically the poor have been conceptualized as criminals and feared for being on the move. They were believed to embody the forces of evil or to be actors of criminal activities (Venn 2009:221). Some of the women speak of the urban poor as bodies that have originated from an undetermined place in *provincia*, or from neighboring countries, threatening to squat houses and other spaces of the federal capital. In this way the poor are also othered as bodies not belonging to the national space. Raquel, for example, associated *la inseguridad* with immigration from neighboring countries:

when there was European immigration to Argentina ... the European immigrant came ... with intention to work ... /.../ Now the immigrants, let's say the Latin American immigrant who has no culture ... who is not intelligent ... I mean ... maybe they're good for manual professions or for developing minor things<sup>55</sup>...

Raquel connects the urban poor with a continent she does not identify with: Latin America. The population policies of Argentina have favored European immigration, and immigrants from the neighboring countries have not been considered as desirables for the national projects (Domenech 2005:14). For example, in the beginning of the 1990’s the administration

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54 Yo en cambio a veces llamé por teléfono al gobierno de Buenos Aires para decir lo de.... los que se asentaron acá a la vuelta... Porque además no es que quiero que se vayan porque queda feo, o la basura/.../Pero más que nada para decir bueno que tengan un lugar donde vivir porque tampoco están viviendo bien, no tienen techo, sacan la luz de la calle... Y me dice sí que se van a comunicar con un asistente social y llamé tres, cuatro veces me dijeron lo mismo /.../ Viste que están construyendo un edificio nuevo ahí. Quizás cuando termine toda esa obra porque están pegaditos ahí quizás ... los re ubiquen porque queda mal tanta obra que están haciendo...(Andrea)

55 cuando en Argentina hubo inmigración europea... el inmigrante europeo vino ... vino con voluntad de trabajo /... /Ahora viene el inmigrante digamos latinoamericano que no tiene cultura ... que no es inteligente ... o sea ... por ahí sirve para el oficio o sirve para desarrollar lo marginal ...

of President Carlos Menem facilitated immigration from Eastern Europe at the same time as immigration from Latin American countries was restricted (Albarracan 2005:19). During the 1990's immigrants from neighboring countries were mentioned as a problem in Argentine public debate. A concern was that if Argentina was to help neighboring countries the national standard would drop. The Bolivian, Peruvian and Paraguayan immigrants were constructed as scapegoats for unemployment and the saturation of public services among other problems caused by the economic policies. The media discourse criminalized immigrants from neighboring countries as illegals, clandestines etc. And even if studies showed that the immigration did not cause any significant impact on unemployment, a nationalist rhetoric constructed clear borders between "us" and "them" – locals and wrong kind of foreigners (Albarracan 2005: 30ff). Maria told me:

I'm a bit afraid of San Telmo because, it's a really nice neighborhood , but there's a lot of squatted houses, people go in to houses without owners, I don't know, there's a lot of Bolivians, Peruvians and they drink a lot ... And at night-time it's kind of dangerous<sup>56</sup> (Maria).

Raquel was also convinced that the Bolivians were "a people that drink"<sup>57</sup>. Augustina was indignant over the immigration from other Latin American countries. According to her they were coming from "outside" occupying houses and the public hospitals. This is part of a xenophobic discourse not uncommon in Buenos Aires. My interviews were conducted shortly after the violent eviction of the squatted park Indoamericano in December 2010; an area located in southern capital federal. This was an incident where several occupants of Bolivian and Paraguayan origin died. The event was positioned within the context of political conflict between the national government and their opposition; given meaning by various discourses. Articulating a right-wing xenophobic discourse, local governor Mauricio Macri spoke of "uncontrolled immigration", and stated that Argentina could not be responsible for the neighboring countries' "housing-problems".

Political scientist Raul Zibechi remarks in an interview with cooperative Lavaca, that it seemed as if the police was fighting an army of foreigners and enemies, comparing this brutal repression of urban poor with the repression of *piqueteros*<sup>58</sup> in 2001 and 2002. According to

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<sup>56</sup>Yo a San Telmo le tengo un poco de temor porque San Telmo es un barrio precioso lindsimo, pero tiene muchsimas casas tomadas, son gente que entran en casas viste que no son que no tienen dueo qu s yo hay muchos Bolivianos, Peruanos y toman mucho ... Y de noche es medio peligroso (Mara)

<sup>57</sup>"un pueblo que toma" (Raquel)

<sup>58</sup> Social movement groups of *piqueteros* first emerged as industries were being shut down in the 90's, as unemployed they had no other means to protest their poverty and claiming a dignified life than to do road blockades.

Zibechi, the way the big Argentine newspapers reported about the violent eviction shows the history of racism and classism of the city's middle class and Argentine elite. He underlines that the problem is not really xenophobic, because the rejection is not against the foreign per se – everyone is happy when Europeans and North Americans come with money – rather it is a rejection of the poor. The “problem” of usurpation of public space was constantly repeated when speaking of the Bolivians and Paraguayans occupying a public park, but as Zibechi notes in the interview, usurpation of public space is never mentioned in relation to gated communities. He states:

Es una constante de la historia argentina ese racismo de la clase media y media alta, y de los medios de comunicación porteños. Quiero aclarar que es un fenómeno muy porteño, porque en otros lados de la Argentina no lo encontrás, donde también hay paraguayos o bolivianos. Ni siquiera en el conurbano encontrás esa actitud ferozmente racista<sup>59</sup>.

This can be analyzed as if the poor are out of place in the city, they do not belong to spaces that some discourses want to inscribe with certain meaning. In my interviews there is a spatialization of the poor to be found as the women places the urban poor in spaces outside of federal capital or as anomalies in their neighborhoods. This spatialization constructs presupposed subjects, and certain bodies that are desired and others that are not. Following Laclau and Mouffe, the subject is constituted by its position in discourse; it is the function and the effect of the discourse (Howarth 2007:64). At the end of the interview Augustina showed me a mail with suggestion of changes in immigration policy as a solution to the “problems” of Bolivians, Peruvians and Paraguayans living “illegally” in Buenos Aires. I then told her that my status in Argentina had been somewhat irregular during the years I had lived in the country. She looked at me as if she did not understand what I was saying. My body as an “illegal” one was a discursive impossibility; it did not fit into the spatial notion of the bodies of those who are constructed as not having the right to public space in Buenos Aires. When I was leaving, she asked me if I could bring her a bobbin for knitting from Spain the next time I went to Europe. The ones she had, made of “national wood”, were of such a “lousy” quality. As fixation of meaning can never be reached and the discursive field is always overdetermined the subject is positioned by various discourses. This means that “all ‘experience’ depends upon precise

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Many times they have been brutally repressed, for example in 2002 two piqueteros were brutally shot dead by police during a blockade of an important bridge connecting federal capital to the southern province.

<sup>59</sup>Zibechi's comments and quote taken from <http://lavaca.org/notas/buenos-aires-es-indoamerica/>(8of June 2011) My translation: “In the Argentine history this racism of the middle and higher classes have been constant as well as in the media of the federal capital. I want to make it clear that this is a phenomena typical of the federal capital, because in other places in Argentina it is not to be found, places where there's also Paraguayans and Bolivians. Not even in the conurbation will you find this kind of cruel racist attitude”.

discursive conditions of possibility” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:115). Social identities, is something relational, constantly changing and positioned against other subjects. When positioned against urban poor, the body of opposition is constructed as the opposite of what the poor embody. In these stories the urban poor are opposed to civilization, modernity, and moral. They are constructed as not belonging to the city or as in this case the nation. But since all identity is ambivalent, the nation might be something superior in comparison to the rest of the continent, but according to a geo-political colonial logic, the Argentine becomes something of “lousy quality” in comparison to the European (Cf Mignolo 2005).

The “othering” of the poor that is made in these women’s stories can also be understood in terms of biopower as developed by Foucault in his lectures at the College de France. According to Foucault, the sovereignty’s old right “to take life or let live” has been complemented by the opposite right in the modern state – “the power to make' live and 'let' die” (Foucault 2003:241). This mean, that governance, defined during the European Middle Ages by the sovereign authority’s power to take the life of its subjects or inflict cruel corporal punishment upon them, was then complemented by a power that targeted the well-being of the population with the aim of producing healthy bodies that could be put to work for the kingdoms, and later for the states, and the capital (Foucault 2003:241ff, Larrinaga & Doucet 2008:520, Castro-Gomez 2007:156). That biopower complements sovereign power as the main form of domination in liberal modern Western societies, does not mean a total exclusion of the sovereign power, thus it coexists with biopower through mechanisms of racism. According to Foucault, racism is incorporated into the state as power focuses on life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Foucault 2003:239f). Racism allows the killing of the “others”, and acts as a guarantee for the safety and well-being of the desired population. It is then racism that makes it possible for biopower:

*.../to discriminate between those segments of the population – and the human species more generally – that would be subject to technologies of health and well-being, and those that would not (Larrinaga & Doucet 2008:520).*

This means that biopower constitutes a logic where racism is a strategy that allows the killing of non-desired bodies. Biopower creates a favored normal body, whose well-being is at its interest, at the same time that it creates a violent exclusion of the “others”. Santiago Castro-Gomez writes that this is a racism, that according to Foucault, take on different shapes, for instance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it appears as a strategy against the poor, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the Jews etc. (Castro-Gomez 2007:156ff).

It can be argued that the urban poor are those that are separated from the desired population, their life or well-being is not administered as bio-political rights, and they are basically let to die. It is not relevant if these urban poor are immigrants or not. The racist mechanism of biopower strikes against the urban poor because they are interpreted in a racialized way. Being poor is being *negro* in Argentina. Grimson notes:

While the cartoneros who come to recycle garbage range in phenotype and skin tones, it is simply their being out of place that contributes to their racialization as the darker invader into the lighter skinned domains of the Buenos Aires, European elite (Grimson 2008:506f). The bodies of the urban poor are constituted as darker-skinned in Argentina, but this has no correspondence to what people really look like. And this is interesting in understanding how bodies are constructed by biopower. Argentina is a country with a long and violent history of exclusions of certain bodies from the nation, and from its political heart. What happens if we analytically consider this spatial and cultural exclusion as a bio-political “othering”? As Venn argues, what Foucault calls a “discourse of race war” in *Society Must Be Defended* should be thought of as:

a history of inequality that points to wars of conquest and subjugation at the origin of an initial dispossession that creates winners and losers, that is inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power (Venn 2009:214).

We might then look at the constructions of the poor as belonging to other spaces than the federal capital as a part of a long and violent battle over the right to occupy public space; and thereby participate in the definitions of the nation; a battle that takes place in a context of inequality and concentration of wealth. How are they then “let to die”? Guano writes of the European immigrants that arrived at Argentina between 1870 and 1930, whose grandchildren came to compose larger parts of the Buenos Aires middle class:

By picturing mestizos and indígenas as ignorant, violent and primitive, i e. lacking cultural proficiency in the unspoken and unwritten rules of bourgeois metropolitan modernity, these categorizations provided the dominant classes with an ideal of citizenship that justified the eviction of the subaltern from the urban sphere (Guano 2004:71).

Some bodies came to represent the non-desired “others”, while white European bodies were idealized. Important to remember is that, as many nations, the modern republic of Argentina is founded upon a space that had to be violently conquered and then built upon the “systematic attempt to eliminate, silence, or assimilate its indigenous populations” (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003:4). The indigenous populations were seen as obstacles to the country’s modernity and were virtually annihilated by the state at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002:525). This was made through a violent “othering” of these groups living in the territories

that the new state wanted to conquer; they were simply let to die through the mechanism of racism, their bodies were massacred as obstacles to a future capitalist agrarian economy (Cf Gordillo & Hirsch 2003). The military campaigns at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was aimed at places called “deserts”, not because of geographical characteristics or lack of human inhabitants, but because they were discursively constituted as waste lands lacking state control, capitalism and civilization (Gordillo & Hirsch 2004:4). These campaigns in the newly born Latin American nation occurred at the same time as the European colonial quest went into its third phase with the “Scramble for Africa” and the “Middle East” (Venn 2009:210).

As the indigenous bodies were brutally excluded from the new national territory, the European body – that is, those who behaved in accordance with Argentine elite’s desires and needs – embodied the desired future of the nation (Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002:525). Of course, the European body is also a floating signifier, overdetermined by discourse, and given different meaning in different discourses (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:113). European immigration was encouraged, but at the same time Argentine elite feared the “foreign ideologies” such as anarchism and communism, brought by immigrants. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> there were massacres of indigenous people as well as violent repression of working-class movement with hundreds of workers killed in Patagonia and in Buenos Aires (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003:12f). The “Campaign of the Desert” – the massacre of indigenous people – is a scene that today decorates the Argentine 100 pesos-bill. Just a few blocks from the political heart of the nation there is a statue of the general who led this military campaign in the Patagonia – General Julio A. Roca. Some years back someone wrote “murderer” in red letters over the foot of the statue. Space and the kind of bodies constituted to occupy it is a question of power and constant negotiation. Foucault has showed how bodies and their visibility is an important aspect of state control (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003:5). Andrea showed indignation of squatters in her neighborhood, but she also told me of the “invasion” of people coming to the popular bars and restaurants in her neighborhood. “We that are born here don’t even have a place to park” she told me, totally ignoring layers of former belongings connected to the soil below our feet.

Writing of social issues in Argentina it is impossible not to mention Peronism. Many of the women, especially those in opposition to the national – Peronist – government keeps referring to how the poor live of subsidies. Implicit in this is a criticism of Peronist social policy traditionally claimed to be directed towards the poor. 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 the large segments of the working class and the rural migrants as he took com-

mand of the Ministry of Labor in 1943. Perón was elected president three times, in 1946, in 1951, and in 1973 as he returned from exile in Spain (James 2002:273). For many years, scholars constructed the supporters of Perón in a prejudiced way. For instance, sociologists like Gino Germani constructed 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, constructed as bodies assigned barbarism. The many rural migrants were referred to as a "zoological flooding", or as *cabecitas negras* – little blackheads – and represented by Argentine elite as bodies lacking the adequate civilization for the city of Buenos Aires (Montesinos 2005:51, Joseph 2000:355, Sarlo 2009).

Historian Daniel James 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 expanded the meaning of who belonged to the nation. Under 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 worker was given labor rights (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003:15). But he also made use of public space in a way that led to the movements' success and persistence:

Perón resorted to amassing enormous crowds of people who would overflow downtown Buenos Aires in order to show loyalty to their leader. The political meaning of these political rituals was obvious to everyone. In a tacit competition for public space, the populace was taking possession of a city whose devotion to high culture and bourgeois sophistication had always excluded them (Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002:271).

During his first government, the nation also saw the rise of social struggle from invisibilized indigenous groups. In 1946, indigenous *Kollas* marched "in peace" from northwest Argentina to Buenos Aires. Anthropologist Gastón Gordillo and Silvia Hirsch write that the march "had an important spatial dimension; it was a trek from the invisible margins of the nation to its material and symbolic core" (Gordillo & Hirsch 2003:14). The bodies of the excluded in the heart of the federal capital continue to be an impacting sign. The importance that spatial use of the city had for Peronism, as it redefined old hierarchies bringing the claims of marginalized groups to the spatial heart of the nation, has also been shown by Laura Podalsky (2005). She examines the political changes that took place after the fall of Perón in 1955 to his restoration in 1973 and shows how the military government that overthrew Perón changed the use of urban space by encouraging consumption of private cars and television sets. The elected

government of Frondizi that replaced the military in 1958 had a modernizing discourse which incited construction of skyscrapers, shopping malls and private automobiles. These trends initiated a privatization of urban space and an increase in the divide between public and private space that Peronism had transgressed. Podalsky argues that these urban transformations linked to consumption culture laid the foundations for the changes in the 1990's (Podalsky 2005, Ortega-Alcázar 2009). Looking at the history of spatial exclusion one can also draw parallels between the violent exclusion of indigenous bodies, the exclusion of migrant workers bodies, and the practices of state-terror during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. As cultural critic and writer David Viñas has pointed out, this erasing of the indigenous populations and silencing the traces of violence can be compared to the erasing of the “disappeared” of the 1970's (Viñas 2002:162f [1982]). According to the human rights organizations, 30 000 persons were killed during the last military regime in Argentina, “their bodies disposed of in anonymous mass graves or in the waters of the Río de la Plata” (Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002:440). The last military dictatorship installed a neo-liberal paradigm and a regime that controlled bodies and spaces and violently killed those that were defined as enemies, or others, to the military regimes. Through what the military regime called the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* the state claimed to restore order. Understood through the concept of biopower – they were improving the life and well-being of some segments of the population, while they were systematically killing others (Bell 2010).

The mechanisms behind expressions like *por algo será*<sup>60</sup> – characterizing for the silence and the justification of the terror the country was living during the last dictatorship – can be seen in my interviews. “For some reason they don't have a job”<sup>61</sup> Victoria told me about the urban poor. And she was not the only one. Many believed them to be poor as a result of an individual fault such as laziness or because they were criminals. *Algo habrán hecho*<sup>62</sup> another woman told me, presupposing that *cartoneros* were ex-convicts. This is a way of constructing the urban poor as responsible for their unemployment. Some political economists have thought of poverty as something inevitable for liberal economies, inequality is so to speak, built into the system, and given meaning as a necessary condition in neoliberal free market economies (Venn 2009:221). Venn writes:

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<sup>60</sup> “it must be because of something” – an expression used to explain why people were “disappearing” during the last dictatorship.

<sup>61</sup> Por algo no tendrán trabajo

<sup>62</sup> “They must have done something” – an expression used to explain why people were “disappearing” during the last dictatorship.

This view of the poor as the dangerous classes, or as an inherently criminal class of people, is a constant refrain in the dominant discourses about poverty from the time of liberalism, whether in political economy or in the countless policy documents and laws introduced to address the 'problem' of the poor. It has been revived in neoliberal policy regarding the treatment of the poor, who are either treated as victims of 'underdevelopment', or marginalized as the 'underclass', or effectively criminalized" (Venn 2009:221).

This discursive criminalization of the urban poor and the representation of them as disposable bodies disconnect their situation from the structural factors behind it. Urban poverty is of course a highly complex social phenomenon. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that the new urban poverty of Buenos Aires is the result of a neoliberal ideology that has implemented legislative reforms of the labor market with the intention of lowering cost of employment and dismissal leading to a total precarization of labor markets and rights (Cerrati & Grimson 2007:283). A result of unemployment has been spatialization of poverty and the making of places inhabited by urban poor as dangerous (Auyero 2002:513). This is not particular for Argentina, in many places of the world poor neighborhoods are represented as dangerous places as a way to legitimate their marginalization (Cf Taylor 2009:131, de Caldeira 2000) As I started to interview Julia who was living in a shantytown of southern conurbation she immediately started contesting this discursive meaning:

In the shantytown there's a bit of everything you know. There's good people, there's bad people, there's people who work and people who doesn't /.../ You know that people discriminate us a bit, because we're from there, but I think that there's shantytowns everywhere and not only where I'm living. There are a lot of good workers, there are people who dedicated themselves at stealing...And well sometimes I think that the kids rob you because the police make them<sup>63</sup> (Julia)

The shantytowns are enclaves of poverty first populated when industrialization and work opportunities in the city attracted migrant from the provinces. Emerging in the 1950's they have been areas of "concentrated, chronic poverty" as Auyero puts it (Auyero 2002:511). And as he also notes, there is a new marginality spreading across these old territories of poverty where "social exclusion becomes the defining characteristic of the slum population" – what used to be a transitional place has turned into a permanent state (Auyero 2002:515). The living conditions in the shantytowns have always been disastrous, yet somewhat reduced during the 1960's and 1970,s Auyero notes that the two "lost decades" of 1980's and 1990's intensified the shantytown resident's marginality (Auyero 2002:515). He locates the root of increased poverty and inequality to "the destruction of manufacturing jobs, the sharp rise in the

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<sup>63</sup> En la villa hay de todo, viste. Hay gente buena, hay gente mala, hay gente que no trabaja y gente que trabaja /.../Que la gente nos discrimina un poco, viste porque somos de ahí, pero pienso que en todos lados hay villas no solamente donde yo vivo. Hay mucha gente que es buena trabajadora, hay gente que se dedica a robar ... Y bueno a veces pienso que los chicos también te roban porque los policías los mandan (Julia)

number of temporary, intermittent, menial, devalued, and unprotected jobs (Auyero 2002:512).

As we were having tea in her little garden, Ana remembered what it used to be like when the factories in the area were still in production and the daily routines were structured around the whistle of the factory. Today her neighborhood was marked by unemployment and a working-class that has been *desclasado* –stripped of the work that formed their class condition. Somewhat surprised she told me how she had met a girl in the dentist’s office who was in her twenties and who during her childhood had never seen her parents go to work. A week later, as I was standing outside a social center in a marginalized neighborhood in southern federal capital my eyes were caught by some children playing with tools and a tire. One of the social activists from the center saw what I was looking at and told me “That’s what it’s like out here, the kids play that they are working<sup>64</sup>”. Auyero writes of the shantytown where he did his fieldwork:

These empty factories are an illustration of the state of the slum and its inhabitants, and of the way in which the withering away of the wage-labor economy is being inscribed in the urban landscape, Villa Paraíso, once the place of the newborn working class, is now the space where the *un* population (unemployed and uneducated) survives (Auyero 2002:516)

To sum up, how is the urban poor then constructed? Neoliberalism increased poverty and transformed urban space. As the urban poor appeared in middle- and upper- class territory they are constructed as out of place, made foreign or others to urban space and the nation. Urban poor are visible in every interviewed woman’s everyday life, but the way of constructing them as subjects varies with class, level of closeness and identification. Many construct the urban poor as bodies belonging to other spaces and other times. They should not be in the federal capital and should go work the land, as some of the women express it. This is a spatialization that can be understood in relation to national constructions of barbaric territories and bodies. To occupy prestigious public space in the political and cultural core of the nation is something that is “earned”. The historic construction of Europeaness, modernity and civilization as opposed to Latin American, backwardness and barbarism can be found in many of the women’s constructions of urban poor. Important in the othering of the urban poor is the construction of their danger – intrinsically linked to certain territories. The constructions of urban poor can also be analyzed with the concept of biopower. According to Foucault racism is the mechanism that produces certain segments of the populations that can be “let to die”. To be

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<sup>64</sup> “Es así, los pibes juegan a trabajar”

poor is to be *negro* and thereby excluded. The modern republic of Argentina has a long history of non-desired bodies that brutally have been let to die. Poverty is constructed as a necessity in neoliberal economies – in a society where the individual thrives on expenses of the public; the poor are to be blamed for their situation. Unemployment, and the shift from an industrial industry has left marks on the urban landscape and the meaning invested in bodies. Are the *desclasados* or the “un-population” that Auyero writes of, the ones being brutally let to die in a system that has less use for a large amount of working-class bodies?

### 3.2 Different kinds of humans

Here I would like to discuss how the poor are constructed as discursive subjects of a sub-human kind. All of the interviewed women share the conception of a new poverty and new actors in the street. Ana told me:

Those people who go to eat from the garbage bags outside of the supermarkets ... Those people that don't have anything, that did not use to exist here ... those kids did not exist<sup>65</sup> (Ana)

Most of the women dated the appearance of this people that “did not exist” before to a decade back, which corresponds to Kessler's material (Kessler 2009:112). I asked the women if they had any relation to *cartoneros*, the ones going through their garbage every day. No one had any personal relation to them, they did not greet them, and they were not aware if they were the same ones every day, nor what time they would come. They seemed to go by unnoticed and as I started to think about it I realized that even if my desk faced the street from which I saw *cartoneros* going through the garbage-cans in my street every day, I could not remember if it was the same people or different. I made me think of something Andrea had told me:

I think that there wasn't that much people begging before./.../ now if you go out to have a coffee /.../ it's like they just keep coming /.../ Every day there's more of them /.../ all the time they are begging or they sell stuff in the subway, it's too much./.../ I always buy something from them and if they beg I always give something, but maybe you give one time and then another and maybe you don't give to the third person ... you just say I already gave or they already offered me, you know ... But there's a lot of children .. Also grownups who beg for the bus-fare but then you don't know if it's true or if they want it for something else... And now maybe when it comes to grownups I prefer not to stop because I'm afraid that they will take my purse, you know /.../ you say no I don't have anything and you keep on walking just to be safe<sup>66</sup> (Andrea).

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<sup>65</sup> Esa gente que va a comer de las bolsas de la basura que tienen afuera del supermercado... Esa gente no tiene nada de nada, eso antes no existía acá... no existían esos chicos...

<sup>66</sup> Me parece que antes no había tanta gente pidiendo./.../ ahora que salís a tomar un café y pasan y te dan estampitas, te piden o te venden cositas /.../ Ahora es así pero antes no... muy poca gente pedía /... todo el tiempo eh que piden o que suben al subte a venderte, es demasiado /.../Siempre algo compro y si te piden siempre doy,

Her story embraces many aspects of the way urban poor are constituted as discursive subjects. The urban poor seem to be positioned as collective subjects in the discursive structure, as if all of them constituted the same body (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:115). Often they appear like an anonymous collective of bodies, an annoyance in the street who begs and who might constitute a risk. Andrea is by no means alone in this way of reasoning. In fact, her statement is almost exact at one of Argentine comedian Peter Capusotto's many characters, Micky Vainilla, who in a sketch templates on what to do when we are in a bar having coffee and "poverty approaches us with a certain human aspect". He banters how people tend to look for coins to the first one who beg, and then say "I already gave" to the next beggar, as if the poor all belonged to a collective organization. In a story of a train-station in western conurbation the urban poor also appear as bodies belonging to a threatening collective:

And those kids that sleep in the station, they say that if you go to say something to them and you respond in the wrong way fifty of them show up ... better not to speak to them<sup>67</sup> (Ana)

Both Andrea and Ana are here constructing the urban poor as a risk. They are not the only ones in my material articulating this discourse. As we have already seen the urban poor are associated with crime and their bodies have been made suspicious. Social scientist Natalia Maldonado and sociologist Celina Recepter argue that the poor in Argentina are constructed as "others" to the society – they are dehumanized as pathology of the society; they are ascribed violence, criminal behaviors, irrationality and abnormality. They are constructed as violent and lacking "culture" and education, constituting a risk for the mainstream population (Maldonado & Recepter 2010:152ff). This is not an isolated phenomena; rather it should be analyzed within a historical frame, allowing us to consider the contingent character of the construction of urban poor as subjects (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:114).

The industrial working class and urban poor have been represented as dangerous in European history. Kessler notes that the French revolution marks a change in the history of fear of crime, as the concern was directed at a potential uprising of the poor and so fear from then on is transformed into antagonism between the proletariat and bourgeois. Here, crime is transformed into an argument for moral and political struggle implying that deprivation is causing

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pero por ahí lo haces una vez y le das otra vez, por ahí a la tercera persona no das... porque de ultimo digo ya di o ya me ofrecieron, viste... Pero son muchos chicos...hay gente grande que pide para viajar también pero después no sabes si es verdad, si quieren para viajar o si quieren para otra cosa eh... Y ahora por ahí a la gente grande prefiero no pararme para sacar nada porque tengo miedo que te arranquen la cartera, viste,/.../ es como que tenés miedo y decís no, no tengo y seguís caminando por las dudas (Andrea)

<sup>67</sup> Y esos chicos que duermen ahí en la estación... dice que igual si le vayas a decir algo si le contestás mal aparecen cincuenta... No le vayas a decir nada (Ana)

misery and poverty. This is an attitude that can be noted among my informants and that I will discuss further ahead. This can also be seen in my material and I will discuss it ahead. Kessler points to the fact that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century crimes connected to pauperism, such as crimes committed against private property was punished severely (Kessler 2009:23). Slowly this perception of the dangerous poor is transformed as their situation gets better and they gain civil and labor rights through trade unions and political parties (Ibid). Then another shift is produced, and the fear of the poor came to be fear of an organized revolutionary class (Kessler 2009:24).

As I showed above, the urban poor are many times constructed through categories of space and race in my material; they are constructed as subjects in a discursive structure where this positioning is made meaningful through inscribing them in certain territories assigned with racialized meaning (Cf Laclau & Mouffe 1985:115). But one can also analyze the construction of urban poor as something made through the use that can be made of their bodies. As the historical retrospect shows, the urban poor are given different meaning depending on their position in the economic system. The industrial era needed a large working-class segment whose bodies could be put to use in production. But what happens when production modes change – neoliberalism erases labor rights and large segments of the working-class once again turn into a lumpenproletariat? As I was asking Julia about *cartoneros* something interesting happened:

Yes the *cartoneros* are in my neighborhood and also in Pompeya and in church. The kids are there gathering card-boards, I run across them every day. But well they don't seem to be bad people Jenny: Not at all, that's not why I'm asking. Julia: They don't seem to be bad people, they seem like good people that don't have an actual job and well they have to do that to support themselves<sup>68</sup> (Julia).

Julia could identify with the *cartoneros*, she did not regard them as distant “others” and immediately she started to defend them, affirming that the *cartoneros* are not “bad people” – as if that was implied in the concept. This can be understood as a way of contesting the discourse that positions the urban poor as criminals and individuals responsible for their unemployment and poverty. Surely she also regarded me as someone belonging to a middle-class that usually express discriminatory attitudes towards urban poor (Cf Kessler 2009:182f, Viladrich 2005, Villalón 2008). My reaction is also interesting – instead of letting her finish, I felt obligated to

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<sup>68</sup> Y si por allá por el barrio donde yo vivo y también ahí en Pompeya y en la iglesia. Están los chicos juntando cartones siempre me cruzo con esa gente. ... Pero bueno no me parecen mala gente J: No, para nada, no es por eso que pregunto J: No parece mala gente parece buena gente que no tiene un trabajo efectivo y bueno tienen que hacer eso para poder mantenerse.

exclaim that I was not one of those discriminatory middle-class people. Both of us related to a discourse where the urban poor are constructed as another category than “normal” people. When I asked Raquel if she saw cartoneros in her everyday life, she answered:

I don't think that the people like that, to get card-boards from the trash, because the people is just as human as you are, but well, instead of maybe taking a work, they do this independently, I don't know, they do this and they live out of it<sup>69</sup>

This notion of the urban poor being “just as human” as anyone else appears in many of my interviews. As if someone had said that they were not humans to begin with. What constitutes “humanity” is socially and culturally constructed as Agnes Ers has shown in her study of Romanian orphans (Ers 2006:21). She finds that the people speak of the Romanian children as if they were not human, making their humanity a discursive impossibility. In an analysis of the TV-program *Policías en acción*, where the viewer follows the federal police on mission in Buenos Aires conurbation, Galvani and Mouzo notes that the urban poor are constructed as anomalous creatures. Independent of if they are victims or offenders, they are represented as a pathology of a social sector living in their own subaltern world: “viven como pobres y hacen cosas de pobres”<sup>70</sup>(Galvani & Mouzo 2010:138). I asked Natalia, mother of a two-year old, and residing in a middle-class neighborhood in the city, how urban poverty was manifested in her life:

They always come to knock on my door /.../ and well I always give them some food J: And in the street? N: No in the street it's like, sometimes I really suffer a lot of agony /.../ I don't know one time in Cabildo I saw a baby crawling in the midst of the street and he was so dirty and his parents were there /.../ You do a projection, you know, because you have a baby and at once you know it's like a little child. /.../ (My son) really likes it when they come because they have this energy ... you know they are quite outside you know, he really likes that, they're not children who have limits or structures, so it's really attractive for the children /.../ he gets caught up there in the window ... he's attracted to them and I like to encourage the encounter /.../ of course the difference is there but I think it would be like saying too much ... he can see for himself<sup>71</sup>(Natalia).

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<sup>69</sup>Yo no creo que a la gente le guste eso, sacar cartones porque la gente es tan humana como sos vos, pero bueno, frente a un trabajo que a lo mejor no toman de no sé se independice y bueno hace eso y vive de eso

<sup>70</sup> “They live like poor and do things that poor people do”

<sup>71</sup> Me tocan siempre/.../ bueno siempre les doy algo de comida. J: ¿Y en la calle? N: No en la calle, a veces es como que me angustia muchísimo /.../ No sé, la otra vez en Cabildo un bebe gateando en pleno Cabildo todo sucio y los papás ahí /.../. Qué sé yo esas cosas, mucho, es como, hacés enseguida proyección, entendés, porque vos estas con un bebe y enseguida viste es como un nenito viste /.../(Mi hijo) se re copa cuando vienen, porque vienen con una energía muy ... están muy por afuera viste... se re copa, no son chicos que estén con limites o con estructuras, entonces es muy atractivo para los chicos /.../ se cuelga un poco ahí en la ventana, no, es que ... le atrae ... pero a mí me gusta fomentar el encuentro /.../ la diferencia es real y me parece que es como enfermarlo si ... él solo se da cuenta (Natalia)

Anthropologist Alejandro Grimson analyzes the middle class racism and discrimination against urban poor as a result of their unaccustomedness in seeing urban poor in their neighborhood, he writes “when they learn to attribute the meaning of cartonero to a poor body bent over garbage bags, then fear of difference is being reduced” (Grimson 2008:506). Natalia does not fear the cartoneros, but rather she does a routine categorization of the urban poor. The poor appear as distant others that are part of everyday life, “they always come” to her door to beg, and her son is fascinated by the poor children who are so different from him. The urban poor are constructed as subaltern bodies whose poverty is naturalized and interpreted as a part of the urban landscape. But something changes this routine categorization: The dirty baby crawling in the street stands out from the naturalized image of urban poor in the street and makes her remember that they are human – “it’s like a little child”.

My interest in examining how the urban poor are constructed emerged from the way I had made meaning out of poverty when first moving to Buenos Aires. The first year I lived in the city, only a few years after the economic collapse, the mixture of wealth and total despair astonished me, but then as some years passed by I just stopped seeing. The urban poor became part of the urban landscape, they were there minding their own business and I went about minding mine. As I was preparing the field-work, I always circled around the idea of children in the street. I asked myself what a child with economic resources was thinking when it sees a child of the same age begging in the street. But I never stopped to reflect about my interest in children. The mothers of small children did not really provide me with answers to my question; rather they proved my ignorance of child psychology as they told me that children does not think like us, they do not “see the difference”. Magalí told me about an encounter between her four year old daughter and some children living in the street:

You know, she does not think that they might live in the street, she doesn’t imagine that so she goes and plays with them because a child lives in another dimension than us<sup>72</sup> (Magalí)

As I looked through their answers I realized why it was children that had called for my attention during preparations for field-work. As the urban poor are constructed as “others”, an anonymous collective of subaltern bodies, positioned by discourses as a lesser kind of humans, children – strong cultural symbols as they are – contested these discourses, embodying the humanity of the urban poor. They spoke to me because they were constructed as more human. Magalí told me:

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<sup>72</sup> Viste ella no piensa, por ahí que vive en la calle, ni se imagina, entonces va y se pone a jugar porque un niño vive en otra dimensión que nosotros (Magalí).

For me it's really hard with the children /.../ when you have children, and you see a child (makes a gesture over her stomach) it moves around a bit ... eh your system ... and it's also something questionable /.../ What do you do? I mean you see them there; they're really small, your son's age, they have nothing, you can't take them home, you can't report the father to the police, I mean ... what do you do?<sup>73</sup> (Magalí).

The children of the poor emerge as humans, the baby crawling in the dirt or the small children in the street are reminders of their proximity to “us”. As Natalia mentioned above, the baby crawling in the street is “like a child” and seeing it makes her feel sick. As is well known, Foucault argues that power is productive and its validity rests in its ability to create discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Foucault 2002:104). Carman writes of the invisibilization:

¿cómo no evocar los altos contenidos de plomo en la sangre de los habitantes de Villa Inflamable, el trágico incendio de Villa Cartón, los niños de las villas al borde de las vías que son aplastados por el tren, o los sin techo que mueren en forma invisible de madrugada /.../ Existe una deliberada política de producción del olvido<sup>74</sup> (Carman 2011:204).

The neoliberal free market is often presented as the only choice, and as a system that will generate wealth for all. Within this logic, the inequality of this system is presented as a natural condition (Venn 2009:211). Constructing the urban poor one sees in the routines of everyday life as a sub-category of humans can be understood as a way to naturalize the inequality of the system, and above all as a way to live with the sight of this inequality. It is painful to see other human beings suffer so the cognitive defense mechanism is then to separate them from what is being understood as human. This is a process with no necessary intention behind it. “You know I do not even see them as human anymore, I always think there is no solution for these people and I maintain a physical distance” a friend of mine told me as I discussed my material with him. “But when I actually think about it, it hurts” he then added. This separation between us and them exists in all interviews; nevertheless the level of identification varies.

If the interpretation of *la inseguridad* does not seem to vary with place of residence, the way the urban poor are constructed in my material varies with level of closeness to urban poverty. Women living in more marginalized areas do not speak of the poor as the “other” that one might observe through the window. Rather they are people one coexists with and try to

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<sup>73</sup>Con los chicos es muy difícil para mí /.../ cuando tenés hijos, cuando ves un nene... se te... (hace un gesto sobre la panza) se te remueve un poco el... el sistema... y también es muy cuestionable /.../ ¿Qué hacés? O sea los ves ahí, son re chiquititos, de la edad de tus hijos... están sin nada, no los podés llevar a tu casa, no podés denunciar al padre o sea... ¿qué hacés? (Magalí).

<sup>74</sup> In my translation: How not to evoke the high contents of lead in the blood of the inhabitants of Villa Inflamable, the tragic fire in Villa Cardboard, the children who live at the verge of the railway tracks and who are crushed by the trains, or the ones without a roof that dies invisibles at dawn? /.../ There is a deliberate politic production of forgetfulness.

give something, be it a coin or some bread. But some of the women living in rich neighborhoods are articulating the difference between “us” and “them” in a particularly strong sense. These women are also the ones that think of themselves as especially targeted by crime, and interestingly enough they speak of the difficulties they have had in working with social assistance and charity. One woman of the upper middle-class told me how she had to quit doing charity work where she was confronted with the urban poor, because she could not live with the sight of the enormous difference between her comfortable life and their extreme poverty.

This can be analyzed as a way of maintaining the defense-mechanism of categorizing the urban poor as sub-humans. When the urban poor get too close and are interpreted as humans, the naturalized inequality cannot be withheld. Instead of questioning her own wealth and the system that withheld the differences, the woman changed her activity to one where she does not have to face the poor. If children constitute a strong cultural symbol; one that it is hard to make invisible - another symbol also emerges in the material in relation to the urban poor: As we were speaking of the urban poor, Ana started telling me about the horses of the urban poor and how much they suffered. “They passed a law that they cannot use them like that in the traffic, but no one seems to care” she told me. In a fashionable chair in a luxurious vestibule in Recoleta, Alejandra told me a story of her charity-work connected to animals:

I help street-dogs /.../ I worked 10 years /.../ I used to go in to places of really humble people, but really good people, there were no criminals /.../ I helped their animals, got them vaccinated and castrated /.../ the houses are precarious and if (the dogs) have flees and mange it’s horrible for the humans as well /.../ I used to cry because I didn’t only see sick dogs but also sick people /.../ it caused me emotional harm so I had to stop doing it, and now I help the dogs I find in the street /.../ It’s difficult to find them a home because nobody wants an ugly dog, everyone wants an educated dog of pedigree (she laughs) you know /.../ I think animals should be castrated, I mean /.../ so they don’t reproduce in poverty /.../ well one have to try to castrate them and it’s quite an issue but with the humans I don’t know /.../ if you don’t give them an education or health ... a center that takes care of them ... that they give them some food .. It’s really difficult... because it is easier to rob<sup>75</sup> (Alejandra).

This analogy between the urban poor and animals is not an absurd joke, but rather the consequence of their position of subjects as non-humans. As the work of Carman shows some animals are created as more human and civilized while some humans – in her material the urban

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<sup>75</sup> Yo ayudo perros en la calle/.../ trabajé 10 años /.../ entraba a lugares que realmente era de gente muy humilde, pero muy buena, no había delincuentes /.../ yo ayudaba a sus animales los vacunaba los castraba /.../ las casas son precarias si (los perros) tienen pulgas y sarna es terrible para los humanos también /.../ lloraba porque veía no solo perros enfermos, sino también gente enferma /.../ llegué emocionalmente a hacerme tanto mal que tuve que dejarlo y ayudo a los que encuentro por la calle ahora /.../ es difícil ubicarlos porque nadie quiere un perro feo, todos quieren un perro de raza y bien formado (se ríe) me entendés./.../soy de castrar los animales, o sea /.../ así no se reproducen en la pobreza /.../ y bueno hay que tratar de castrarlos y eso es un tema pero con los humanos no sé .. /.../ si no le das educación y no le das salud... un centro que los cuide... que les dé un plato de comida... es muy difícil... porque lo más fácil es robar (Alejandra)

squatters who are living on territory designated to be ecological reserves— are created as barbaric animals in relation to the city and at the same time they are constructed as a threat against the animals and the nature where they are living (Carman 2011:239f).

Understood with the Foucaultian concept of biopower I argue that the urban poor are constructed as non-desired bodies that can be let to die by the state without risk of losing the desired population whose wellbeing biopower is aimed at. This can also be understood within the frame of capitalism and consumer-culture. As Zygmunt Bauman has shown, consumerism implants the logic of disposable bodies, a production of human waste that he interprets as the outcome of modernity (Bauman 2004). The urban poor are not the bodies desired by a neoliberal logic. There is of course a great paradox in the necessity of bodies for production and the dispensability of these bodies (Cf Lisdero 2009:103). In my material this is manifested in some quotes about domestic employed. For example, one woman employed a child as a gardener, but he turned out to be thief, who “studied their routines” and broke in when no one was home. The lower classes can be employed in service, but they are not to be trusted and they are not considered to be fully human. Maria tells me about a problem connected to the new role of working mothers:

My grandson has a nanny, she is an adorable girl, divine, we love her a lot... it's really good that she is with my grandson, but ... she has limitations, because she didn't have an education, like the education one has, she has certain limitations, she takes care of him at a human level, makes sure he doesn't get hurt, that he eats good, she takes him to the bathroom ... she prepares him for when the mother comes <sup>76</sup>(Maria).

The urban poor are not as human as “us” and they are described through their lacks. But still, the consumer logic tells the buyer, that they can buy their services and their bodies. Important here is also, as Carman points out, that the independence and liberty of the middle- and high class rests upon the services performed by the urban poor (Carman 2011:228). In northern conurbation the exclusive closed neighborhoods are surrounded by shantytowns where their domestic servers live.

An interesting parallel can be drawn to how the urban poor have no other resource than their bodies. The body is their only tool in a system where wage-work has ceased to exist for a great number of excluded, the body is what they put in line to protest. The *piqueteros* blocking crucial roads or bridges were the first to put their bodies in line in a society where indus-

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<sup>76</sup> La mamá de mi nieto tiene una niñera, una chica adorable, divina, la queremos un montón... está buenísimo que esté ella con mi nieto, pero... ella tiene limitaciones, porque ella no tuvo una educación J: ¿No? M: Como la que uno tuvo, ella tiene ciertas limitaciones, ella lo cuida al nivel humano, que no se lastime, que come bien, le lleva al baño ... prepararle para cuando llegue la mama (María).

trial production is scarce and where the strike is no longer efficient as social protest. The call from the excluded of a worthy life – *una vida digna* – can also be understood as a demand to be administrated bio-politically by the state (Cf Bell 2010:85).

During the end of his field-work in 2008, Kessler is surprised to hear some twenty year old informants from the upper middle-class questioning social protest, proposing death penalty and criticizing the work of human rights organization. One of his informants says: “se tendría que poner a laburar a todos los negros, me cago en los derechos humanos y en las manifestaciones, y empezar desde chiquitos a educarlos”<sup>77</sup> (Kessler2008:183). At the same time these informants also expressed great tolerance towards sexual, esthetic and religious difference. That they manifest tolerance against some groups earlier discriminated and this cruel attitude against urban poor might be located in the construction of the urban poor as a subcategory of humans. In the discursive structure the urban poor are not made possible as human subjects.

Another position of subject where the urban poor is placed by some of the interviewed women, is that of the “social welfare receiver”, the “cheater”, or the “manipulated”. Veronica, residing in a middle-class neighborhood in northwestern conurbation, travels a lot between her home and the city. Her interpretation of the urban poor is quite representative for my material:

The children who beg in the corners or the ones that clean the windshield of your car eh ... I always give them some coins but I know that they are managed by a kid who controls them ... Sometimes it feels terrible when you don't give them, but on the other hand if you give them they're going to take it away from them you know. /.../ But, for example, when I travel in the subway I always give to those who sing, because I know that's a form of making a living and they don't have any job. There must be a reason why they don't have any job I don't know, but they are offering what they know how to do so then I always give them/.../ I know that some are cunning and they're doing it because they don't want to work ... And the government is also causing this because you know they give them this ... /.../ *Plan Trabajar* /.../ I think that it would be much better if they gave them a job instead of a *plan*<sup>78</sup> (Veronica)

*Plan Trabajar* was one of a series of *planes* – a minimum remuneration designed to encourage employment – implemented as a way to curb social protest in the 1990's. Many of the

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<sup>77</sup>“all of the *negros* should be put to work, I don't give a shit about human rights and the demonstrations, they should start early to educate them”

<sup>78</sup> A los chicos que piden monedas en las esquinas o qué limpian los vidrios eh... siempre... yo a veces les doy monedas pero sé que están manejados por un pibe que los regentea... A veces te da no sé qué al no darle, pero por el otro lado si lo das se lo va a sacar viste porque hay uno que los están cafichando, que está ahí en la esquina y que le tienen que traer todas las monedas. Pero, por ejemplo, cuando voy en el subte siempre a los que cantan les doy, porque sé que es un medio de vida que ellos no tienen trabajo. Por algo no tendrán trabajo no lo sé, pero que brindan lo que saben hacer y entonces siempre/.../ les doy/.../ sé que algunos son avivados y lo hacen por... porque no quieren trabajar... Pero además el gobierno también se les proporciona eso porque viste que le da... /.../ Un *Plan Trabajar* /.../ estaría mucho mejor que les dieran trabajo en vez de *plan trabajar* (Verónica).

interviewed women mention *Plan Trabajar* and express that the poor are always given things by the government, and that they prefer subsidies before working. The statistics show that only 13,7 % of the total of unemployed in 1997, when *Plan Trabajar* was functioning, received economic support through a plan or an unemployment insurance (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:292). This plan does no longer exist, but still two of my informants refer to *Plan Trabajar* when speaking of the urban poor. In 2002 the former *planes* were replaced by *Plan Jefes y Jefes de Hogar Desocupados* which granted a small subsidy every month to a larger number of families who in return are to do community work etc. (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:293).

Stereotypes about poor people or about individuals who receive subsidies are old news (Young 1990). In a welfare-state like Sweden, people living of subsidies have often been accused of “cheating” the system, perhaps even more so during the last couple of years. A study from Canada, another state with a welfare-model, shows how women living in poverty internalize the discourse of welfare recipients as illegitimate subjects depending on the state. The poor are constructed as having insufficient will-power or knowledge, or as being lazy and unmotivated, choosing to rely upon the system in their lack of individual free will and capacities (Reid & Tom 2006:409f). Implicit in the liberal economy is the idea that economic growth enables wealth that can be shared within society. Venn writes that

/.../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).

This is a “grand narrative” that can be traced to the founders of laissez-faire liberalism where the free market economy is expected to ensure a “mutual enrichment” and benefit for the “society as a whole” (Ibid). When this theory proved wrong the poor are still blamed for their impoverishment. In the Argentine context there is a long standing conflict between two economic models – to protect the national industry and regulate labor markets or deregulation of markets (Libertun de Duren 2009:315) – as well as an antagonistic relationship between Peronists and anti-Peronist that should be kept in mind as a contextualization the interviewed women’s statement on subsidies for the poor. Maria, living in Recoleta, had quite an outspoken stance against the Peronist national government and their social politics:

None of them is looking for work, because at the end the government will give them some money/.../They give the poor a *plan de familia* so that they will have money supposedly ... the more children they have the more money, no. That’s not good at all it encourage laziness<sup>79</sup> (Maria)

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<sup>79</sup>Ninguno de ellos se ocupan de buscar trabajo, total el gobierno les va a dar algo de plata/.../ Les regalan a los pobres un plan de familia para que tengan plata supuestamente... cuantos hijos tienen cuanto más no. Eso no sirve nada fomenta la vagancia (María).

In the subheading above I discussed how one of the ways to make cultural sense of *la inseguridad* was through the women's own motherhood and to follow prescribed behavior for how to act in public spaces. Here I have also discussed the way children emerge as a reminder of the humanness of the urban poor. In the construction of the urban poor as lazy and dependent on subsidies motherhood and parenting also becomes relevant. Maria told me:

Once there was a woman with two or three children, /.../ they were small and she said come one, come one, go and beg, go and beg ... So I say "Don't you have any sort of help? Because I work in Caritas of Pilar /.../ And you can go and ask for clothes there /.../ your children have no clothes, you have to go /.../ they will help you and you will get food once a day in this *comedor* /.../ And she tells me "No, because I get a lot of money per day from being here with the children" /.../ And I say "Very well, now they are (small) /.../ these children will grow up when you don't have these children anymore, that moves the people, they give them money because they are children, what will you do?" "And I will have more kids so that I'll always have money" and that's what she contested<sup>80</sup> (Maria).

According to Laclau and Mouffe all social identity is relational and created within a system of difference (1985:113). As Maria is positioning this woman as a bad mother, at the same time she is assigning herself the position of the good mother, a subject invested with role of having to educate the children of these failed mothers that are lacking moral and education:

The other day I had gone out with the dog and /.../ I went to a kiosk and there were two little ones /.../ and one said "will you buy something for me?" "Yes" I said "*alfajores*" /.../ "No, we want *chizitos*" Jenny: What is that? Maria: It's like these things made out of fat, it's like potato chips but it's all fat /.../ the *chizito* is like a luxury, for a child who's well feed, well, a child who once in a while can treat himself to *chizito*/.../. An *alfajor* is more nutritive /.../ Well I say "no I'm not going to buy that" and they say "no, no we want *chizitos*" Ok let's see "I propose one *alfajor* each, it can be chocolate or *dulce de leche*, it's your choice, if you want the *chizito* you lose the *alfajor*". "OK it's alright the *alfajor* then" /.../ Never ever do I give money, even if my soul is aching because I know that they will use it to buy drugs even if they're only 8 years old, glue, that stuff they do or because their lazy mother is waiting for them /.../ She has a belly like this, a dirty child without shoes, who hasn't eaten and who's 1 year old sitting on them, you know, and they already have the stomach to have another one. And that they don't even know who the father is, is a context of an absolute poverty and with drugs in the middle of it<sup>81</sup> (Maria)

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<sup>80</sup> Una vez estaba una mujer con dos o tres chicos /.../ chiquitos eran y ella le decían dale, dale, andá, pedíle, andá pedíle... Entonces yo le digo "Vos ¿no tenés una ayuda? Porque yo trabajo para Caritas de Pilar /.../ Vos podés ir a pedir ropa ahí /.../ tus chicos están sin ropa, tenés que ir /.../ te van a ayudar y tenés asegurada una vez por día comida en tal comedor /.../ Y me dice "No, porque yo acá saco mucha plata por día con los chicos" /.../ Y digo "Bueno, muy bien, ahora (son chicos), así muy bien ahora decime vos /.../ estos chicos van a crecer, cuando vos ya no tengas esos chicos que a la gente le conmueva, porque son chicos y les den plata, ¿cómo vas a hacer vos?". "Y voy a seguir teniendo, para tener siempre plata" eso fue lo que me contestó (María)

<sup>81</sup> El otro día había salido con el perro /.../ voy a un kiosco y habían dos chiquitos /.../ me dice ¿me compra algo? "Sí", le digo, "alfajores" /.../ "no, no queremos chizitos". J: ¿Qué son? M: Son como esas cosas de grasa eh parecido al papa frita pero grasa pura /.../ el chizito eso es como un lujo. Chizitos es para un chico que está bien alimentado, que bueno, se puede dar el gusto de comer un chizito cada tanto /.../ El alfajor es algo mucho más nutritivo, tiene dulce de leche, viste /.../ bueno y digo "no, no te compro" y dicen "no nosotros queremos chizi-

As the urban poor are constructed as irrational and thereby incapable of taking rational decisions Maria here has to impose good order and manners upon them. As she educates them she is constructing herself as a good citizen and a good mother. In doing so it appears as if the problems are “education” or “manners” that the urban poor lack and not the structural conditions behind urban poverty. Maria is making a strong judgment of another woman’s sexual behavior, questioning her lack of moral and ethics. An element of the discourse of poor people’s own responsibility for their fate is that they can be educated; learning from the middle class would then solve their problem (Cf Reid & Tom 2006:410). Maria is also disturbed by their “insolence” and their lack of judgment as they propose she buy them something “unhealthy”. Dalmaso and Ibañez have shown how personnel working at a social food center in Argentina articulated notions of “and on top of everything they have the nerve to choose” as poor children would come in greater amounts to eat the days they were served food they liked (Dalmaso & Ibañez 2009:76). Ana, living in the conurbation, in somewhat different economic circumstances than Maria also condemned poor mothers who she, like Maria, interpreted to be using their children to their own advantage:

Why should I work if they give me *Plan Trabajar* anyway and I don’t have any money and then they live like that. The women are some fatsos and if you say something to them ... The other day I was seeing how the ones that were occupying those houses that they were turning over, how they used their children as shields, with their babies. How can they bring a baby that needs constant attention? Because they know that if they are with their children the police won’t be throwing themselves over them<sup>82</sup> (Ana).

Not all women were so outspoken about bad motherhood as Maria or Ana, but many mentioned the responsibility of the parents for their children. The importance of not being able to report the parents of a neglected child was mentioned by many. Both Magalí and Natalia expressed concerns about what to do when they saw children living in the street and begging, something they categorized as child labor. Or as Veronica said – “I do not want to judge but the parents have the ultimate responsibility for sending them to work” when speaking of children begging in the train.

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tos” bah a ver ”Yo te propongo un alfajor para cada uno de chocolate o dulce de leche ustedes eligen si vos querés el chizito te perdés el alfajor”. “Bueno está bien el alfajor” /.../ No le doy jamás plata, jamás, anqué me parte el alma porque sé que es para comprarse droga aunque tengan 8 años, pegamentos lo que ellos hacen o porque los están esperando la vaga de la madre/.../ Tiene una panza así, tiene el chico sin zapatos y sucios sin comida de un año encima de ellos, viste, ya tiene la panza otra vez para tener el segundo/.../ de qué no saben ni de qué padre es un contexto de una pobreza absolutamente, eh droga por medio (María)

<sup>82</sup> Para qué voy a trabajar si total este a mí me dan Plan Trabajar y yo no tengo plata y entonces viven así. Las mujeres son unas gordas así y vos le decís algo... El otro día estaba viendo, ellos que ocuparon las casas esas que estaban para entregarse, usando los chicos de escudo, con los bebés. ¿Cómo va a andar con un bebé que necesita atención? Porque saben si están con los chicos no le van a tirar la policía encima entonces (Ana)

As we spoke of poverty some of the women associated poverty with sexual violence. As I mentioned earlier, sexualized violence was spatialized and inscribed in the “dangerous” territories that the urban poor inhabit. They spoke of rapes and what “those poor women” had to endure in the shantytowns. Often this association was made in reflections about their own well-being and material status. One woman told me she had to stop doing charity-work because she could not stand seeing the obvious sexual abuse of the poor family’s teenage daughter. Another woman told me that she believed that the mothers looked the other way when their men raped their daughters. In another analysis of the TV-program *Policías en Acción*, Maria E Boito deconstructs the way a scene of sexual abuse is set in a poor family’s home in the program. Boito argues that the family members and the raped sister are shown in a dehumanizing way; their bodies are shown in fragments. As the camera and the police question the girl who is about to go to the police-station to report repeated rapes and sexual violence committed by her brother, the camera approaches every one as a suspect or responsible for the abuse (Boito 2009). Thus, the female urban poor are here constructed as bad mothers, morally lacking women or victims of sexual abuse, this articulation of discourse positions the interviewed women as good mothers and good citizens - constructing the spaces they inhabit as free of sexual violence and risk. Within in a context of uncertainty and urban fears constructed through the discourse of *la inseguridad* this can be understood as locating the dangers in certain spaces and bodies, thereby constructing their own spaces as safe.

So finally, urban poor are by many women constructed as a collective body that might constitute a threat or an annoyance. The poor are ascribed violence, criminality, irrationality and abnormality. As I showed earlier the urban poor are given meaning through space and race, but here I have also discussed how this can also be related to the use that their bodies can be put to. Neoliberalism erased labor rights and as parts of the labor market disappeared the bodies of impoverished working class are dehumanized. The women speak of the urban poor as “also being” human, constructing them as distant others that are part of everyday life – they are subaltern bodies whose poverty is naturalized as part of the urban landscape. The image of the child changes this construction as they embody the humanity of urban poor. To construct the urban poor as a sub-category of humans can be understood as a defense mechanism, a way to go about with everyday life despite of the sight of human suffering. To describe the poor as victims of their own lacks – of education, of manners, of moral etcetera – is also a way of legitimizing inequality and invisibilized the structural factors behind it. The ways the women make meaning of the poor differ with the level of closeness and

place of residence. The women in marginalized areas coexist and try to help in the ways they can. While some of the women living in rich areas articulated strong difference. I argue that the construction of urban poor as others and sub-humans should be understood with the concept of biopower. There is no place for them in production and in constructing them as dehumanized and in opposition to the desired population they can be let to die without greater protest. Some of them can also be employed in domestic service etcetera for almost no money at all without greater protests. There is of course a contradiction between these constructions and the need for cheap domestic labor, reflected by the interviewed women in the risk of letting an employed into their home or the lack of “intelligence” in nannies. Of course not all of the women expressed this kind of extreme constructions, but many did construct the poor as responsible for their situation, as manipulated or as depending on the system. Many spoke of the subsidies they receive and constructed the urban poor as bad mothers, using their children to beg to or to get more subsidies. Not all women were so judgmental about what they expressed to be bad moral and motherhood of the urban poor, but they did express concern or claimed that the parents were responsible for the children begging, categorizing it as child-labor. To construct the urban poor as others can then be understood as a way to live with the sight of human suffering, but it can also be seen as a way of reinforcing one’s own position as a “normal” citizen and a good mother, creating distance to the threat of poverty. To localize dangers and responsibility to other spaces and bodies helps constructs feeling of safety and stability in a reality much constructed through neoliberal discourse of insecurity and individual responsibility. A reality where some starve and others buy cheap labor and private security.

## 4 Concluding discussion

Vengo de la cabeza, soy de una banda descontrolada. Hoy no me cabe nada, vas a correr porque sos cagón. Son todos unos putos, unos amargos, unos buchones. Llamen a los botones; vinieron todos, se quedan dos. Hoy vas a correr, porque sos cagón. Con el culo roto, porque mando yo.

Voy a salir de caño; ya estoy re duro, estoy re pasado. Como ya estoy jugado me chupa un huevo matarte o no. Mi vida es un infierno; mi padre es chorro, mi madre es puta. Vos me mandás la yuta y yo te mando para el cajón. Yo soy el error de la sociedad. Soy el plan perfecto, que ha salido mal.

Vengo del basurero que este sistema dejó al costado. Las leyes del mercado me convirtieron en funcional. Soy un montón de mierda brotando de las alcantarillas. Soy una pesadilla de la que no vas a despertar. Vos me despreciás, vos me buchoneás; pero fisurado, me necesitás.

Soy parte de un negocio que nadie puso y que todos usan. En la ruleta Rusa yo soy la bala que te tocó. Cargo con un linaje acumulativo de mishiadura. Y un alma que supura veneno de otra generación. Yo no sé quién soy, yo no sé quién sos. El tren del rebaño, se descarriló.

Ya escucho la sirena, la policía me está encerrando. Uno me está tirando, me dio en la gamba, le dí a un botón. Pasa mi vida entera como un tornado escupiendo sangre. Manga de hijos de puta, me dieron justo en el corazón<sup>83</sup> (Agarrate Catalina).

Sometimes a piece of fine art just sums it all up for you. As I was finishing this thesis I happened to see Uruguayan *murga*<sup>84</sup>-group *Agarrate Catalina*. At the end of their performance, they sang *La violencia*, a new song from this year's Uruguayan carnival, and somewhat surprised I could not stop my tears as I heard it. The lyrics pretty much summed up all the interviews and half-written analyzes waiting for me at home on my desk and I realized that they were really all about violence. The construction of the urban poor as dangerous and less hu-

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<sup>83</sup> This song speaks with a violent voice from the street of social inequality, the violence invested in social relations in a polarized society, the desperation of the poor and the accumulated poverty of generations and how the market needs the poor to be poor. The lyrics are written in the slang of the excluded territories of Rio de la Plata, its content belongs to a very specific local context and my translation to English would never do it justice. It would be like translating a North American rap-song into Swedish and I prefer to leave it as it.

<sup>84</sup> *Murga* is a form of musical street theater performed during carnival in Argentina and Uruguay. The lyrics often comment social or political events during the year.

man, the exclusion of the territories they inhabit, and the elimination of their bodies from public space – and in extension from the nation – is a silent and violent form of “let to die”. The cruel paradox resides in the consumer society’s request of cheap labor. This “un-population” is victim of the system at the same time as their bodies and conditions are needed to maintain it.

My reaction to the song also made me realize my emotional commitment to the topic. I have chosen to write about urban poverty because I wanted to understand my own experience of invisibilization of urban poverty, but also because it makes me angry. Some might argue that ethnology should not be about politics. But for me it is all about passion and to claim some sort of distant scientific objectivity towards my field and material would be dishonest. Thus, I have tried to analytically work with this by employing an auto-ethnographic method where my own reactions and choices before and during field-work have constituted part of the analyzed material. As we all go about making sense out of everyday life according to categorization and positioning of subjects within a discursive regime of knowledge we are articulating discourse and creating reality (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:113). I believe in change and that we can make it happen by questioning our categorizations, contesting geo-political knowledge, changing the way we speak of people and places, and by reconsidering our actions towards those around us and the conception of ourselves in the world.

What is the need to write of *la inseguridad* and urban poverty in the same text? All description is an inscription and to once again juxtaposition these two phenomena can be understood as part of the construction of criminalization of poverty. But I believe that the categorization of reality through the discourse of *la inseguridad* is highly linked to the construction of urban poor in a neoliberal society like Buenos Aires. As an ironic example pointed out by Javier Auyero, in 1998 the Argentine Ministry of Justice and Security announced that the prisons were full and that they would move 3,700 new prisoners to former factories that were empty (Auyero 2002:512). There is a connection between discourse of security and neoliberal reorganization of space. Conflation of poverty with crime can be said to reflect middle class fear of descending socially. Many of the women explain *la inseguridad* with poverty, but research indicates that there is really no clear relation between crime, poverty and new urban fears. Many argue that the real problem is inequality and exclusion caused by the free market economy, consumption and economic recession and the fears this arouse (Taylor 2009:133, Caldeira 2000, Moser et al 2005).

As the urban poor are constructed in dehumanized ways, positioned as sub-humans, and interpreted as dangerous according to the logic of *la inseguridad*, or as lacking moral and enough social capital for being acceptable in the work market, this making of their otherness creates a sense of security for main-stream population. If danger can be localized to certain bodies and certain territories, the risk of losing one's well-being and material condition can be held at a distance. And as risk, danger and poverty is located to other spaces and other social realities the private home is constructed as a safe haven. These are discourses that for example direct attention from domestic violence being committed in all social and spatial sectors. Women are really most at risk in their private homes where they are submitted to violence by male relatives or partners. Half of all Latin American women are estimated to have been subjected to violence in their home at some point (Moser et al 2005:135). Still, the women in my interviews express fear of situations in public space.

Society seems to be out of place. The profound transformations of labor markets and privatizations have left a large amount of people outside of the system in Argentina, once a country where workers could expect a certain social mobility. In the 1990's an important part of the population was excluded from any social mobility. Cerruti and Grimson write that the neoliberal dichotomy is not up or down, but inside or outside (Cerruti & Grimson 2007:317). I have showed that the urban poor are constructed through concepts of space and race, this means that I argue that they are constructed as subject in accordance to territorial and racial meaning assigned to their bodies. In this context it is also interesting to make use of Foucault's concept of biopower in order to understand how people are let to die as we are minding our own business. As the meaning of welfare – public health, education, and different kind of insurance for the population – was articulated through collective demands on society in the industrial era, today the globalized capital are reassessing these right formerly connected to labor (Marks 2006:333). Neoliberalism creates logic of disposable bodies – bodies that do not produce nor consume. At best they can be cheap labor, but the majority of the former working-class is superfluous population in the privatized system. This transformation of society has led to new spatial practices and new visible poverty in global cities. As the urban poor are constructed as dangerous others that lack moral, education and civilization, their poverty can be hold at a distance and assigned their individual failure to thrive in a system that supposedly creates wealth for the ones who make the right choices. The violent evictions of them from public space can be legitimized by their own failure. The racialization of urban poor in Buenos Aires can be understood as a mechanism of biopower, as they are constructed

as *negros* being out of place their claims are made illegitimate and the dehumanization functions as a defense-mechanism that enables “us” in the main-stream population to go about in our everyday life without having to take in human suffering in front of our eyes.

My focus has been on how *la inseguridad* and dehumanizing othering of the urban poor are made discursively in the narratives of everyday life. I have referred a lot to the women’s experience of news media and the reality they construct. To study news media with a discourse perspective is common in ethnology. I do believe that it is important to remember the role of parliamentary politics and the importance of political policies issued at a national and local level when we study how reality is constructed. María Carman argues that it is the state with its political decision on how to handle the urban poor and the wealthy classes that produces the borders of citizenship in Buenos Aires (Carman 2011:195).

Finally, this thesis is not only about Buenos Aires, rather what I have tried to show is part of an international trend and should be considered in relation to the reader’s own local context. As identity is created in a structure of difference, othering is always constructed. Important for cultural analysis is to deconstruct how this is done within global and local systems of power and hierarchies. I have argued that poverty and danger can be understood as spatialized and racialized in Buenos Aires. But subject positions are always ambivalent and floating constructions, as meaning changes and contingency is always present as a subversive reminder of the impossibility of total fixation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:114). This changing structure suggests the possibility of change and makes it worthwhile examining discourse even at the risk of reproducing it.



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For interview with Raúl Zibechi:

Cooperativa La Vaca: <http://lavaca.org/notas/buenos-aires-es-indoamerica/> (Checked 8th of June 2011)

Murga group:

Agarrate Catalina: <http://www.agarratecatalina.com.uy/>. A video of *La Violencia* performed can be seen here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWmwCMpnWbQ>

## Interviews:

I have changed all the names and to respects the principle of anonymity I prefer not to state location of the interviews.

Interview with Andrea conducted in Buenos Aires, 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Interview with Ana conducted in Buenos Aires, 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2011; duration about 2 hours.

Interview with Veronica conducted in Buenos Aires, 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Interview with Raquel conducted in two parts, on 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of March; duration about 30 minutes, and 20 minutes.

Interview with Julia conducted in Buenos Aires, 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2011; duration about 30 minutes.

Interview with Natalia conducted in Buenos Aires, 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Interview with Mercedes conducted in Buenos Aires, 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 30 minutes.

Interview with Eva conducted in Buenos Aires, 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 20 minutes.

Interview with Magalí conducted in Buenos Aires, 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Interview with María conducted in Buenos Aires, 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Interview with Iris conducted in Buenos Aires, 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 2 hours.

Interview with Augustina conducted in Buenos Aires, 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Interview with Nora conducted in Buenos Aires, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 20 minutes.

Interview with Alejandra conducted in Buenos Aires, 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2011; duration about 1 hour.

Group interview conducted in several parts in Buenos Aires, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2011, total duration about 40 minutes.

## Observations:

Observation in form of “walk along” made at 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2001 with Andrea.

Observation in form of “walk along” made at 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2001 with Ana.

Observation in form of “walk along” made at 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2001 with Iris.

Observation in form of “walk along” made at 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2001 with Augustina.

