Palettes of Freedom

Murals shaping political and ethnic identities
in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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Photograph FrontPage[1]

[1] Photograph taken by Anna-Maria Patsouraki on 24-03-2017. Location: Avenida de Mayo, Buenos Aires.

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MAP OF BUENOS AIRES

Figure 1: Map of the neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires[2]

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[2] Obtained from: *ciudadsilvestre.blogspot.com* on 12-06-2017

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Doing anthropological fieldwork was something had been looking forward to for a very long time, but since we only had been in contact with a view people who 'might be able' to help us with our research before we entered the field, everything seemed very uncertain before our departure. Where and how would we find our informants? Where and how would we have to start our fieldwork? When we arrived in Buenos Aires we realized everybody was very open, helpful, interested, welcoming and passionate, so talking about our research soon brought us to potential informants.

This thesis is the product of our ten week fieldwork in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Fieldwork is all about hanging out, participant observation and developing relationships with informants in order to understand the way they speak, behave, think and feel. Although we did not entirely live our informants' life, we believe to have become insiders in the mural art scene of Buenos Aires as best as we possibly could in such a short period of time. We owe this to our informants and dozens of other people who have been so kind to invite us to activities, having us over for dinner, taking us for a drink, or just share their story with us.

Therefore we want to thank everyone who made our stay and research special with their enthusiastic, warm and welcoming attitude, we could not have written this thesis without them. Last but not least we want to thank our supervisor Gijs Cremers, who has guided us with much devotion and enthusiasm through the whole process. His trust and critical feedback contributed a lot to the final result of this thesis. After the amazing and intense three months we spent there, we can firmly state that 'we will never forget our time in Buenos Aires'.

Anna-Maria & Laure

1. INTRODUCTION

(Anna-Maria & Laure)

Voices came from everywhere, each wall sharing its own story. Sometimes we wanted to talk back, sometimes we tried to ignore them, but they kept talking. *''Porque el arte público, es un espacio de discusión.''* [3]

Buenos Aires, Argentina's very socially diverse and enormous capital, is going through constant (re)construction of political and ethnic identities among her citizens. Individual and collective, sometimes massive expression about ongoing and historic social matters, contribute to a (re)formation of ideas about politics and ethnicity, two social identities that are strongly related to each other when it comes to citizenship in Buenos Aires. The meaning of citizenship is negotiated on the urban streets through a public manifestation of local actors' agency within the civic power divisions that are constructed by the government and among locals themselves. Based on agents' perception of their role as city citizens with a certain political and ethnic identity and of the public space they live in, streets call for such identities to be (dis)empowered, through their agency in the city's social structure of power. A predominant perception of streets as common space, visibilizes power relations among different citizens claiming the same space. Whom do streets belong to and who should have the power to decide over them?

As muralism is taking over Buenos Aires' walls throughout different neighbourhoods (see map on page 7), local cultures and power relations among the city citizens are also involved in the reformative urban process and by that, trigger a great variety of personal and collective identifications with the mural interventions that are changing the city as a whole. The construction of politics and ethnicity on Buenos Aires' streets now gains a whole new dimension, in which mural art, as an act and image, takes the power of representation of various contested identities. Both ethnic and political matters in Argentinean society are constructed through the posture the different actors take in the power position they find themselves in regarding the presence and creation of murals in the city they form part of. Thus, a blurred shared urban space with millions of inhabitants, no governmental restrictions on muralism and countless available walls, produce a 'battlefield' of semantic negotiation and

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[3] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

identity (re)construction. Murals provoke citizens' reactions, opinions, feelings and thoughts, since walls are situated on streets and in this sense are 'common' property. Nevertheless, in Buenos Aires walls have particular owners who are the ones to legally 'own' the murals as well. In this friction between public and private, power divisions emerge between the citizens that relate to the act and image of murals intervening daily urban life. These power divisions form part of the political identity construction in Buenos Aires, since different agencies are also reflected in the mural interventions.

The term 'identity' refers to where a person or a group belongs, a personal or common image that is expressed so as to integrate the person or the group into their own existence and distinguish them from 'others' (Golubović 2010, 25). Identity can thus be either collective or personal, ascribed or self-ascribed, or a combination of both. When it comes to political identity, its construction can be interpreted as a political medium or a political goal, for personal or collective identification with political ideologies can be used in order to acquire such an identity or in order to achieve further goals within a context of political power struggles (Bernstein 2013, 1-2). Ethnic identity refers to the categorization of people in groups and relationships (Cohen 1978, 386), a classification that focusses on cultural constructions such as language, skin colour and religion (Chandra 2005, 236). Although ethnic identity is largely ascribed, it is a hybrid concept that is strongly context dependent and is in accordance with identity, a product of change (Cohen 1978). This fluid character of ethnic identity makes it comparable to political identity, which also highly depends on the situation in which it is studied and also demands personal identification, whether individually, or collectively.

According to Dosch, muralism can be seen as collective art, as a tool for representation made possible by a team's cooperation (2007, 19). The challenge of mural interventions in Buenos Aires is defining who should be part of this collective process and what participation in the creation of a mural should mean for the different local actors involved. A focus on muralism in the study of political and ethnic identity construction offers insights in the distribution of power between different agents, since the latter are not necessarily guaranteed equal participation in mural interventions. Muralism's 'openness' can thus not be considered synonymous to an equal distribution of representative power among all citizens of Buenos Aires and challenges political and ethnic identity construction through local actors' agency in public space.

The main question we will answer in this thesis is: *"What is the role of muralism in the construction of political and ethnic identity of local actors in Buenos Aires, Argentina?"* In order to answer this question, we explored the relationship between muralism and the

(dis)empowerment of local actors' political and ethnic identities through their agency as citizens of Buenos Aires. This process between agents and society is influenced by power divisions constructed by both higher political institutions and interpersonal social contact among the different agents.

Our research population consists of local actors living in Buenos Aires, who are somehow involved in the creation of the murals in Buenos Aires. Such local actors are mural artists, the owners of the walls that are decorated with a mural, the people living in the neighbourhood of a mural, people that walk by the murals in their daily lives or organizations of mural events. Politics and ethnicity are issues that we studied apart from and in relation to each other within the city's muralism. Our fieldwork has shown that these two types of identities are strongly related to each other. Within our research, Anna-Maria focussed on political identity and Laure on ethnic identity through muralism. Our overall goal was to create a complementary view, by revealing different ways in which muralism can (dis)empower citizenship through agency and possibly activism and thereby, the (re)construction of political and ethnic identities in Buenos Aires.

Controversial perceptions of public space

The main struggle regarding identity (re)construction through muralism in Buenos Aires lies in the different agencies in intervening walls as an ambiguous public space in which private properties are painted on public streets. Considering that the owners of the walls are the ones to give the final approval for the 'legal' making of a mural and the artists the ones to physically realize the work, those agents' decisive power is confronted with other citizens' agency to represent their proper identities, whether political or ethnic.

Murals as public spaces of discussion challenge various local actors in Buenos Aires' to react on their agency in the process before, during and after the making of a mural. Hence different interests, values, ideas, feelings and interpretations of the act and image of muralism are related to the social power structure in which citizens construct their political and ethnic identities, issues that all citizens somehow relate to in Buenos Aires. Painted on private walls on shared streets, murals invite numerous actors with different power positions and certain political and ethnic identities to relate with them, whether in a passive, solely interpretative way, or a more activist posture toward (dis)empowerment.

Qualitative research methods

We defined both political and ethnic identity as dynamic, context-dependent and as the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external processes and perceptions (Nagel 1994). Murals are located in public space and are thus freely interpretable to everyone, inviting semantic negotiation and identity (re)construction in Buenos Aires.

We did anthropological research in Buenos Aires for ten weeks, from the 6th of February to the 14th of April, 2017. Our first month we lived in the neighbourhood of San Telmo and the last two months in Palermo (see map on page 7). During our fieldwork we used several qualitative research methods such as participant observation, hanging out, informal conversations and several types of interviewing (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, Boeije 2010). We participated in street art tours and street art festivals, we visited galleries, joined different protests and marches, while we also observed artists as they were painting in their studios or on the streets. During these activities we had conversations, we made jot notes, took pictures or video's when permitted and tried to assimilate and remember all the details of the moments and contexts we were part of. In order to process our data, we elaborated our jot notes as soon as possible in to simple and comprehensive explanations. We experienced this elaboration of our jot- and head notes into complete field notes as a time consuming, but highly important analytical activity.

Hanging out, 'being there' and informal conversations, all part of our participant observation, strengthened the 'rapport' we built with our informants. These methods ensured that we and our participants would really get to know each other, creating a relationship of mutual trust and a comfortable feeling with each other. However, sometimes we struggled with the long distances between that separated us from our informants, many of them scattered throughout the city. Given the city's enormous size, some activities could be dangerous, time consuming or expensive, but this was compensated with the murals' public character, which made it easy for us to enter into our research field. Soon we noticed that the 'mural community' in Buenos Aires is very big and diverse, but also united and connected. Because of this it was possible for us to use the snowball method to get in touch with other potential informants. Because of the fact that most of our informants were very open and sociable, we acquired a large amount of data using these methods.

This thesis is based on 37 qualitative interviews with 37 different informants. Different types of interview methods enabled us to ask more specific questions about certain topics we and our informants had already spoken about during informal conversations. We

used semi-structured interviews to get more structured and detailed information from our informants, where it was still very important that our participants felt free to talk and were only being, minimally, controlled by questions we asked to gain specific information on the subject. We used this type of interviewing in a later stage of our research, when we needed to fill up data gaps and more specific information to answer particular research questions. We used our topic- and question lists, but still it is was up to our informants which topics or questions were discussed and when. Also two focus groups emerged, which generated group discussions about people's perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes toward particular topics

.   This thesis consists of several chapters, in which the theoretical framework and empirical data will be presented. In order to answer our main question we will first discuss some relevant concepts and theories relevant to the debate of political and ethnic identity in urban muralism. Our theoretical outline includes an elaboration of concepts as political and ethnic identity, citizenship, gentrification, political and ethnic activism and empowerment. In the next chapter we will provide the context to which the theoretical framework will be applied. The socio-economic crisis of 2001 in Buenos Aires and the contemporary political situation and ethnic composition in the Argentine capital will be discussed and related to the notion of both political and ethnic activism and eventually to activist muralism in Buenos Aires. In our empirical chapters we will present the data we collected during our fieldwork, which we have linked to our theoretical framework as well. We have used four chapters, all divided into different subparagraphs; 1) 'Contested identities in Buenos Aires', discussing the European influence on Buenos Aires and its inhabitants, the contested identities within this society, and the ongoing search for 'the' Argentinean identity 2) 'Negotiating public agency in Buenos Aires', entailing activism and gentrification in the (re)construction of politics in Buenos Aires' public space 3) 'Murals shaping politics in Buenos Aires, demonstrating power divisions between citizens' diverse agency in mural interventions and specifically in La Boca's muralist gentrification 4) 'Murals shaping ethnicities in Buenos Aires', entailing the multifaceted role of muralism in the (re)construction processes of ethnic identities of local actors in Buenos Aires.

In our concluding remarks we have integrated our research findings and have connected these to our most important theories, being citizenship, agency and empowerment, while also parallels and deviations are discussed, followed by the answer on our main research question.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following paragraphs we will give a theoretical outline of the main concepts within our research. The concepts will be placed in the anthropological debate in order to demonstrate their relevance to our research. First, we will conceptualize the concept of both political and ethnic identity, which can be seen as the core of our research. We will describe a) what is meant with each specific type, b) how it is actively expressed ('activism') and c) we will focus on the socially constructive character of mural art. Secondly we have included a specific paragraph on citizenship as it is important to understand it's relation to political and ethnical identities. After these paragraphs we will try to concretize more and connect the quite abstract and wide concepts of identity and citizenship to more tangible relevant concepts within our research, pointing at activist muralism. In the last paragraph the concept of empowerment will be discussed and will be linked to and reflect on the concepts in the aforementioned paragraphs.

2.1 Political identity

(Anna-Maria)

When it comes to political identity, its construction serves as a political medium or a political goal, for personal or collective identification with political ideologies can be used in order to acquire such an identity or in order to achieve further goals within a context of political power struggles (Bernstein 2013, 1-2). When studying political identity in relation to muralism in Buenos Aires, activism as a constructive social force cannot be left out of consideration, since the creation of murals requires the use of shared space (Hollman 2009, 33). Activist muralism in Buenos Aires can thus be considered as a means for (dis)empowerment, for its intervention in the daily order can change power relations, or make them expand (Page and Cuba 1999).

Political identity as a social construction, can be interpreted in different ways and have various forms within society. The political identity Golubović mentions can either be constructed individually or collectively, the two forms not excluding each other. In the case of one's participation in a collective political group and thus adherence of a collective political identity, personal political identification can take place simultaneously. Bernstein states that identity is deployed by activists in order to realize political change, pointing to the collective character of such an deployment as a political strategy. (Re)constructing political identity is either a political medium or a political end, meaning that the dynamic construction of political identity can be used to achieve a certain goal, or can be the goal itself.

The meaning of collectivity strongly influences people's willingness to acquire certain political ideologies, making political identity dependent on both ideologies and a sense of belonging. Huddy defines political identity as ''the identification with a major political party or the adoption of an ideological moniker as a term of self-description'' (2001, 130-131). Within this approach, political identification would solely be dependent on higher institutions undermining bottom-up political expression. The local perception of power relations defining politics is completely left out of perspective here, making politics a result of other types of identity construction rather than the source of an proper identity itself. This personal or collective construction of political ideologies make political identity symbolic, cultural and as a result, dynamic.

Hence, political identity is achieved through the perception of various types of meanings, such as participation and ideology. Political identities are also influenced by higher political institutions, given the many explicit and implicit statements made by political leaders, but their perception and construction occurs among and by the locals themselves. Political meanings are thus reciprocal and interdependent between locals and political leaders. When political identity refers to power relations on a broad level, power struggles in the construction of other identities can also be perceived as political. Ethnic identity is an example of a certain identity in which power relations can be of significant importance when to comes to its construction, for political and ethnic identity should also be studied in relation to each other within anthropological research. What makes political identity different from ethnic identity and what links them to one another?

2.2 Ethnic identity

(Laure)

In order to understand the concept of ethnic identity it is necessary to have a clear idea of both the term identity and ethnicity. All of the anthropological approaches of the concept of ethnicity agree that ethnicity has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships (Cohen 1978). In everyday language the term ethnicity is used to describe 'minority issues' and 'race relations' but in anthropology the term is more often used to describe relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive (Cohen 1978, 386). Majorities and dominant peoples are no less 'ethnic' than minorities.

Chandra argues that "ethnic identity refers to nominal membership in an ascriptive category, including race, language, caste, or religion. By defining these concepts she uses

ethnicity as an 'umbrella' concept that easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion and covers 'tribes', 'races', 'nationalities', and castes (2005, 236). She also states that membership in an ethnic category is inherited (2005, 236). For example, one may be born a African American Muslim from Chicago or a Khoina Christian from South-Africa living in Europe. These examples illustrate that we are usually born as members of several ethnic categories, with a choice about which one to identify with (Chandra 2005). Beside, the location and meaning of particular ethnic categories and boundaries are continuously negotiated, revised, and revitalized, both by ethnic group members themselves as well as by outside observers (Nagel 1994, 153). The most important point in this is that ethnic boundaries are not stable and continuing. This makes identification with such a ethnic category (or more than one category) even more complicated.

Ethnic boundaries determine who is a member and who is not and designate which ethnic categories are available for individual identification at a particular time and place. Membership in an ethnic group is a matter of social definition, an interplay of the self-definition of members and the definition of other groups (Nagel 1994, 154). An influential theoretician who wrote about the relation between ethnicity and boundaries was the anthropologist Fredrik Barth. He argues that ethnicity is the product of social ascriptions, a kind of labeling process engaged in by oneself and others, which is in line with the definition of ethnicity above (Barth 1969). However, Barth sees ethnicity as a continuing ascription which classifies a person in terms of his most general identity, presumptively determined by origin and background (Cohen 1978, 385). Ethnic groups are then those widest scaled subjectively utilized modes of identification used in interactions among and between groups. Instead of this view of 'societies' or even 'cultures' as more or less isolated, static and homogeneous units, anthropologists now typically try to find a more accurate, less evolutionary means of understanding both advance of ancient differences among peoples (Nagel 1994, 152). Examples of this are the definitions of Chandra and Nagel, who argue that the same person can be categorized according to different criteria of relevance in different situation. From this point ethnic identity can be seen as the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external processes and opinions and thus, can change in various situations and various audiences. This makes the notion of ethnicity mutable and since we defined identity as 'a product of change', we also used this 'situational' concept of ethnic identity within our research.

2.3 Citizenship

(Anna-Maria & Laure)

A central concept in the relation of political and ethnic identity construction through muralism in Buenos Aires is citizenship, given that all local actors considered are characterized by it. The concept of citizenship can be seen as a shared identity that would provide a source of national unity among its owners. Hereunder this universal model of citizenship is discussed and gives an outcome on which both political and ethnic identities can act. In post-war theory about citizenship the concept is defined almost entirely in terms of the possession of rights. The most influential exposition of this post-war conception of citizenship-as-rights is T.H. Marshall's "Citizenship and Social Class" from 1949. According to Marshall, citizenship is essentially a matter of ensuring that everyone is treated as a full and equal member of society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354). And the way to ensure this sense of membership is through according people an increasing number of citizenship rights. By guaranteeing civil, political, and social rights to all, Marshall states that the welfare state ensures that every member of society feels like a full member of society, able to participate in and enjoy the common life of society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354). This understanding of citizenship from a status attribute to a way of acting has come increasingly under attack. The main criticism is based on the idea that citizenship is not just a certain status, defined by a set of rights and responsibilities. Robert Asen agrees with this and writes in his article A Discourse Theory of Citizenship that citizenship has not to be seen as the exclusive possession of citizens, citizenship may not be granted. Instead, people enact citizenship through their own agency (2004, 204). This definition of the concept is very interesting for our research because of our focus on local actors and their agency. Both of these concepts will be elaborated later in this theoretical framework.

Citizenship can also be seen as an identity, an expression of one's membership in a community. Marshall sees citizenship as a shared identity that would provide a source of national unity. It has become clear however, that many groups such as blacks, women, ethnic and religious minorities, feel excluded from the "common culture", despite possessing the common rights of citizenship. An increasing number of theorists argue that citizenship must take account of these differences. One of these critics is Iris Marion Young and she argued that the model of universal citizenship, who sees citizenship primarily as a legal status through which an identical set of civil, political and social rights are accorded to all members of the polity is difference-blind (1989, 250). In order of this she offers the idea of differentiated citizenship; "members of certain groups would be incorporated into the political

community not only as individuals but also through the group, and their rights would depend, in part, on their group membership" (Young 1989, 251). So instead of a universal citizenship we need a group differentiated citizenship and a heterogeneous public. In a heterogeneous public, differences are publicly recognized and acknowledged as irreducible.

In a later publication, Young talks about the ideal of 'together-in-difference', which assumes that people live together in a common polity but are locally differentiated into elective group affinities (1999, 237). This idea is in line with the perspective of Asen, because they both believe that self-organization and local autonomy of people (who are differentiated by compounds of culture, religion, ethnicity, or lifestyle) causes commitment to cooperation and justice in heavy and interdependent relations among these locals (Asen, 204) (Young, 248). These theories, which do not agree with the model of legal and universal citizenship, could be combined in the term 'cultural citizenship', introduced by Rosaldo. According to him, cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different and to belong, in a participatory democratic sense (1994, 402). It claims that social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to construct inequality among people. The notion of belonging here means full membership in a group and the ability to influence one's destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions. When it comes to gentrification, the notion of belonging among the city citizens becomes questioned. According to Wyly and Hammel, gentrification ''underwrites new configurations of highest and best use, reallocations of neighbourhood public services, and realignments of police practices and public space regulation'' (2005, 36). New priorities are attached to the content of urban policy. According to Herzfeld, gentrification can have severe impacts on the residents of the impoverished areas 'to be improved' (2010). Even stronger is Neil Smith's suspicious vision on gentrification as a positive process, calling its equation to urban improvement, an euphemism (2002). The 'improving grade' of gentrification's transformative interventions in public urban space depends on the semantics of the process, therefore neither an exclusively negative or positive label can be attached to it. In order to regard gentrification's ' improving' aspect, the meanings that the actors involved in the process attach to the changes they find themselves in should be understood first.

Within this research focus is laid on the conceptualization of citizenship as a fluid, multimodal, and quotidian process. Citizenship as constructed and constructivist in daily life, can be studied in shared space and more specifically within mural art, being a very visible artistic intervention. Such identity related concepts are going to be studied in relation to empowerment, in order to comprehend the functional character of murals in Buenos Aires.

2.4 Activist muralism

(Anna-Maria)

Since muralism is a political act by intervening in the daily order, everything expressed and constructed through it, is equally political. The different social mobilizations after the crisis of 2001 in Buenos Aires can be understood under the notion of 'political activism', which does not only imply the expression of political ideologies through explicit activist movements, but constructive manifestations of various identities in general. According to Nagengast, ''consciousness of shared identity and common discourse centred upon that identity are not uncontested'' (2003, 61). Identity can thus be constructed and negotiated through activism, the latter addressing different social issues such as political or ethnic ones. Political activism should thus be seen as the active practice of social mobilization, pointing at the personal or collective negotiation of certain power relations and identities, within this research political and ethnic identities. The reason political activism is taken into consideration here, is its influence on its practitioners' identity construction, for it is relevant to the wider study of political and ethnic identity of local actors in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The power struggles among the citizens studied related to the existence and construction of murals in Buenos Aires, present insights in the functional character of murals in the city and their influence on the social interaction of the local actors involved. Mya Dosch (2007) discusses how muralism can be seen as collective art, as a tool for representation made possible by a team's cooperation. In this case, muralists have a representative power in the identity construction realized through their art. As we have seen empowerment in general, it means giving something or someone the authority to do something. This can be closely linked to an individual or a group having agency.

In their article Agency & Empowerment Ibrahim and Alkire describe empowerment as an expansion of agency, in which they define agency as the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value (2007). According to Barker's explanation of the structure-agency debate, structure regards the ''recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available'', while agency ''is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choice''(2000, 448). However, agents are social actors and thus influence in their existence the social arrangements by which they are regulated, for agency and social structure are always interrelated to each other in a dialectical process of mutual influence. The ability to act freely and empowerment as an extension of this process thus also depends on the interdependence of agents and social structure instead of ''an issue of socialization against autonomy in determining whether an

individual acts as a free agent or in a manner dictated by social structure'' (Baker 2000, 448). Amartya Sen defines agency as ″what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important″ (1982, 4). Considering that values have different meanings, this freedom can also be interpreted in various ways, giving agency many faces and forms of expression.

Public expression, by means of muralism can be seen as a very important part of the agency of an individual. To make the connection between muralism and its political aspect, we have to look at the socially constructed characteristic of the mural. The political aspect in this is the imposition of a singular identity on an heterogeneous community (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, 19). Following Hollman's reference to place as a lived space, citizens feel and experience the urban spaces they live in and pass through, appropriating the streets, squares and walls they are faced with in their daily lives (2009). Murals thus have different functions in the urban space of Buenos Aires. Murals can be regarded as a symbolic camp full of meanings that are different to every subject faced with them, given the variety in proper cultural backgrounds among the city citizens. Besides, murals can be seen as an object and space of social struggle, since they reflect daily interactions between different people, institutions and companies (Hollman 2009, 33). The activist character of murals discussed here can be justified by Orión's statement clarifying that, ''using collective space is always a political act, since a real urban intervention always proposes a change in the order, opposing the urban blindness caused by the everyday'' (2009, 33). Muralism can be seen as a tool for activism and expression; a public voice, a part of an activist culture of art. Art activism is a key element of social and political commentary that can be called activism because of its advocacy, or at least its stubborn acknowledgment of imperfections in the human condition. Within this research we look at muralism, which is a form of art activism, in relation to the (dis) empowerment of political and ethnic identity of local actors in Buenos Aires, in order to comprehend the functional character of murals in Buenos Aires.

2.5 Empowerment

(Laure)

Looking back to the origins of the concept of empowerment, we can note that it is linked to the pursuit of emancipation of socially disadvantaged individuals and groups. It expresses the power of people themselves to actually influence on (limiting) living conditions. Empowerment is a challenging concept in which the relationship between the individual and society is a central issue (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995, 569). In activist muralism, empowerment can take place when emancipation is sought for. Mural art as an active intervention in the daily order and can thus be empowering when it facilitates social emancipation.

Page and Czuba argue that the idea of power is the core of the concept of empowerment (1999). The possibility of empowerment depends on two things. First, empowerment requires that power can change. If power cannot change, if it is inherent in positions or people, then empowerment is not possible, nor is empowerment conceivable in any meaningful way. Second, the concept of empowerment depends upon the idea that power can expand (Page and Czuba 1999). From the anthropological view on power as dynamic, we can approach power as a social construction. From this point, empowerment can be seen as a reflection of the changing nature of power relations. Since empowerment regards the potential of dynamic power relations, it can be understood as political, considering the meaning of politics as power relations that is focussed on here. Nevertheless, also ethnic motives can underlie political empowerment, for empowerment is a concept that can address both ethnic and political issues, as either its stimuli or its outcomes.

According to Perkins and Zimmerman, the various definitions are generally consistent of empowerment as an intentional, ongoing process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment (1995, 570). They further emphasize that a distinction between empowering processes and outcomes is critical in order to clearly define empowerment theory. This distinction suggests that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering, and that the outcome of such processes result in a level of being empowered. In this process Perkins and Zimmerman distinguishes three layers of empowerment: a community, organizational and individual level (1995, 570). These different levels are mutually connected and dependent on each other.

Empowerment is thus emerging as a multi-level construct in which the different layers interact. It connects the individual well-being of individuals and groups with the broader

social and political context. Empowerment is a construct is a highly relevant concept within anthropology, because of its multi-dimensional social dimension. However, within anthropology the focus is mainly aimed at the cultural dimension of empowerment.

With regards to our research and especially to our focus on the involvement of local actors in the construction of political and ethnic identity in Buenos Aires, it is important to illustrate the concept of *'locality'*. According to Philip Cooke locality may be understood as a socio-spatial construct around which a significant element of social dynamism is gathered, that drives forward the development processes of modern society (2013, 14). This is a theorization of locality that stresses both the external determining forces which contribute to the nature of specific localities and the internal agency affects of which individuals and social groups are capable, acting within localities by using locality as a basis for social mobilization.

In the next chapter we will provide the context of our research location in which the previous discussed concepts and theories must be placed. Subsequently we will connect the concepts, theories and context to our research findings, in order to gain a better understanding of the role of muralism in the political and ethnic identity construction of local actors in Buenos Aires.

3. CONTEXT

Using art to connect with the crowd was once a pretty revolutionary idea. Almost 100 years ago a socially and politically motivated art movement from Mexico started to use public space to communicate with, engage and inspire the public by providing art into their daily lives.[4] This movement was headed by *'los tres grandes'*, the three great ones; Diego Rivero, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who are considered to be the three most influential muralists from the 20th century.[5] The movement quickly spread throughout Latin America and left an important mark on Argentina, including Buenos Aires.[6]

Nowadays the architecture of Buenos Aires is still characterized by an enormous presence of muralism. The result of local and international artistic interventions which in the last decades, has expanded widely throughout the different neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. Urban policies in Buenos Aires have been carried out in order to ''encourage middle-class households' to move into working-class neighbourhoods'' (Lees 2015, 200). Gentrification's 'improving' aspect, depends on the meanings that the actors involved in the process attach to the changes they find themselves in. Within this wider pattern of urban transformation, murals as part of public space, invite all citizens to relate with, and react on them. According to the agency these local actors receive in this process of change and their proper identification as citizens of Buenos Aires, they can (re)construct their identities. Political instability and insecurity produce relationships of instant reaction between the local citizens who are supposed to share the same 'public' streets. As a result, murals are not simply a form of urban art, but reference points of ongoing identity struggles regarding politics and ethnicity in Buenos Aires. This chapter discusses how different political and ethnic identities of the city citizens are contested by social structure that is constructed by the government and among citizens themselves and how muralism can provide a medium for the expression of these identities.

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[4] Tour with a street art organisation, 09-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[5] Tour with a street art organisation, 09-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[6] Tour with a street art organisation, 09-02-2017, Buenos Aires.

3.1 Politics in contemporary Buenos Aires

(Anna-Maria)

The change from a substitution model to a neoliberal model during the '90's in Argentina, is still visible within the capital's society. It is reflected in the spatial segmentation of the city, dividing it in numerous neighbourhoods of strong economic contrasts with regards to their life quality and social class composition (Cerutti and Grimson 2004, 26). In the end of 2001, the country suffered from a tragic institutional crisis, resulting in a percentage of 42,3% of the homes in the metropolitan area, including the city of Buenos Aires, living below the poverty line by 2002 (Cerutti and Grimson 2004, 4-12). Scarcity and austerity made policies regarding social security and the growth of the labour market insufficient, given the extremely high necessity for socio-economic development in Buenos Aires. What followed, was the perception of a 'naturalized' inequality among the city citizens and insecurity deriving from fear generated by the police (Cerutti and Grimson 2004, Dinerstein 2002).

Political identities in Buenos Aires are constructed in relation to the notion of citizenship, for this is a characteristic all residents of the city theoretically have in common. The aforementioned naturalized inequality between the citizens of Buenos Aires, shows that although all citizens are formally ascribed with the 'same bureaucratic status', they are not equal. The power relations between the groups of unequal citizens, depend on the interrelation between different forms of agency. Hence, politics are constructed from above, the recognition citizens receive in practice from both the government of Buenos Aires as their society, but also from beneath, in the way citizens react to their agency through activism. In the transformative process of muralism on Buenos Aires' streets, different forms of agency are also visible between the local actors that consider themselves relevant to the mural interventions in their city, which taking citizenship into account, 'belongs to everyone'. The citizens' perception of their social position in relation to these mural interventions, is in constant negotiation with their attitude toward their agency, opening doors for (dis)empowerment of their political identity.

Mya Dosch discusses how muralism can be seen as collective art, as a tool for representation made possible by a team's cooperation. A mural is a socially constructed object, so its creation has a political aspect, which is the imposition of a singular identity on an heterogeneous community (2007, 19). The mural can be used here as a way to celebrate, teach or support a political movement and is referred to as 'a painted book', given that it provides accessible knowledge to everyone. Following Hollman's reference to place as a lived space, citizens feel and experience the urban spaces they live in and pass through,

appropriating the streets, squares and walls they are faced with in their daily lives (2009, 32). Murals have thus different functions in the commonly space of Buenos Aires. They can be regarded as a symbolic camp full of meanings that are different to every subject faced with them, while they are an object and space of social struggle, reflecting daily interactions between different people, institutions and companies (Hollman 2009, 33). The activist character of murals discussed here can be justified by Orión's statement clarifying that, ''using collective space is always a political act, since a real urban intervention always proposes a change in the order, opposing the urban blindness caused by the everyday'' (2009, 33).

Muralism is activist in its act of intervening the shared lived space, namely the streets of Buenos Aires. Their 'public' and transformative character invites all citizens, regardless their political identity, to relate themselves to this change. 'Ethnic murals' are political in their activist intervention and sometimes also in their image, while 'political murals' are always activist and can also entail semantic struggles regarding ethnicity. It becomes clear that political and ethnic identity can be (re)constructed within the figurative and symbolic content of the represented images in the murals, but also in the activist process around the creation. According to Nagengast, consciousness of shared identity and common discourse centred upon that identities are not uncontested (2003, 61). Mural activism in Buenos Aires is an active practice of social mobilization, in which power relations between citizens are challenged and thereby (re)constructed in the expression and shaping of new, contested identities.

3.2 Ethnic diversity and contested identities in contemporary Buenos Aires

(Laure)

For most of its history Argentina has been primarily a country of immigration. Argentines usually refer to the country as a race crucible, or a melting pot of different peoples (Beck-Agular 1962, 262). The history of immigration to Argentina can be divided into several major stages, but it was the European immigration wave that made Argentina the country with the second-largest number of immigrants; namely 6.6 million. As a result of this the majority of Argentines nowadays descend from different European ethnic groups (Goebel 2016, 94). The best architects from Europe contributed to the expansion of the city, which soon became an international metropolis with the latest modern gadgets and sophisticated culture. Since then, the city is known as the 'Paris of South America' (Goebel 2016, 96). Apart from the fact that Buenos Aires has the most "European" population of Latin America, Buenos Aires became a

place that has been constructed to exclude individuals who do not fit into the categories of modern, European, or North American (Guano 2003, 148). This extensive racist ideology has been built on the notion of European supremacy (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, 5).

The notion of Argentine modernity is tainted by connotations of race and class and this is part of why Argentines who are other to white middle-class modernity are having a hard time with participating in the Buenos Aires public sphere. However, this existence of racial discrimination in Buenos Aires is highly denied; nobody talks about it. It is a commonly held belief among white, mainly middle-class city citizens that there is no racism in Argentina (Guano 2003, 160). Buenos Aires' 'Latin American' social and racial background nowadays only relates in apparently mysterious ways to the Euro-American modernity of the city (Guano 2003, 148). It became of modern nation that silences so many.

Talking about the social and racial background of Latin America, i.e. the indigenous people, we see a striking phenomenon in Argentina. As Gordillo and Hirsch state: "The constitution of Argentina as a nation-state in the late 19th century was based on the systematic attempt to eliminate, silence, or assimilate its indigenous population" (2003, 4). The elites of the time defined the idea of 'the Argentinean nation' in tension with what they imagined as its opposite: *el desierto*, the desert, the term then widely used to refer to the territories of the Pampas, Patagonia, and the Gran Chaco inhabited by indigenous groups that resisted the advance of the state (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, 4).

So, despite the fact that Argentina is a nation of immigrants, a 'melting pot' of different people, there is discrimination against 1) Latin American immigrants, such as Paraguayans, Peruvians and Bolivians, 2) indigenous populations, such as Mapuche, Kollas, Toba, Wichí and the Guaraní, 3) and other racial minorities, such as such as Aborigines, Africans, fellow Latin-Americans, or Asians (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, 20). Muralism provides a pattern for the expression of these identities in Buenos Aires because of its public designation, which implies expressive equality for all citizens, through its visibility and lack of governmental control. Since politics and ethnicity are issues constantly negotiated within the diverse power relations between the citizens of Buenos Aires, murals have a great representative role in the (dis)empowerment of these relations, through the act and image of muralism. Political and ethnic identities reflected in citizens' daily lives, are (re)constructed through their different forms of agency in the expanding muralism.

EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS

4. CONTESTED IDENTITIES IN BUENOS AIRES

(Laure)

"What is your size, S or M? And how tall are you?"[7] While I respond, the girl behind the counter is putting my data in the computer and before I realize, I am standing in front of big cameras and screens reflecting the light. *"Do you speak Spanish?"*[8] but before I can answer that I indeed do speak Spanish, the cameraman is already giving his instructions. Anna is sitting on a chair next to him. *"Try to look fresh and natural, do not hurry, take your time"*[9], says the girl that scouted me on the streets yesterday, after I made my first dubious act of trying to show that 'I feel very happy and confident because of the delicious beer of which I supposedly just took a sip.' I have never done a casting in my entire life, and now I'm here, in a casting agency in Palermo, one of Buenos Aires' neighbourhoods, doing a take for a commercial for an Argentinean beer brand. Apparently I radiate what they want to express as a brand. While in a flash all the conversations that I have had in the last few months rush through my brain, I slowly begin to understand why many people have trouble defining their identity, as even I am beginning to doubt mine. My European appearance seems to fascinate them, although no one really knows where I come from. And the fact that I speak some Spanish seems to be of no interest to them at all; *"Don't worry, you don't have to say anything."*[10] I feel some resistance coming up, wondering if I am presenting the image of the *porteño* now and why these people decide that. Confronted with this every day, trying to live up to this European image of what they should but cannot be, must be hard and stressful for a lot of people living in Buenos Aires.

Defining the Argentine ethnic identity, or more specifically the Buenos Aires' identity appeared to be a complicated, or rather impossible task. Ethnic identity seemed to be a controversial, complicated and sometimes sensitive issue for most of its inhabitants. This chapter discusses how the still-dominant ideology of the melting pot as the basis for identity (re)construction does not apply for all and creates a crisis regarding the Buenos Aires' identity. Not everybody 'melted' or 'melts' in the same way, and we shall see that the melting pot, far from being egalitarian, always entails hierarchical distinctions between desired, less

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[7] Participant observation, 10-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[8] Participant observation, 10-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[9] Participant observation, 10-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[10] Participant observation, 10-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

desired, and undesired ethnic populations. The chapter discusses in succession; the European influence on Buenos Aires and its inhabitants, the contested identities within this society, and the ongoing search for 'the' Argentinean identity.

4.1 The European influence on Buenos Aires

The South-Americans see us as being European, while the Europeans
consider us to be South-Americans. So, it seems we are part of nothing."[11]

After massive, mainly European, migration between 1880 and 1930, and once more after World War II till the early 1950s, Argentina is understood as a nation of European immigrants and their descendants (Goebel 2016). The inhabitants of Buenos Aires, irrespective of their specific individual origin, generally conceive themselves as descendants of Europeans and feel superior to the Latin American half-blood.[12] Most of my informants consider the porteño as being obsessed with Europe, rich and white, and behaving arrogant, proud and selfish.[13] The massive denial of being a porteño in combination with the shared statement that they are everywhere in the city, points to the situational and ascribed character of the concept. The vast majority of my informants have European grandparents, but were born in Argentina. What happened when we were ´hanging around´, was that they often emphasized that they have European roots themselves, they presented me to other people as 'the girl from Europe' and always talked about Europe as if it were paradise, a place where they eventually wanted to live. Gerardo, told me more about this phenomenon:

"It is not necessarily the wish to be truly European, or to live there. In fact,
Argentineans are incredibly nationalist and proud. When an Argentinean tells you his
grandfather comes from Germany, he tries to prove he is better than the 'other'
Latino's. Better than the stereotypical image of a Latino as indecent, wild, poor and
uneducated. They have European roots and Europe is superior to Latin America so

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[11] Nehuen, informal conversation, 01-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[12] Nehuen, informal conversation, 01-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[13] Daniel, informal conversation, 29-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Angelo, interview, 15-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Gerardo, informal conversation, 26-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Cristina, informal conversation, 11-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Jennifer, informal conversation, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Sarah, informal conversation, 18-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
  Claudia, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.

they are 'better than the rest'. At the same time, they try to say something else; I'm also better than you, because I am partly European, but I live here, in a beautiful and warm country, and you live in the cold and boring Europe."[14]

These people, born as members of several ethnic categories, such as Latino, Argentinean, European, inhabitant of Buenos Aires and porteño, have to choose in which situation they identify themselves with which category. This is in line with the statement of Chandra (2005, 236) that membership in an ethnic category is inherited. When my informants were with me; an European girl, they chose to identify themselves as an European living in Buenos Aires. I, on the other hand, often identified them as a Latino, an Argentinean, or a porteño. From this point, ethnic identity can be seen as the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external processes and opinions and thus, can change in various situations and various audiences, just like Chandra (2005, 236) defines the concept of ethnic identity. The idealistic perception with the European image is also visible in the media of the country. When you open a magazine or turn on the television, almost all commercials and advertisements show an European image; blond, white, European looking models who supposedly represent the country's and city's identity.[15] As a result of this, all those who do not meet the requirements of rich, modern or European are ignored and neglected.[16] Like Guano (2003, 148) said in his article "Buenos Aires became a place that has been constructed to exclude individuals who do not fit into the categories of modern, European, or North American." The next paragraph describes who these excluded individuals and groups are, what it is they struggle with and how they try to participate in the daily life of Buenos Aires.

4.2 Struggling to fit in 'modern' Buenos Aires

"Our society is profoundly, very profoundly racist." [17] Leandro, a famous local muralist and Mapuche descendant was the first person who admitted and talked openly about racial discrimination in Buenos Aires. The majority of the people I asked about this topic reacted surprised or a bit offensive; "Why would there be discrimination? We are a melting pot of people, a city where so many different ethnic groups live together." But according to Leandro and other informants[18], Argentina, and especially Buenos Aires became a cosmopolitan city

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[14] Gerardo, interview, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[15] Gerardo, interview, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[16] Lorena, informal conversation, 16-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[17] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[18] Cucho, interview, 05-04-2017,Buenos Aires.
   Gerardo, informal conversation, 26-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

that silences and conceals all people who do not belong to the educated 'white civilization'.[19] This striking phenomenon is build upon the belief that the Argentine identity was largely forged by the flow of European immigrants. The leaders at that time, neglected the existence of indigenous groups, stigmatising them as 'illiterate and uncivilized', unqualified to contribute to the political and economic development of the country.[20] As Fernando told about this time; *"European immigrants were seen as the only hope to develop a consistent project for the country in terms of development and economic success"*[21], and apart from the fact that they indeed have contributed to the development of the country, this idea of Europeans being superior to Argentineans played, and still plays a major role in the identity (re)construction of a lot of people living in Buenos Aires.

So, just like Gordillo and Hirsch (2003, 4) state, Argentina, and especially Buenos Aires carried, and still carry out a rhetoric that is based on the systematic attempt to eliminate, silence, or assimilate its indigenous population. The Mapuche people have been, and still are one of the most affected by these policies; *"The right-wing ruling government of today is trying to 'push the indigenous into the museum', in order to present them as 'the past"*[22], said Leandro angrily, when we talked about this subject. "*And the worst is that all these tactics seem to work*, i*n Buenos Aires the contact with indigenous communities is disappearing, people forget that we are here",* Leandro continued.[23]

In addition to the indigenous people, groups that are other to white middle-class modernity are having a hard time with participating in the Buenos Aires' politics and decision-making processes and are thus not threatened as full and equal members of society, able to participate in and enjoy the common life of this society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354). Especially people who are living in the poor, mostly remote neighbourhoods of the city, feel not being taken seriously by the government at all;

They dance as if they are the only persons on earth. They are young, fifteen years I guess, but they move as if they have never done anything else. Their facial expressions and gestures of the body almost make you believe they are old souls in a young body. Gerardo seems emotional; *"This is very valuable for me, it is the younger generation that must keep our culture alive. We try to teach them everything, but the world changes, everything*

Adrian, interview, 06-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
Santino, interview, 26-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
Lorena, informal conversation, 19-03-2017,Buenos Aires.
[19] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[20] Fernando, interview, 07-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[21] Fernando, interview, 07-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[22] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[23] Cucho, interview, 05-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

changes." They are dancing the *zamba*, a traditional folk dance and circle around each other waving handkerchiefs very elegantly. The song comes to an end and the couple finishes with a strong, passionate pose. The boy taps with his gaucho boots on the floor, sweat is trickling from his forehead. The woman who just sung now starts to speak to the, mostly dark, Latin American looking audience; *"We will not be chased away, by no one, this is who we are and nobody is going to change that, this is our identity, we must remain strong."[24]* She sounds angry, upset, hurt, her voice is trembling. She talks about the plans of the government to build a gigantic shopping mall. Right in the middle of 'their' Mataderos, a neighbourhood located in the west of the city. A big part of its population will be forced to move and the local market will be closed. Gerardo laughs out loud; *"They are crazy, haha."[25]* The music starts playing again, everybody quickly looks for a new partner, including Gerardo and I. In the distance, the Wiphala flag is waving in the wind.

Mataderos is a rather poor neighbourhood, where many South American immigrants (Peruvians, Bolivians, Paraguayans) and native people live.[26] The neighbourhood is being threatened by interventions, that will not only transform the physical appearance of the neighbourhood but also put his strong cultural identity at risk. There are more of these neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires, for example La Boca, Liniers, Barracas or Villa Urquiza (see map on page 7), which the government is trying to 'improve'. Their argument and intention for interventions like this can be summarized in the previously mentioned quote *'Que Buenos Aires sea una ciudad para disfrutar'.* By who the city would be enjoyed exactly is not specified here. At least not by the government itself. For a lot of people, it is pretty clear what the contemporary government is trying to achieve; *"The Buenos Aires' government tries to transform all these areas into a large museum, a museum for tourists, white and rich people."[27]* This demonstrates that the perceptions about transformative improving interventions; also called 'gentrification' depend on the semantics of the process and therefore not naturally contain positive labels (Smith 2002). In order to regard gentrification's 'improving' aspect, the meanings that the local actors involved attach to the changes they find themselves in should be understood first.

So it could be said that the modern, white and rich centre is expanding and that the people who do not fit into those categories are affected by exclusion, invisibilization and displacement. This process has deep effects on these groups' identity and social

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[24] Participant observation, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[25] Gerardo, informal conversation, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[26] Gerardo, informal conversation, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[27] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

configuration.[28] Their membership in a community; being a citizen of Buenos Aires does not give them the notion of belonging here, because they feel excluded from the 'common culture' and do not have the ability, despite possessing the common rights of citizenship, to influence their destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions. At least not through the legitimate, democratic way. Public expression, and in this case (activist) mural art can be a very important way to influence their destiny, or at least occupy the public space and make their voices heard. The definition of Robert Asen (2004), that says that citizenship has not to be seen as the exclusive possession of citizens, that citizenship may not be granted, is very interesting when we look at the situation in Buenos Aires. In his opinion people enact citizenship through their own agency (Asen 2004, 204). The assumption that streets provide equal access and by that equal participation in public space to all citizens of Buenos Aires, is confronted with the aforementioned inequalities in agency between local actors. Considering agency as the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007), different ethnic positions in mural interventions show this ability, to be unequal among local actors.

4.3 What is 'the' Argentinean identity?

When walking down the streets, talking with locals and hanging around with my informants it seemed like people in Buenos Aires are quite confident about themselves. They loved to tell me about their lives and what they are good at.[29] Daniel told me, while having dinner in an authentic eatery in Coghlan, that when he was in Colombia to visit a friend, he became aware of how often people in Buenos Aires refer to themselves with the word *yo*, something that occurs less in Colombia or other Latin American countries. In his opinion, a lot of people in Buenos Aires love to talk about themselves, because they are insecure; insecure about who they are and where they come from.[30]

In fact this uncertainty is not entirely incomprehensible. Throughout Argentina's troubled history its people have found themselves subjected to traumatic cycles of democracy, military dictatorship and economic catastrophe. The country's short, but turbulent and painful history left many people seeing holes in what they were told by the government and in history books. Especially the cosmopolitan Buenos Aires is missing a connection with his roots; *"We are trapped in the city. There are hardly any books in which they tell our history, education is only centred around information from abroad, it is not talking about our own history, our*

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[28] Cucho, interview, 05-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[29] Daniel, informal conversation, 18-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[30] Daniel, informal conversation, 18-02-2017, Buenos Aires.

roots.[31] Despite of the fact that a large percentage of the citizens of Buenos Aires have European ancestors and are confronted with all kinds of European influences in their daily lives, they themselves are born and raised in Argentina, in Latin America. So, this is where the first conflict comes up; the eternal and inevitable confrontation with a European past while you were born in Argentina. And because it seemed like nobody really knew what 'being an Argentinean' means, it is more 'easy' to rely on your European roots.[32] On the other hand, there is also a growing number of people in Buenos Aires who, especially in the cultural field, are seeking to break with their European past and want to assume a new Latin American identity.[33]

Like Nagel (1994, 153) states ethnic boundaries determine who is a member and who is not and designate which ethnic categories are available for individual identification at a particular time and place. Buenos Aires has a remarkably large variety of ethnic categories and their boundaries are unclear or sometimes even invisible. In addition, the current economic, political and social situation of the city is also quite unstable. For these reasons, people living in Buenos Aires are having difficulties identifying themselves with a particular ethnic category.[34] According to Martín ethnic identities in Buenos Aires are constantly subject to change[35], which is in accordance with the definition of Nagel (1994, 153), who states that ethnic categories are continuously negotiated, revised, and revitalized, both by ethnic group members themselves as well as by outside observers. This makes identification with such an ethnic category (or more than one category) even more complicated for the people living in Buenos Aires.

According to Cristina, Argentineans must learn to be proud of what they have achieved, of what they are and what they have, and not always compare themselves with other countries; *"We have to accept that we are no longer 'the Paris of South America', but a Latin American country with an incredibly strong own culture that is far from being European."*[36] This nationalistic feeling, in which the sentiment of belonging to a nation is being expressed can be seen as a shared identity that would provide a source of national unity among its owners (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354). According to Young (1999, 237) this idea of belonging to 'your' nation and to which one not, creates a feeling of 'togetherness in difference'. In Buenos Aires, the home of so many different ethnic identities this idea of

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[31] Martín, informal conversation, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[32] Fernando, informal conversation, 08-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[33] Gerardo, interview, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[34] Fernando, interview, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[35] Martín Almaras, informal conversation, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[36] Cristina, interview, 16-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

togetherness in difference is an incredibly relevant and important concept; *"We share this city, together. Each very differently, with its own history, its own origins. But for all of us, Argentina is our country and Buenos Aires our city. In that we are all equal."*[37]

I became aware of this even more on 'The Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice', a day to commemorating the victims of the Dirty War. It visited this march together with Anna-Maria on the 24th of March, the anniversary of the coup d'état of 1976 that brought the National Reorganization Process to power.

Angelo, bearded and cheerful as always, passes his self-prepared mate and takes a suck of his joint. We are sitting on the ground in Avenida Roque Sáenz Peña, a side street of Plaza de Mayo. We are surrounded by thousands and thousands of people. All kinds, of all walks of life; young and old, white and dark, educated and uneducated, Argentinean or not, poor and rich. All so different, but today all so equal. The sun is shining high in the sky and illuminates Casa Rosada, the presidential residence, which now almost looks like a romantic decor from afar. Singing people, dancing people, demonstrating people, crying, laughing and silent people are passing by and following the giant grandmother, *abuela,* made of wood and paper-maché that is pulled through the crowd by a group of teenagers. Banners with texts such as; 'Nunca más', 'No olividar, siempre resistir', 'Memoria, Verdad y Justicia', swaying flags and the characteristic white headscarves, which symbolize the victims of disappearances during the Argentinean military regime, fill the never ending view. Blasts of energy, passion and emotion, mixed with strong barbeque scents and the sweat of human bodies touch my senses. Angelo closes his eyes for a moment and turns to me; *"This is who we are, Laure. We are all different, but we all breath the same air. Look, try to feel it, this is our identity."* [38]

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[37] Martín, interview, 30-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[38] Angelo, informal conversation, participant observation, 24-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

5. NEGOTIATING PUBLIC AGENCY IN BUENOS AIRES

(Anna-Maria)

During the three months of our fieldwork we happened to coincide with numerous political manifestations, many of them occupying *public space* on the streets of Buenos Aires. An urge to been seen and to be heard was observable in the city's 'open air', the latter resulting less clear and more heterogeneously interpreted than the equal accessibility the word 'openness' implies, when it comes to streets as collective spaces. The *'mismo aire'* Angelo referred to, symbolizes the streets that are lived by city citizens regardless the different meanings they attach to it. *''The city government, that has existed for many years, is 'beautifying' the city''[39],* Stella, a famous Argentinean urban lifestyle blogger told me, while we were having lunch at 'Le Ble', between Callao and Vincente López. Advertised by the government as *embellecimiento urbano,* this process of urban beautification was paralleled with strikes, protests and marches and political manifestations in citizens' daily lives. Many of them referred to the policies of the right-wing ruling government, headed by Mauricio Macri. In this chapter, insights are offered in gentrifying policies and activism in Buenos Aires regarding the (re)construction of political identities in the city's public space.

5.1 Activism in Buenos Aires

From outside you can hear people shouting. My heart starts beating harder as we get closer to the platform, the voices become louder and louder. Yesterday, in this same metro station, right under Palermo's train station, people were waiting to go to work, listening to music or talking on the phone. But today it's 'feriado', so everyone in Buenos Aires is free. Every four minutes a train passes by without stopping, each so overfilled with people that it seems about to explode any second. On the platform, people are holding banners calling 'Macri Gato', while they are simultaneously shouting quotes as '*Macri, basura, vos sos la dictadura*'. Anger, anxiety and an intense vibe of collective protest is overtaking the underground. People are looking around desperately. We have been waiting for about half an hour, if not longer, for a train in which we can at least somehow fit. We don't know where to get out, but apparently it is not necessary either, we'll just follow the crowd. '*Okay let's just do it*' I tell Laure and we push ourselves into the metro. The shouting goes on, everyone is constantly being pushed. All windows are open because of the lack of oxygen and everyone is sweating, yelling, sometimes even laughing while looking at each other. At the stop 'Scalabrini Ortiz',

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[39] Stella, interview, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

an old man pushes himself into the crowd, like an animal ready for attack. Even standing here, hurts. '*No se puede más*', the people closest to the entrance say, while a woman in the back screams '*Be careful, if we don't help each other, this makes no sense*!'

The start of an active, collective manifestation of political opposition in the metro from Palermo to the city centre, was only a 'sneak peek' of the massive concentration of protesters that we joined once we arrived at the historic *Congreso* (see photograph 1 on page 44). During the *Día Nacional de la Memoria por La Verdad y La Justicia*,, thousands of citizens overwhelmed Buenos Aires' political core, which is extended from Congreso to Plaza de Mayo. They represented themselves through act and image, being physically present on the streets, holding banners, painting on walls, dancing, holding speeches and yelling. Marshall states citizenship regards equal treatment of all members of society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354), but the one thing all protesters seemed to have in common, was their dissatisfaction with the way they were treated by the ruling government. The streets seemed collective nirvana's for a huge mass of people filling up every millimetre and countless group-arranged manifestations going on, while they also appeared as battlefields of feelings and meanings.

The 24th of March was not a simplistic reproduction of historic national memorial, on the contrary, at some moments I even forgot what the official meaning of the day was. The continuous reference to a modern dictatorship linked the past and the present in a multi-thematic expression of discontent among the protesters. Marcelo, a fifty year old local resident of San Telmo and as he many times stated 'fed up with Buenos Aires', was not enthusiastic about the march. [40]

> *''Almost all of them were Peronistas. In Buenos Aires, many people take advantage of the situation, they don't pay taxes and at the same time demand higher salaries, or many people choose to have many children to get money from the government. People were even paid to participate in the march''.*

Marcelo has a middle-low income and as he told me various times *''Para mejorar, hay que trabajar''*. The expression of discontent about current economic opportunities in Buenos Aires was a daily subject among local citizens. *''In Buenos Aires everything is political, from taking the bus, to the clothes you wear, everything'*[41], Lucía, a famous local artist very explicitly opposed to Macri's policies stated, while taking a sip of her self-prepared mate. In

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[40] Marcelo, interview, 25-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[41] Lucía, interview, 23-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

reference to the annual international anti-gender violence protests called *Ni Una Menos,* she continued. *''I think it's fantastic that people take to the streets, it shows awareness that women are being mistreated. Here they do not gather to complain, but to achieve things seriously''.*[42] Lucía clarified with this statement the gravity of gender violence in Argentina, representing activist protesters as agents for change and empowerment. The unifying effect of collective protest in public space, stimulated by dark feelings of anger, anxiety, aggressiveness and desperation, brought along bright feelings of strength, faith and hope. *''Juntas podemos!''*[43], a woman yelled in the loudspeaker, while she was holding a speech about the undervalued position of women in the labour market. *''Juntas podemos!''*, repeated the women that surrounded her. During my fieldwork I was daily warned about which street to take and which to avoid, for a very suspicious posture of porteños themselves toward the safety on 'their' streets, which they can, but certainly not always choose, to share. Standing in the middle of the Ni Una Menos protest, between thousands of women consciously sharing the same space in order to achieve the rights they felt to be deprived from, I as a woman, felt safer than ever before in Buenos Aires.

When we first met, Maria – a young organizer of graffiti events in the city - told me comparing local prices to those of European cities *''No se si te diste cuenta, pero Buenos Aires está carísimo''*[44]. The verb *'estar'* , which means a temporary state of being, indicated the instability Buenos Aires' citizens have been coping with since the economic crisis of 2001, which was the fruit of a deep transformation in labour and social relations (Dinerstein 2002) and which has made life in Argentina strongly vulnerable to the constant inflation turbulences. Local citizens are coping with a great disproportion between the prices with the local minimum salary. Raquel is currently living with her partner in a small apartment in La Boca, in the southern part of the city. She moved there for him, but she's unemployed, so she spends most of the time at home. "*The monthly costs rise from one day to another, but it's too much. It is not possible so fast, give us some time. I feel that I have things to offer, but I can't grow here. I want to work, but there is no work. It's very frustrating, I'm done with this country, I want to leave one day".*[45]

Raquel was one of the numerous city residents that blamed their current socio-economic desperation on 'the ones in power', referring to decades of governmental corruption. Sol, a 23-year old Art History student, firmly stated[7]: *"Argentina is a very rich*

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[42] Lucía, interview, 23-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[43] Participant observation, 08-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[44] María, interview, 10-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[45] Raquel, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

country, but we almost had corrupt politicians that did not allow for the country to grow". [46]

During our fieldwork I did not hear one single person being positive about the current government, worth taking into account that I mostly spent time with people from the middle- or lower economic classes. Given that Macri is a right-wing political leader, the ones profiting from his open-market economy policies and modernizing measures, are mostly people with a higher economic status. In a flyer I received from the CSC (*Coordinadora Sindical Clasista*) near the Buenos Aires' symbolic *Obelisco*, attention was called on working conditions of teachers in public education with the screaming title *'Que el paro sea Activo y Ahora, para llevar a la docencia a la Victoria'.* With this flyer, the citizens involved in this act intervened the public order, not only by stimulating protest in the city centre to demand change in public education, but also by openly warning about this upcoming event. The CSC continued:

> *''Our priority is to bring the teacher strike to victory, in its demand of 15 thousand basic pesos and 35 percent increase, so that the break of the parity limit of 18 percent opens a route to the entire labour movement and in the Defence of public education. With this approach we will go to the Federal teacher March on the 22th of March and we will go away repudiating the end point policy of the Macri government, independently of Milani's political partners on the historic day of March 24th''.*

The flyer was shared on the 8th of March, the international day of protest against gender violence, though it did not mention anything about gender violence. It was actively calling on 'defence' of public education in a march that would take place two weeks later. According to Nagengast, *"Consciousness of shared identity and common discourse centred upon that identity are not uncontested"* (2003, 61). With this call, citizens expressed their political identity through activist measures in public space on a casual day, before the official manifestation that was about to come.

The term *public* provoked questions about governmental responsibility for equally accessible educational institutions, run by the state and employed with local citizens. Sol, herself studying on a private university told me *''public education is much better in Argentina than private education, which ''is all about money and not about quality. The UBA (Universidad de Buenos Aires) has been elected as the best public university in whole Latin America, and it's free. Private universities are not that good, people just go there because*

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[46] Sol, participant observation, 22-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

they know that If they pay, they can finish in three years, instead of eight''.[47] This is an example of the complexity in defining 'the public' in Buenos Aires. Who does public education belong to and who should decide over it? Why do people take to the 'open streets' to protest about such a public matter? Eloy intervened his *public* Facebook *wall* with the following statement:

> *"Today I infinitely thank having gone to a public school from kindergarten to primary school, I infinitely thank having had classmates from all social strata, we were all the same. Without Public School I would not be what I am today. Do not forget that more than 20 years ago we had to see our teachers fasting for their salary to be increased. Let's read more books, and less the newspaper .. "* [48]

His conscious intervention in social media's public order, activist in its call for attention to a common social matter, was a political choice. Huddy defines political identity *as* ''The identification with a major political party or the adoption of an ideological moniker as a term of self-description'' (2001, 130-131). Within this approach on the construction of politics, higher institutions are presented as the defining ideological factors, though in the example mentioned here, bottom-up politics were constructed when individual political expression about a collective social issue was shared publicly and this way, made common. On social media, a friction between public and private occurs, for my informant's personal wall, but accessible to everyone, invited the public to react on his proper political thought. What should be noticed here, is that by means of social media, the urban shared space of Buenos Aires has been extended from physical communication, to a much broader dimension. As a result, semantic negotiations expressed on the streets of Buenos Aires can be also (dis)empowered by activist citizens that are not physically present during political manifestations, or can even occur independently, through a parallel public order provided by contemporary social media.

The defence of public education, whether on the street or the Internet, adopted a political character not only because of its public intervention, but also in its reference to equality. Stimulating equality directly implied a certain perception of reality in which equality is not taken for granted. The aim of protesting for better working conditions within public education thus goes much further than the employees' economic reward, namely a change in the current socio-economic inequality between the citizens of Buenos Aires, a political construct that has been naturalized (Dinerstein, 2002).

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[47] Sol, participant observation, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[48] Eloy, participant observation, 22-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

According to Eloy, *''The street is everything, it is a political space, it is shared, people interact in it. In Buenos Aires you see the Argentinean inconformity, people always blame others for everything, there is no self-criticism''.*[49]

Political dissatisfaction was always explained by a perceived instability and insecurity regarding the government in power and the economic situation in Buenos Aires. *'Here you never know what is going to happen the next day''*[50], Joaquin, the guardian of our building told me, slightly joking. *''And people are tired of this''*[51], he added. The unequal distribution of socio-economic opportunities provided by the government to the citizens rejects the notion of a universal citizenship. Public activism, specifically as political opposition on the streets, is a way of unity and thus political empowerment between heterogeneous unsatisfied agents. Under the assumption of the streets as an available space to all citizens of Buenos Aires, the idea of equal possibilities in that space, invites agents into public expressions as activism. Such interventions challenge the naturalized inequality that has divided Buenos Aires into so many different 'realities' and in by that, unites contested identities into a common urban space. The public 'renovating' interventions that present themselves throughout the city can therefore be seen to unify these different realities in an overall transformative process toward modernity. However, the varying local perception of these modernizing changes appear to provoke political differences among the citizens as a whole.

5.2 Gentrification in Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires, also known as *Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires*, is regulated by her own government and is therefore both dependent on national and regional politics. As I walked around *Avenida 9 de Julio*, the largest avenue in the world, I noticed countless advertisements, but also with posters referring to the city's '*espacio público*'. This term has been even incorporated in the designation of one of the government's departments, called *Ambiente y Espacio Público*. The secretariat of this department defends its function with the quote *''Que Buenos Aires sea una ciudad para disfrutar''*, from this angle pointing to a suggested urban improvement through changes in public space. During my stay in the city, political streets as public spaces 'under improvement', showed to provoke discussion among citizens, who attach meaning to their lived urban surrounding and thus also to the changes perceived in it. Ramona is a politically active porteña and although not born in La Boca, she identifies with the

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[49] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[50] Joaquín, informal conversation, 29-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[51] Joaquín, informal conversation, 29-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

neighbourhood as her *''place in the world''*[52]. As she prepared a mate, she commented that *''They call it revaluation of the neighbourhood, but the street lights in front of my house have not been fixed for a decade now''.* [53] Eloy referred to 'The Broken Windows Theory' in comparison with the current government's urban policies:

> *''It is the idea of fixing a neighbourhood's damaged surface in order to make it look better, which would reduce criminality and vandalism. So they are making it look prettier, so that structural problems will seem to disappear''.* [54]

According to Lucas, *"Muralism has turned a little 'dark' in that aspect, with this policies not real problems regarding infrastructure , education or health care in highly impoverished areas are not erased"*.[55] Following this approach on gentrification as a process imposed by the government, Ramona added , *"It's not about what they are doing, but why they doing it, which is much worse. These policies will displace many families to the villas''*.[56] Herzfeld explains gentrification as a dangerous process for the residents of the impoverished areas 'to be improved' (2010). Nevertheless, bottom-up rooted gentrification was also mentioned by my informants. As Marina, the guide of the graffiti tour we attended in the northern part of Buenos Aires, in Palermo gentrification was a process initiated by the locals themselves,

> *"When during the crisis, it became so cheap for north Americans to travel to Argentina, that local residents started converting their houses into restaurants in order to profit from the expanding tourism".* [57]

While by some, gentrification in Buenos Aires was evaluated in relation to economic profits, by others attention was paid to the 'proper' representation of a neighbourhood's identity within the process. This multi-interpretable transformative urban phenomenon can be viewed as a social structure in which the interaction of more and less powerful local agents and their relationship with the government is revealed, a construction of power that is challenged at the moment citizens are invited to behave a certain way toward their agency in the city's changing public space. Hence citizens' political identities are here called toward (dis)empowerment based on their agency within the gentrifying processes that surround them.

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[52] Ramona, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[53] Ramona, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[54] Eloy, informal conversation, 16-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[55] Lucas, informal conversation, 06-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[56] Ramona, interview, 03-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[57] Marina, participant observation, 12-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

Photograph 1: taken by Anna-Maria Patsouraki on 24-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

6. MURALS SHAPING POLITICS IN BUENOS AIRES

(Anna-Maria)

When focusing on muralism, urban streets represent a space in which citizens live through, thus murals intervene people's lives. Different agents are called to interpret these muralist acts and images as part of a city in which they construct their political identities and therefore give them a certain meaning. Murals of all sizes fill up almost every street in neighbourhoods as San Telmo, Villa Crespo, La Boca, Palermo, el microcentro, Villa Urquiza, Coghlan and Barracas, all with their own multiplicity of local identities within Buenos Aires' urban cultural universe. Eloy shared a statement on social media in which a local citizen rejected mural interventions regardless their aesthetics, for according to her, *''It's not fair to have something in front of you don't want''.* [58] This posture toward muralism revealed a lack of her decisive agency regarding murals intervening her daily life, while leading her to a digital form of 'public expression' on the matter she enacted her role as a citizen and thereby empowered her political identity. In this chapter, power relations between citizens' diverse agency in Buenos Aires' muralism are demonstrated, enriched with a specific focus on murals intervening La Boca's public space.

''*Public art is a space for discussion, it depends on the after, on the responses''* [59] Eloy stated while we were sitting in his studio in Villa Crespo. According to him, public art is important because of its direct arrival to the people. In order to cause reactions, one should paint within the given context. '*'In Argentina, the government is absent on many fields. Muralism offers an alternative sort of culture, which is accessible to everyone, not only the ones that can pay a museum entrance*''[60], he continued. From this approach, the equal accessibility to culture through muralism would be limited to citizens' interpretative agency, for apparently, freedom of decision upon mural interventions is diverse and limiting among different agents. Murals were constantly related to the streets they intervened, shared spaces collectively lived through and by that, collectively constructed. However, "*The ones to give the final permission for the creation of a mural, are the wall owners*"[61], Marina stated during the tour as she explained the process of permission giving before the actual creation of a mural in Buenos Aires.

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[58] Participant observation, 18-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[59] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017 , Buenos Aires.
[60] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[61] Marina, participant observation, 12-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

''But painting on walls, gives you power. You are imposing something on an   enormous wall which other people have to live with every day. Which is a   responsibility   as   well.   I think it is good to consider a neighbourhood's identity when painting a mural''[62] Lucía told me, while referring to the artist's representative power in muralism's act, she opened up an interesting debate about the neighbours' representative and decisive power in mural interventions.

''Murals belong to the people''[63], Facundo, a young successful local muralist said firmly, while he was painting a mural with an North American artist in Barracas. He was one of the many muralists defending that once a mural is finished, it does not belong to them anymore. *An incredible connection is generated with the neighbours, they offer you empanadas, mate, everything''*, he continued, while he stated to be painting in Barracas, for the people of Barracas. *''People from Palermo are not going to come here''*[64], he continued. When we were talking about politics in Buenos Aires, Santiago suggested that*'' Maybe it is because of this political situation, in which nothing is well controlled, that people are so much related to each other''*[65]. Citizenship is enacted here in the locals' ability to participate personally, whether in the simple act of literally 'feeding' and thereby supporting the artists in their collective act of urban transformation, without the involvement of the government. Their empowering posture toward the activist murals in process reveals their freedom to (re)construct their political identities in public, on an exclusively local level.

The guide of the first graffiti tour I attended just upon my arrival in Buenos Aires said that *''A mural is public when it belongs to the government. In this case, the government is the one to decide what is going to be painted. Artists sometimes add their own characteristics though, if they want''.*[66] Interestingly, the government was mentioned here as the defining actor in the muralist construction of public space as a top-down process. According to various artists, murals intervene the public and therefore belong to 'the people' once finished. In a small group of tourists we were taken to a three hour walk through Coghlan's and Villa Urquiza's painted walls. All the murals presented to us were made by famous artists, while the organization's intermediating role in the creation of some murals, by connecting muralists to wall owners, was mentioned several times. Coghlan, a neighbourhood in the far north-eastern part of the city, has become a tourist attraction for its famous murals, but as Stella said

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[62] Lucía, interview, 23-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[63] Facundo, participant observation, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[64] Facundo, participant observation, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[65] Santiago, participant observation, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[66] Participant observation, 09-02-2017, Buenos Aires.

"*It is quite hard for people from the centre to get there, so they never go. It's very local*".[67] It seemed that the famous murals in this area are less accessible than their public character may imply in the first place, since not all citizens have the ability to physically reach them. Here the long distances and naturalized inequality in Buenos Aires come into play again, as interpretative agency and thus a freedom of reaction on enormous governmental mural interventions that transform the city's image to the outside world, is exclusive to certain groups of local citizens. One should be living in the area, have access to transportation, or pay for a tour in order to get in contact with these internationally recognized murals. Apparently, muralism in Buenos Aires can also be a matter of socio-geographic distribution, or economic possibilities.

Palermo, one of the city's most modern areas, explodes by its huge quantity of colourful murals. *"Not everyone lets his house be painted though, there are many purely commercial walls, without deep social messages. Murals are attractive, that's why they are so important for brands. In Palermo there is a lot of 'movida', it's very transited"*[68]. Stella, who lives and works in the area, commented. When during an opening event in one of Palermo's galleries I met two famous local muralists, they both stated, "*We belong to the first generation of muralists in Buenos Aires, we started painting just for fun. Now that it seems to be a successful business, it has maybe become a little more competitive".*[69] In Stella's eyes, *"In the last couple of years, murals in Buenos Aires have been converted into beautiful pieces of art, so what makes muralism in the city fashionable now, is the aesthetic part".*[70]According to her, artists can make use of this aesthetic representative power in order to transmit strong social messages, taking one of the city's most famous muralists as an example. *"When you see his murals, you maybe don't notice it, but the stories behind them can be very thought through, very strong".*[71]The artist she named many times depicts police officers in fire, blindfolded and homeless people in his murals.

''I have been held so many times by police officers because they thought I was driving a stolen car''[72] a twenty-year old boy from La Boca told me as we were talking on the street about insecurity in the neighbourhood. "*Son una mierda"*[73] he added, *"They take advantage of*

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[67] Stella, interview, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[68] Stella, interview, 14-03-02017, Buenos Aires.
[69] Informal conversation, participant observation, 06-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[70] Stella, interview, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[71] Stella, interview, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[72] Informal conversation, 15-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[73] Informal conversation, 15-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

their power and treat you like crap".[74] During the memorial day I talked with a twenty-five year old girl that had joined a collective initiative to paint on walls and streets during the march, who said *''Once a police officer took a pistol out and said that my boyfriend and I had stolen the motorcycle we were riding. Instead of protected, I feel scared when I see them"*.[75] During our stay in San Telmo and Palermo we were warned almost every day to be careful and not walk alone late at night, especially for us being girls.

"Police has more important issues to resolve here than controlling people painting walls''[76], Eloy said[8]. However, he mentioned an incident of a Peruvian friend of his that was approached by the police painting a mural on a wall that is being painted for years and which Eloy himself is never restricted from painting. "*If you allow something, this should apply to everyone"*[77] he concluded. Interpersonal inequalities in muralists' intervening agency in Buenos Aires partly derive from the government's varying posture toward famous and not famous artists. According to Dante, a young local muralist from San Telmo, the government recognizes mural art in Buenos Aires selectively. "*It does not seem fair to me that a famous artist gets paid to paint a mural in the subway, while other artists are fined for painting just next to it, taxes which are then used by the government to pay the famous artist*"[78]. He would never work for the government, he said, but he does organize and participate in local muralist initiatives in the city.

When I was having breakfast in Recoleta with María, the 25-year old co-founder of a non-profit street art organization that is specified in colouring up the city's countless blinds, she told me that their main goal is to *"Help young local professional artists toward economic reward for their work, something they do not receive from the government. A couple of times per year, artists can apply by sending in some sketches and then go through a selective process".*[79] The sketches are based on each event's theme, which is decided by the founders. *''It has to be this way, since we have many applications and a limited amount of blinds to offer''*[80], María added. As a result, the founders are the main representative agents in this type of mural interventions, defining the subjects depicted and by that influencing the artists' representative agency. Considering that participation is unpaid but the events and artists are promoted a lot on social media, the artists' power of representation mostly regards a public

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[74] Informal conversation, 15-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[75] Informal conversation, participant observation, 24-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[76] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[77] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[78] Dante, interview, 11-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[79] María, interview, 10-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[80] María, interview, 10-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

recognition of them as professional artists, which occurs in a possibly 'safer' collective mural intervention, instead of independent acts. "*I just do it for fun, not like a job or anything*"[81], one of the girls participating in an event in Palermo told me. Knowing their position in the muralists' expanding community in Buenos Aires, those artists' representative agency is negotiated between their limited freedom of artistic expression and their public promotion as professional artists.

6.1 La Boca's challenge

"*Festivals are good, they give us work, but sometimes they seem a little invasive to me*"[82], Santiago, a famous local muralist said while we were watching Facundo paint a mural in Barracas. "*Hey dude, why are you working today, it's holiday!!!*"[83], a man in a car shouted at Facundo as he was driving by the mural in process. "*For fun!*"[84], Facundo answered laughing and he approached the car. Santiago participated in the first edition of a mural festival in La Boca a few months ago, of which the second edition was about to happen. "*They totally change a neighbourhood and when it's very traditional, like La Boca, it changes the neighbourhood's identity. It's like taking this whole street and paint it all. It changes*"[85], he continued.

As the official start date of the festival came closer, Eloy, who was invited to paint a mural there, decided to include the children of one of La Boca's thirty three shelters in his mural (see photograph 2 on page 53). During his several visits to the shelter, where he communicated and played with the children, the founder of the shelter informed him about the bureaucratic struggles they were going through, fighting for official recognition by the government. ''*It would be good to create a bridge between the shelter and the government this way*'' [86] he said while he was preparing his mural intervention for the festival in his studio. According to Lucía, ''*What should be painted, are things related to the context, not stereotypes*''.[87] Eloy told me that the children of the shelter, as many other locals, will have to leave the neighbourhood eventually, because of "*What is coming, which is dangerous*"[88]. The founder of the shelter mentioned that "*Macri wants for La Boca to become Puerto Madero*".

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[81] Informal conversation, participant observation, 18-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[82] Santiago, participant observation, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[83] Participant observation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[84] Facundo, participant observation, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[85] Santiago, participant observation, informal conversation, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[86] Eloy, participant observation, informal conversation, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[87] Lucía, interview, 23-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[88] Eloy, participant observation, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

[89] She was delighted to hear her granddaughter was going to be on two of the festival's murals, although in Ramona's eyes, painting the children was a kind initiative by the artist, but not the solution. *"No one knows which shelter it is, so even if people ask, the won't get an answer. And these people will have to leave their homes anyway"*.[90]

In one week, more than twenty murals would be painted in La Boca, on walls selected by a private organization hired by the city government. *"Only they can invest in muralism, the national government has no money for that. So they are using public space, while they should use culture"*[91], Lucía told me reflecting on her earlier participation in the festival. *"It's very invasive, people in the neighbourhood don't want it. Macri is gentrifying La Boca so that people from Palermo don't feel that they are in La Boca. I didn't feel comfortable when I participated last time, so at least I tried to paint something local, so as not to go straight to hell"*[92], she said mockingly. Eloy chose to use his social position as a famous hired artist to transmit a message from within the system.

> *"One has to make a living, so first work, then enjoy. I always paint what I want, but that does not mean I'm against the system. I try to find a point in the middle, because the system uses you as well. The best critics come from inside the system, so you can play with that, try things"*.[93]

Initially, the organization did not want the shelter's children to be painted, since this could evoke polemics. When the mural was finished, they photographed the child of the mural taking a picture of himself in front of it and then promoted it on social media. *"They are beautiful, La Boca needed colour, happiness, that was missing here before, it was completely abandoned"*[94], two elder men told me while they were playing cards in an old, traditional café. A 70-year old shoemaker, born and raised in La Boca, told me that *"This is no novelty, murals have always existed here"*[95], while Lorenzo, a fanatical collector of art pieces related to the neighbourhood, stated that *"La Boca has always been colourful, full of murals, they were just different, more traditional. The murals made at the festival are modern, because*

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[89] Informal conversation, 12-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[90] Ramona, interview, 03-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[91] Lucía, interview, 23-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[92] Lucía, interview, 23-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[93] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[94] Participant observation, informal conversation, 12-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[95] Participant observation, informal conversation, 18-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

they change with time, which is not a bad thing". [96] While we were watching the murals in process, Ramona continued:

> *"This has nothing to do with La Boca, they did not even consider local artists in the creation of the murals. What Quinquela Martín did was really local, because he lived here, he knew the people, he knew what they wanted to be painted on their walls, he was part of their lives. La Boca has a great history in muralism already, we have organized mural activities so many times ourselves, with no money, it's so easy. And still they preferred to pay a private company to arrange the whole thing".* [97]

According to the neighbours, no one had been informed in advance about the upcoming festival. On the fifth day, one of the country's biggest newspapers dedicated its front page on La Boca's new murals, with the quote *"With pieces of art chosen by neighbours, local and international artists put more colour in La Boca".* [98] A picture of one of the two murals that had incorporated the shelter's mothers and children was attached. The article mentioned Quinquela Martín's importance in the birth of muralism in the neighbourhood and linked this to the ongoing festival saying that more than a hundred years later, twenty artists 'took charge' and intervened La Boca's walls*,* 'relating with the neighbours, their culture, history and traditions'. As we were sitting in her living room, in her apartment just next that specific mural, Raquel said *"No one knew anything, until one day the artists showed up and started painting".* [99] According to Facundo, *'"The political part of muralism is not the image, but the act of it. It is a form of activism, you intervene public space with permission, nicely, in order to make a wall more beautiful".* [100]

La Boca's residents were never asked for permission, apart from the specific owners of the walls selected by the organization of the festival. In this case, the festival was not political in an intentionally activist way, but in its undeniable intervention in La Boca's public space. However, in some cases, neighbours became considered in the process during the making of some murals on an interpersonal local level. During the whole week, Raquel offered the foreign artists food and beverages and always received them in her house whenever they needed something. *"I felt sorry for them as I saw them up there for hours without eating,*

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[96] Lorenzo, interview, 13-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[97] Ramona, interview, 03-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[98] Newspaper *El Clarín*, ''Segunda edición del festival de arte urbano Color BA'', 17/03/2017.
[99] Raquel, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[100] Facundo, interview, 27-02-2017, Buenos Aires.

painting in the rain, I wanted to help them. They were so nice, I really miss them"[101], she said when the festival had finished. Out of her window, we could see the enormous baby painted on the wall. *"Now this mural will always remind me of them"*[102], she said nostalgically.

While on the third day of the festival I watched Gonzalo's mural in process, on the walls of a small house on the corner of a non-touristy street, an adolescent approached him and asked what the mural was supposed to mean. Gonzalo explained that it represented one of his childhood memories, when he went to a football match at *la cancha de Boca* (see photograph 3 on page 53). This mural would show a *previa* of such a match, 'typical of the neighbourhood'. *"Gonzalo es lo más argentino que hay, es muy del barrio"*[103], Stella, who had met him earlier, told me. A couple of weeks after the festival, I visited that house and talked with the owners about the mural painted on its front.

> *"It's his memories, not mine. I like it, but it is not something that personally represents me. When the girl of the organization came to ask for permission, she said that we would decide together about what was going to be painted, that I would be able to choose between three sketches. That's why I accepted. But she never came back and on Sunday morning, at eight o'clock, my husband realized they were already painting the house. At least it is well painted and is therefore going to be 'cared for', so I do not need to buy paint myself all the time to paint the house".*[104]

This wall owner's economic position was empowered by the mural intervention, although her representative agency was disempowered by the meaning of the image depicted on the front of her house.

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[101] Raquel, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[102] Raquel, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[103] Stella, interview, 14-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[104] Informal conversation, 06-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

Photograph 2:taken Anna-Maria Patsouraki on 08-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

Photograph 3: taken by Anna-Maria Patsouraki on 13-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

7. MURALS SHAPING ETHNICITIES IN BUENOS AIRES

(Laure)

Since the streets of Buenos Aires are supposed to be public and so many people feel ignored, excluded and disadvantaged, they feel the need and the responsibility to occupy this public space and express and manifest themselves in order to make their voices heard. Mural art appeared to be a very powerful instrument for the unseen and unheard, it can offer an alternative sort of culture. Fernando, a middle-aged man who started a Facebook page on which he posts pictures of murals in the city that draw his attention, once said; *"The murals in Buenos Aires give visibility to a very diverse cultural presence."*[105] This public representation of different cultures and ethnicities reveals a more complete image of the cultural diversity of Buenos Aires, while the popular media is representing a distorted and incomplete image of the city's cultural identity. In a city that silences so many people, public expression by means of art can be considered as something of great importance. As discussed before, many people in Buenos Aires have difficulty defining their ethnic identity, defining where they come from, where they belong to. This chapter will discuss the multifaceted power of muralism in the (re)construction and (dis)empowerment processes of various ethnic identities of local actors in Buenos Aires.

7.1 Making the invisble visble and the unspeakable speakable

Cristina and Ana-Laura are just talking about how to use the last spaces of the wall when it starts to rain gently. We quickly move the paint pots to the covered area of the building and take place under it ourselves as well. It is one of the many buildings on the grounds of the Ex ESMA. The Ex ESMA is a memorial and human rights centre, of which 'Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo', Grandmothers of the Plaza the Mayo, a human rights organization whose purpose is to find the babies who have disappeared during the Argentine Dirty War, is a member. Cristina and Ana-Laura started to paint a mural in the 'Casa por la identidad Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo' in 2014 and will continue it today. When I ask them why they did not finish the mural in 2014, just at once, Cristina answers; *"In fact, we do it on purpose, every year we paint a little. By continuing to paint on our history we keep it alive and are constantly confronted with reality."*[106] On the wall in front of us the portraits of hundreds of abuelas, strong looking, but obviously marked by the harshness of life, are staring at us.

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[105] Fernando, informal conversation, 05-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[106] Cristina, participant observation, informal conversation, 11-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

Cristina and Ana-Laura painted this mural to show their compassion and keep alive the history, which is symbolized in the hugs, *abrazos* that the women give each other and the number (121) of the returned children of the 'disappeared' during the Dirty War (see photograph 4 on page 61).[107] Daniel also works with the Ex ESMA and recently received an award for his work; 'Recovery of the Memory of Argentina', by means of art. While sitting on his balcony, we spoke about one of the murals he made in 2013. This mural, located next to the train station in Nuñez, a neighbourhood on the northern edge of the city, represents the disappeared victims of the dictatorship; 'the ones without an identity'. To symbolize this Daniel painted a family without faces (see photograph 5 on page 61).[108] *"It means a lot to me, this mural"*, said Daniel, who seemed a little moved; *"They taught us how to fight, in a democratic, peaceful way, they fought so long, and still fight to find their grandchildren, to make our society stronger. By making this mural I wanted to show my respect and thank them for everything they did."*[109] The last day of the creation process people from the human rights organisation and some grandmothers came by to see the mural. One of them spoke some beautiful, emotional words about her struggles and how thankful she is that young people like Daniel are with them and memorialize what happened in the past, but certainly is not forgotten.[110] This is a very strong example of how important murals can be for both the muralists and the persons they refer to, and the often very emotional reactions they trigger, which go far deeper than just the response to a beautiful work of art.

These mural interventions are also revealing different forms of agency, considering agency as the multi-facial enacting factor of citizenship. Would citizenship be a matter of ensuring that everyone is treated as a full and equal member of society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354), the agency enacting this equality should be homogenous, whether created from above, or bottom-up. Given that the permission of the Ex ESMA was necessary in giving the muralists the ability to act on behalf of their values (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, 19), agency shows to be heterogeneous within mural interventions. As regards the empowerment,

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[107] During the Dirty War (1976-1983), a right-wing military junta controlled the country, and many left leaning activists and opponents of the government were arrested, held and tortured in secret detention centres, and killed. These prisoners are referred to as "the disappeared". Many of these people were young adults and university students. After civilian rule was restored in Argentina, the families of "the disappeared" slowly realized that many of those arrested and detained were never going to return, but became aware that some women had given birth inside the detention centres and so there might be children in Argentina who were their biological grandchildren. Nowadays 121, of the estimated 500 children who were born in the military secret prisons, taken from their mothers and given to families loyal to the military government in order to be raised, are found (informal conversations: Daniel, Cristina, Angelo, Martín).

[108] Daniel, interview, 07-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

[109] Daniel, interview, 07-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

[110] Daniel, interview, 07-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

defined as an expansion of agency (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, 9), of different identities during the mural interventions, there can be made a distinction as well. These murals empower on 1) individual level, given the freedom of expression the muralists felt, on 2) community level, because the murals are 'speaking for' the abuelas, and also on 3) organizational level, since the Ex ESMA is an organisation that plays a role in the representation and expression of different cultural values of Argentina. The Ex ESMA has a very broad program of activities, of which one of them is the transmission of a cultural message by means of muralism, which in this case was completed by Daniel, Cristina and Ana-Laura. These layers of empowerment, distinguished by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) are mutually connected and dependent on each other.

Murals that visibly express cultural and ethnic issues seem to keep alive or maintain the cultural identity, the roots of the people who live in Buenos Aires. Leandro, who mostly paints for this reason, believes that murals are a way to give voice to those who most desperately need to be heard and function as a tool to voice justice and other ideas that are not really voiced in the popular media and culture.[111] Also Cucho, a muralist who originally comes from Colombia, uses the streets to *"visibilizar a los invisibles"*[112] in order to strengthen their identities but also make people in the city aware of their roots, their culture.[113]

Both Leandro and Cucho paint on themes that are related to *el indigenismo* and the Latin American identity, with the main intention of representing the indigenous culture in public space. *"This one for example, with paintings like this I try to save and complete this lost Latin American identity, since most of our population has roots and is descended from indigenous peoples"*[114], said Leandro while he shows me a sketch from his facebook page (see photograph 6 on page 62). The sketch which is also realized in a mural, shows an activist indigenous event and the text, also activist in nature, refers to Argentina's systematic attempt to eliminate, silence, or forcefully assimilate its indigenous people, among which the Mapuche people (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, 4). *"The flag represents the indigenous people of the Andes..."*[115], Leandro continued. In addition to the Inca sun, to be found in all Leandro's murals, the Wiphala flag at the top of the sketch is an important symbol for Latin American indigenous people. In many places the Wiphala symbol is used as a symbol of resistance and

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[111] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[112] Cucho, interview, 05-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[113] Cucho, interview, 05-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[114] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[115] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

claim in the struggle for the rights of Native American peoples[116], but oddly enough in Buenos Aires you have to search very hard to find one. The first time I saw one was when Gerardo and I visited the local market in the neighbourhood Mataderos, a two-hour journey from the city centre; "*Haha, no, you can hardly find them in the centre, and I think that speaks for itself.*"[117]

Like the illustrations above, there are many other murals who represent the Argentinean culture and discuss its ethnic issues. These mural interventions generate *espacios* to discuss, argue, protest, or praise.[118] The (re)construction and empowerment of a certain ethnic identity through this kind of mural art can be realized in its direct image, in the implicit and explicit meanings attached, and personal identification with a certain mural.

The next paragraph will show that the 'act' of muralism; the actual creation and the associated process, instead of only the ethnic image itself plays a significant role in the ethnic identity (re)construction of local actors in Buenos Aires. Something remarkable here is that the ´act´ of a mural intervention is something typical *Latino*.[119] Many of our informants travel a lot to make murals in other parts of the world and often realize that what happens in Latin America is culturally something very strong; "*What happens here when I am painting, I have never seen in, for example, Europe or the United States. People here stop by to talk and drink mate with me, they offer their help, bring me food and invite me to their homes. They are sincerely interested in what I do.*"[120]

From this point of view murals in Buenos Aires, regardless of what they represent, can be seen as a cultural expression and therefore play a supporting role in the identity (re)construction of people who doubt their cultural identity.

7.2 Community-based muralism

We are on our way to Quilmes, a city in the south-eastern part of the province of Buenos Aires, by car a ride of approximately one hour. The broad avenues that carried us through the modern center, gradually change into narrow, badly maintained roads as we leave the city behind. And it is not only the roads that change. The images that flash before our eyes silence

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[116] Gerardo, informal conversation, 26-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[117] Gerardo, informal conversation, 26-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[118] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
   Daniel, interview, 07-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
   Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
   Angelo, interview, 15-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
   Santino, interview, 26-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[119] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires + participant observation
[120] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

us. *"It is another world. So close, but so excluded."*[121] Well, Eliana was right: since my arrival in Buenos Aires I had not seen such hardship and poverty. When we enter the dusty grounds, they are already waiting for us at the entrance. Melina, the head of the *comedor*, a centre that provides meals for poor children, and Lily, one of the volunteers. There are no children today, as there are no meals prepared on Saturdays, due to a lack of funds. Angelo unloads his painting materials from the back of his truck, looks from a distance at the walls of the comedor, and lights a cigarette. A couple of months ago, he and his art-group have started a project to paint a mural on the walls of the comedor, together with all volunteers and interested people of the neighbourhood. I am here today to interview Eliana and Lily, two incredibly sweet and strong women who are very eager to tell their story. When I ask them, to get right to the point, what the mural means to them, Eliana answers the following; *"Life is difficult here. The mural gives colour and positivity to a place with a lot of pain."*[122] Yes, and not only that, it will also be a reminder that there are people out there that care about them.

While most muralists I met also have the intention to create beautiful works and attach value to the aesthetic aspect or their work, their deeper values lie in the conversations that can be created, the connections that can be build, and the legacy of relationships that can be fostered along the way, often with transformative results, at different levels. Santino, a big name in the mural community, believes that these processes of creating ethnic murals, if they are to be meaningful and to survive, must include community participation; *"A mural should have a connection with its context and its people, it must include their needs, their voices."*[123] Many informants share this statement. In order to accomplish this actual connection between a mural and its context there has to be a connection between the artist and the neighbourhood, the people involved. Ana-Laure, one of the few female muralists I have met, told me that this requires research;

> *"After choosing a wall, the process actually starts. I talk to the people in the neighbourhood, listen to their stories and try to figure out what their needs are, where they are struggling with or where they are proud of. I try to find the themes that are meaningful to the neighbourhood and the people living there. The walls are the voice of the people, so I try to make my murals speak for them."*[124]

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[121] Eliana, informal conversation, 08-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[122] Melina, interview, 08-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[123] Santino, interview, 26-02-2017, Buenos Aires.
[124] Ana-Laura, interview, 27-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

In this case a mural can be seen as a socially constructed object and an immediate representation of a neighbourhood's identity, whether in his image explicit represented or not. As Mya Dosh (2007, 17) discusses, muralism can be seen as collective type of art, as a tool for representation made possible by a team's cooperation, something that happened at the comedor in Quilmes. Lily, one of the volunteers of the comedor told me that the commitment of all people who participated in the mural project was stronger than she had ever thought before;

"An impressive number of people showed up. People who know the neighbourhood, the comedor, its history and its pain. The parents whose children we provide food, because they themselves are too poor to do so, now finally could do something in return. It clearly gave them a feeling of togetherness, satisfaction and freedom. And the only thing that they had to do to achieve this was to pick up a brush."[125]

What is of profound importance is that these type of mural interventions give people the opportunity to represent their cultural existence as they know it, and if they decide so, are free to change. The mural art project in Quilmes, turned neighbours into creative agents in a transformative process, considering that everyone was free to participate. Initiators of such projects are agents in giving other people the freedom to take control of their own perceptions, which is necessary to take charge of their own identity and own lives.[126] This ability to act on behalf of what people value and have reason to value (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007) can lead to the empowerment and a (re)construction of agents' citizenship and ethnic identities.

7.3 Looking beyond ethnic boundaries; murals as art by and for everyone?

"Murals belong to the people, so when it comes to observing, interpretating and discussing, every person is equal." [127] What Nehuen means by this is that muralism introduces a fundamental change in the relation of culture to 'ordinary' people. The idea of 'bringing culture to the people' instead of 'bringing people to the culture', referring to museums or galleries can eliminate and expand social, political, economic and ethnic categories. Instead of the 'fine art', embraced by a cultivated elite and only accessible by paying for a ticket, murals are for anyone.[128] According to Jennifer, who worked seven years for a leading street art

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[125] Lily, informal conversation, 08-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[126] Adrian, interview, 06-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[127] Nehuen, interview, 01-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[128] Eloy, interview, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.

organisation in Buenos Aires, the idea that art is for anyone, is what makes muralism so powerful.[129] *"But making a mural is not possible for everyone, the paint is quite expensive so not everyone can afford it"*[130], Jennifer completed. So in practice not all citizens in Buenos Aires are equal agents in the decision making, participation, creation and interpretation of a mural, because of differences in possibilities, skills, desires, thoughts and attitudes, whether created from above, or bottom-up. Murals can become common ground for people who might not ordinarily interact. This aspect of communication and interaction with the outside world, with the 'other', makes muralism a highly social type of art. Almost all artists I met chose to paint on the streets because of this reason; *"Because it is an excuse to start a conversation, a dialogue with 'the other'."*[131] The public spectacle of its creation and presence afterwards often brings people on the street together to start talking. People who otherwise might not have a starting point for conversation, because they are from different social classes or ethnic groups; *"Muralism can be seen as a fight against stereotypes, not only by what is painted, but by what happens around."*[132] This is something that can function as a form of education. Especially in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires that seems to be missing a connection with his roots, mural art can provide accessible knowledge to everyone, by Dosh described as 'a painted book' (2007, 24)[133] In Angelo's opinion this brings people of so many different 'worlds' together, sometimes even without knowing it; *"People forget to think in categories and differences for a moment. The only thing they do is make a human connection."*[134]

So muralism, activist in its act of intervening in 'shared space' can create unity, unity in diversity, considering the great social, political, ethnic and economic variety of Buenos Aires. This sense of togetherness, in a city that is rife with social divisions (Young 1999), pointing at the right be different, claims that social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to construct inequality among people (Rosaldo 1994, 402). However, citizens' ability to act on behalf of their values showed to be heterogeneous in Buenos Aires, because of the great variety of ethnic identities attached to different forms of agencies within mural interventions.

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[129] Jennifer, informal conversation, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[130] Jennifer, informal conversation, 03-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[131] Leandro, interview, 01-03-2017, Buenos Aires.
[132] Cucho, interview, 05-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
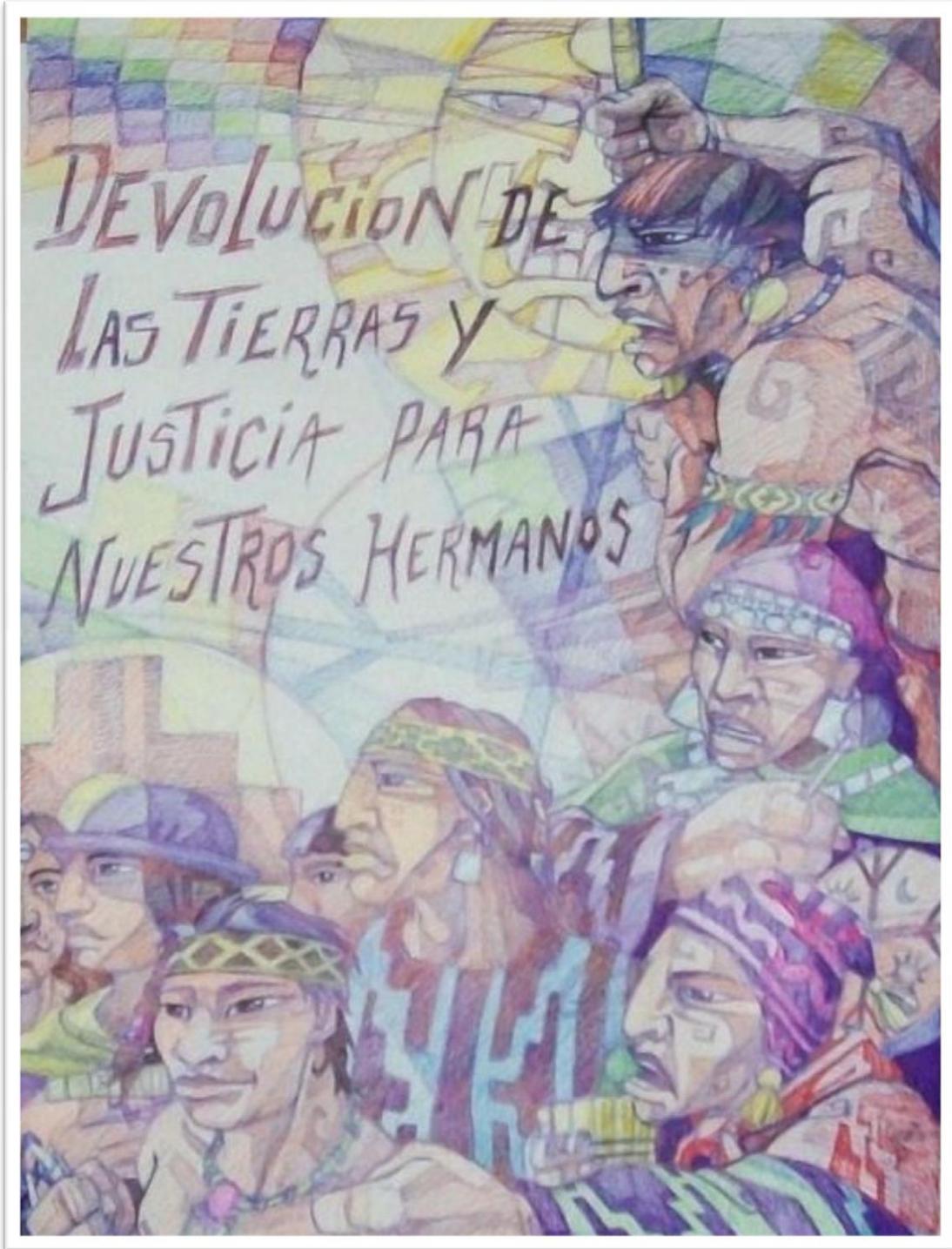[133] Gerardo, interview, 02-04-2017, Buenos Aires.
[134] Angelo, informal conversation, formal interview with focus group, 08-04-2017, Buenos Aires.

Photograph 4: taken by Laure Andriesse at the Ex ESMA, Nuñez, Buenos Aires, 11-03-2017

Photograph 5: taken by a friend of Daniel in Nuñez, Buenos Aires, 30-09-2013

Photograph 6: posted by Leandro, obtained via his facebook page on 06-05-2017

8. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

(Anna-Maria & Laure)

In our concluding remarks we will integrate our research findings and discuss the ambiguous character of muralism as part of public space in relation to power divisions among citizens with different political and ethnic identities in Buenos Aires, in order to answer our main question, namely: "*What is the role of muralism in the construction of political and ethnic identity of local actors in Buenos Aires, Argentina?"*

With a thriving population of almost 13 million people, and a history of massive immigration, it is not surprising that Buenos Aires is also called 'a mix of people'. Buenos Aires is understood as a city of European immigrants and their descendants, historic influences that are still present in urban life. An idealistic perception of the European image, that is visible in almost every aspect of contemporary Buenos Aires, has become part of the identity crisis of many city citizens; born Latinos, but wanting to be Europeans. This has resulted in many people being, or at least feeling excluded from society. As Guano stated in his article, Buenos Aires became a place that has been constructed to exclude individuals who do not fit into the categories of modern, European, or North American (2003, 148). The notion of Argentine modernity is tainted by connotations of race and class and therefore is part of contemporary racial discrimination in Buenos Aires. This racial discrimination expresses itself towards indigenous people, who suffered and still suffer from the governmental systematic attempt to eliminate, silence, or assimilate them. In this sense, it is quite ironic that cultures with a strong identity, like that of most indigenous groups, are being threatened by a culture which is not even clear about its own identity. Indigenous struggles for recognition and justice are expressed by various ways of ethnic activism, among which muralism. Cultural public expression is something essential for people who are affected by cultural invisibilization, feel ignored, or doubt their identity. This social exclusion forms part of a social structure that is constructed by the government and among citizens themselves.

Buenos Aires provides a living environment to millions of inhabitants, which are ruled by a national government and their own particular *'Gobierno de la Ciudad'*. This double political leadership makes living in the city dependent on the citizens' position within a society which is regulated by multiple political institutions, all partly influencing the meaning attached to the socio-political construct of 'citizenship'. Considering agency, defined by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) as the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value, as the multi-facial enacting factor of citizenship, citizens are agents with different

opportunities for free action in Buenos Aires, while their power position in the city's social structure depends on their proper interpretation of agency, the importance they attach to it and their posture toward it. Would citizenship be a matter of ensuring that everyone is treated as a full and equal member of society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354), the agency enacting this equality should be homogenous, whether created from above, or bottom-up. However, in Buenos Aires the notion of citizenship seemed to be challenged by the interrelation of different forms of agency in a politically turbulent time, in which several massive manifestations showed a certain inconformity with the ruling government. Power relations were constructed among agents themselves, by and with the government, as to ethnic and political issues giving meaning to the notion of citizenship. As a result, ethnic and political identities in Buenos Aires are contested.

Studying these varying expressions of agency specifically within Buenos Aires' mural art scene, offered many insights in the construction of politics and ethnicity. Muralism is an important popular form of public artistic expression further challenging the already present (re)construction of political and ethnic identities among city citizens. Through its act and image, muralism presented itself as a reference point available to all citizens, but in which not all identities had the agency to (re)construct themselves on. Local actors found themselves 'sharing' murals, because of the assumption of them being public, but the ambiguous character of muralism in its presence on private and at the same time public walls, is problematic concerning the uniform ability for the (re)construction of political and ethnic citizenship.

The government of Buenos Aires is promoting policies of a so-called *embellecimiento urbano*, in which beautification of the city would be part of an urban planning that would lead to urban improvement. Muralism intervening the ambiguous public walls, has been integrated in this beautification plan, since it seemed to be useful for marketing. The input of aesthetics, makes murals 'attractive' and thus popular in contemporary Buenos Aires. As Palermo was initially gentrified due to local initiatives for 'local upgrading' through muralism to attract tourism, the neighbourhood is currently marked with an overwhelming presence of murals on private properties. The ones to decide about the content of the murals here, are particular wall owners in co-operation with the artists. Local participation during the creative process is reflected in neighbours' support and verbal interaction with the artists. While muralists started painting on Palermo's walls 'for fun', mural activity has now turned into a professional, commercial deal, making the wall owners and the artists powerful representative agents in the process and the neighbours, agents of interpretation and social intervention in the process. In

Barracas on the other hand, muralism as a tool for urban beautification has showed the local perception of local upgrading to be a clearly collective matter with the artistic purpose of making the neighbourhood prettier for the neighbours and not for tourists. However, these 'local gifts', have attracted tourism as well, for different graffiti tours are organized in this area of the city, making the initially non-commercial murals, commercial. Interaction with the neighbours, *el vínculo*, is crucial here in the activist creation of these murals. The political act and thus statement in these mural interventions makes the neighbours more powerful intervening agents in Barracas than in Palermo, since they are involved in the process on purpose. In this sense, local citizenship is enacted by the artists in their activist choice to empower the neighbours' interpretative agency to an intended social incorporation in the work.

Most muralists we met intended to create 'beautiful' works and thus attached an aesthetic value to muralism. While in some cases causing conversation or provoking contact were considered as the principle motives for a wall to be painted, in other cases aesthetics were seen as sufficient in legitimizing the mural intervention. The idea of communication and connection with the outside world is a predominant motive for many of our informants to paint in public space. Involving the local community in the process of creating a mural can cause, in addition to the various forms of agency and empowerment; defined as an expansion of agency (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007, 25), community building, since the participation of the local community connects the mural to its context and its people. The mural art project at the shelter in Quilmes, organized and guided by a muralist, gave neighbours the opportunity to be a creative agent in a transformative process, considering that everyone was free to participate. In this case, a mural can be seen as a socially constructed object and an immediate representation of a neighbourhood's identity, whether explicitly included in its image or not. The mural made on the walls of the shelter is as a tool for representation made possible by a team's cooperation, and thus can be considered as a collective type of art (Mya Dosh 2007, 19). What is of profound importance in this type of murals is that they give people the ability to represent their cultural existence as they know it and are thus, if they decide so, free to change it. This type of agency influences the social power structure in which these disadvantaged neighbours are positioned in Buenos Aires. The initiators of such projects are agents in giving other people the freedom to take control of their own perceptions, which is necessary to take charge of their own identity and own lives. This empowering gesture can lead to a (re)construction of agents' citizenship and by this, their political and ethnic identities.

So when murals are made in a participatory way, they very much strengthen the involvement of the persons concerned and thus contribute to community strengthening. However, murals do not always permit local participation and are therefore not always empowering.

La Boca's festival visibilized power relations between the different agents that were present before, during and after the making of the murals. In a lack of uniformity about the neighbourhood's identity, negotiation between 'traditional' and 'modern' muralism was confronted with governmental exclusive policies intervening 'public' space in order to change the neighbourhood. These urban interventions, whether perceived as gentrification or urban improvement, were realized from above, without consulting local residents. Meanings of citizenship were revealed once different agents expressed their thoughts about their role in the muralist process. Statements about 'invasive gentrification and displacement' were contested with positive reactions about 'beautiful local upgrading', while local activism was in some cases put in for a negotiation of slightly interpretative agency toward decision making about the murals as an act and image. The artists were the most powerful agents in the whole process, possessing the most opportunities for free action in the making of a mural. Being the physical 'realizers of change' in La Boca, they were challenged to take a position in the semantic negotiation of La Boca's identity and use their representative power likewise.

When connecting muralism to the (re)construction and (dis)empowerment of ethnic identities a distinction can be made in the visible image and deeper underlying meanings. Murals that explicitly tell a story about ethnic issues, can have a 'visibilizing' function. Keeping a cultural identity and history alive and create awareness, can contribute to any form of (dis)empowerment for people who identify themselves with a certain mural, especially when it comes to community based muralism. Processes around and during the creation, 'the act' of a mural have the power to connect people who might not ordinarily interact, build a sense of community and as a result a sense of togetherness. As the activist manifestations we visited seemed to create unity, unity in diversity, considering the great social, political, ethnic and economic variety of the city, muralism also can create a sense of togetherness. Especially mural art that is activist in nature can contribute to uniting people. Not necessarily because all people start to see things in the same way, but because they realize that most people who use the streets to express themselves feel ignored and excluded, or stand up for the people who are ignored and excluded. They realize that they are together in their difference, their anger, frustration, in their powerlessness. This sense of togetherness (Young 1999, 237), in a city that is rife with racial, social and ethnic divisions, is of great importance when it comes to identity (re)construction and challenges the idea of universal citizenship, pointing at the right

to be different.

Mural art can be a very powerful instrument of expression for groups that feel not being taken into consideration. According to the term public, murals would be open, easily accessible for and belonging to everyone, but this has shown to provoke questions about the various forms of agency in the creation of a mural. Mural art indeed introduces a fundamental change in the relation of culture to 'ordinary' people. But the idea that 'bringing the culture to the people' instead of 'bringing people to the culture', referring to museums or galleries, would eliminate and expand social, political, economic and ethnic categories, is a controversial matter.

The inextricable interrelation between ethnicity and politics in Buenos Aires, appeared to be crucial in the study of identity construction through muralism. The socio-demographic construction of the city presents strong cultural and economic differences among the citizens, power relations that are constructed between groups with different origins and ethnic identifications. As all local actors have a proper ethnic identity, whether this concerns personal identification or an ascribed identity, the act and image of muralism directly concerns those ethnic identities. The different forms of agency that are expressed through muralism and the power divisions they represent can also be related to ethnic issues. The representation of a cultural or ethnic message in a muralist act or image, is a political statement in itself, even if politics are not consciously included in the mural intervention. Murals that explicitly call for attention to ethnic and political issues often express strong opinions and social perceptions, whether referring to governmental policies or local interpersonal power relations that create social inequalities.

Local actors can use murals as an activist medium to challenge injustice, socio-economic disadvantage- and marginalization, gender issues, but also community building, a sense of belonging, social recognition and historic and cultural maintenance. Mural art has a representative power that confronts local actors in their daily lives and invites them to think about them, because of their invasive presence on Buenos Aires' streets. Nevertheless, this power of representation is not available to all local actors in its totality, since agency in muralism has various aspects which are interpreted locally and eventually (re)constructed according to agents' posture toward their position in the social structure they find themselves in. This can be activist in demanding a wider form of agency, or more passive, in accepting one's constructed social position.

Citizens' ability to act on behalf of their values is heterogeneous in Buenos Aires, because of the great variety of political and ethnic identities attached to their different agencies within mural interventions. Whether consciously activist or not, murals have the

power of representation, since they always entail an interpretable image and act. This 'homogenizing' aspect of muralism over politically and ethnically diverse agents, makes power relations related in the freedom of representation visible. Identities are (re)constructed once difference forms of 'free muralist action' are negotiated between the local actors, allowing (dis)empowerment of politics and ethnicity in Buenos Aires. As a result, muralism reveals the distribution of freedoms and thereby power, among city citizens with different political and ethnic identities, because it provides the 'illusion' of homogenous potential in intervening a supposedly equally available public order. Since not all citizens in Buenos Aires are equal agents in the decision making, participation, creation and interpretation of a mural, differences in possibilities, skills, desires, thoughts and attitudes between the agents become exposed. By providing politically and ethnically heterogeneous people with the overall authority to claim public space under the name of citizenship, mantled power relations between them become transparent again, when in practice this freedom seems to be limiting.

Muralism thus contributes to the (re)construction of different agents' political and ethnic identities, by challenging them to express themselves equally in public space and then in practice, categorizing them again into more and less powerful agents, according to these identities. Under the generalizing assumption of universal citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 354), all different agents are then called to take a certain posture toward this invitation into public space, resulting in passive, but also activist reactions, all giving new meanings to political and ethnic identities in Buenos Aires.

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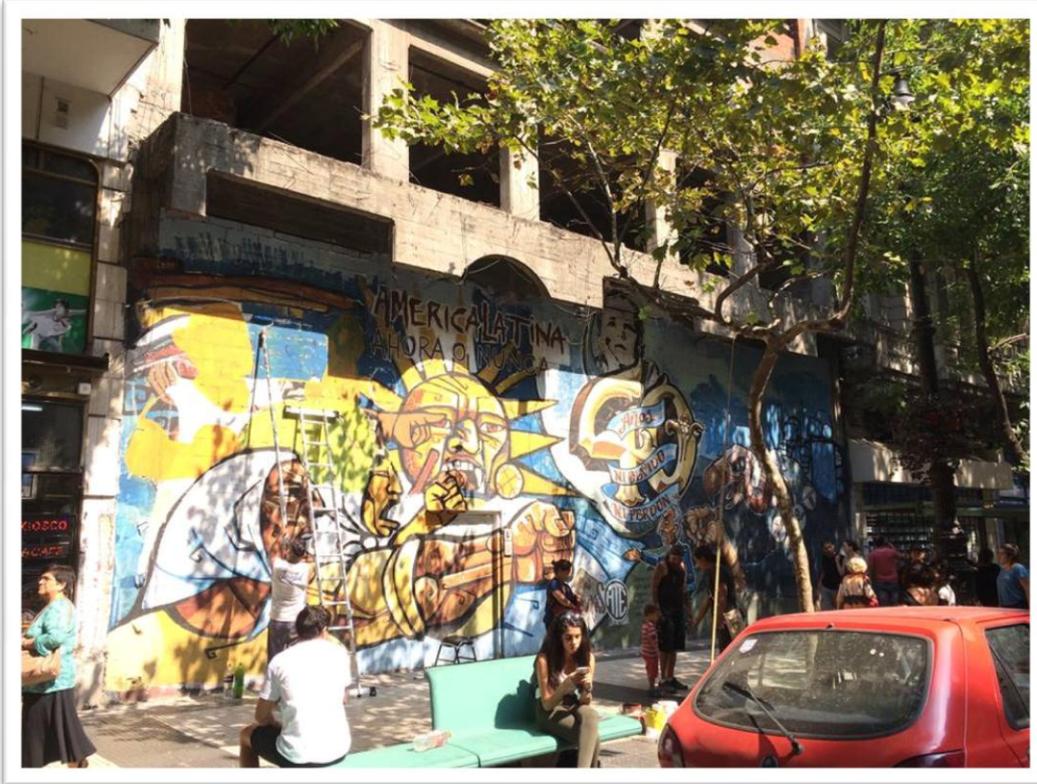Smith, N. 2002. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City.* London: Routledge.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Photo Gallery

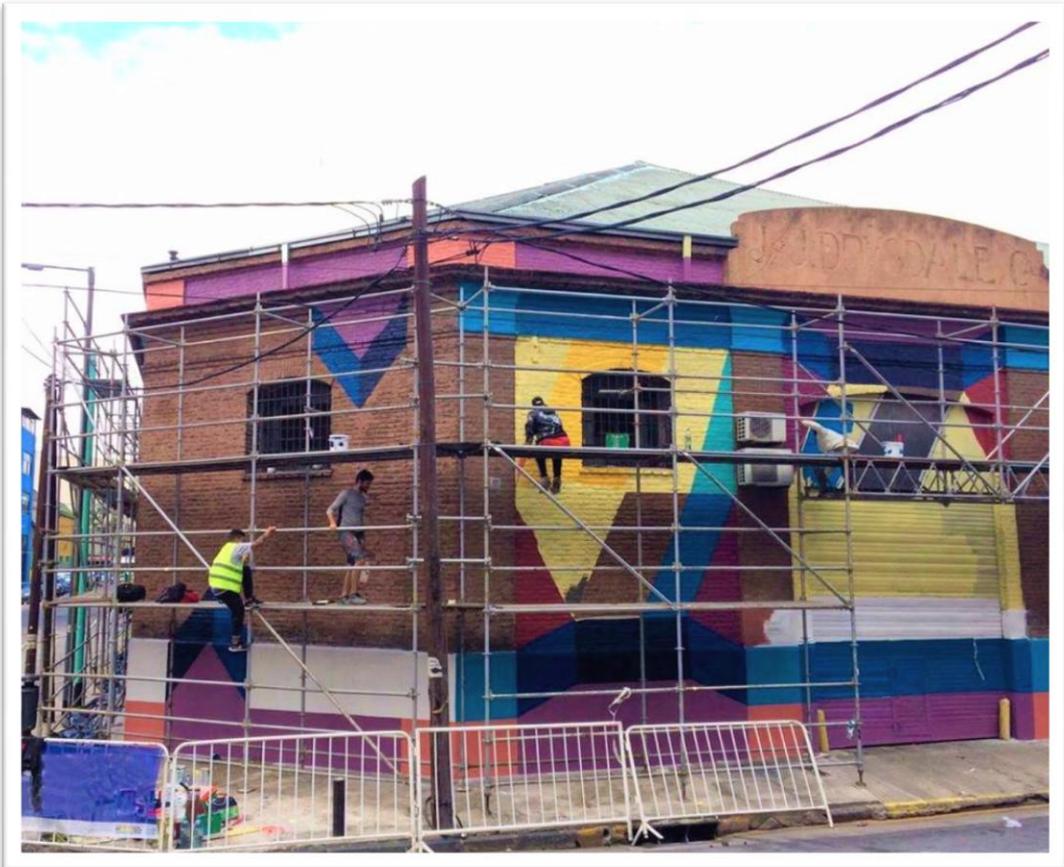| During El Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia, Avenida de Mayo |

| La Boca |

| Plaza de Mayo, in front of La Casa Rosada |

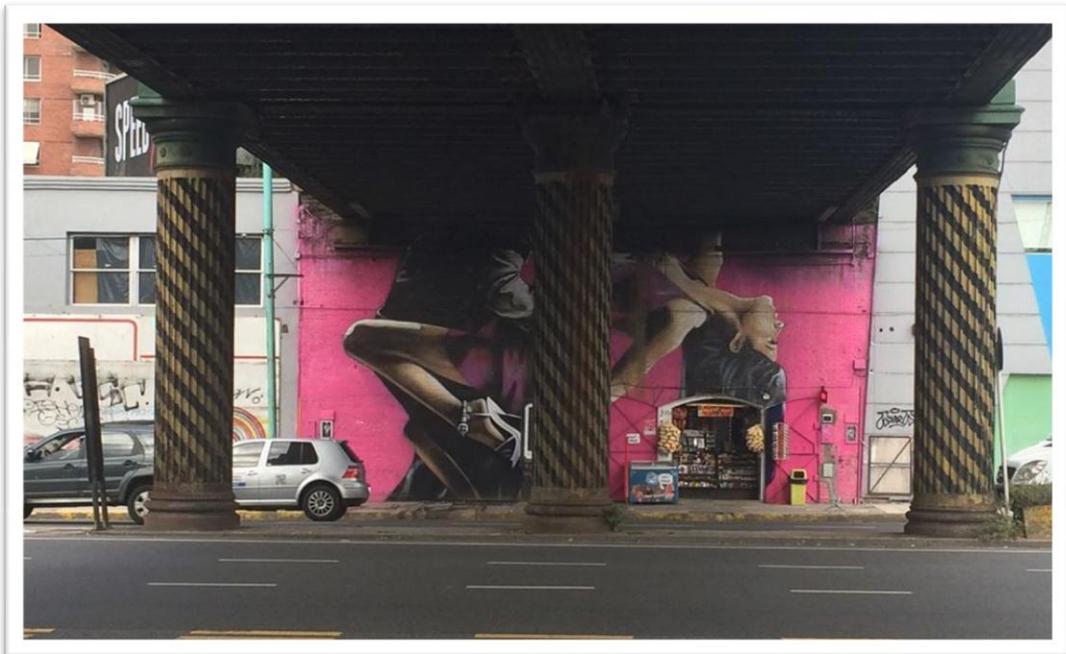| El Día Internacional Contra la Violencia de Género, Congreso |

| Barracas |

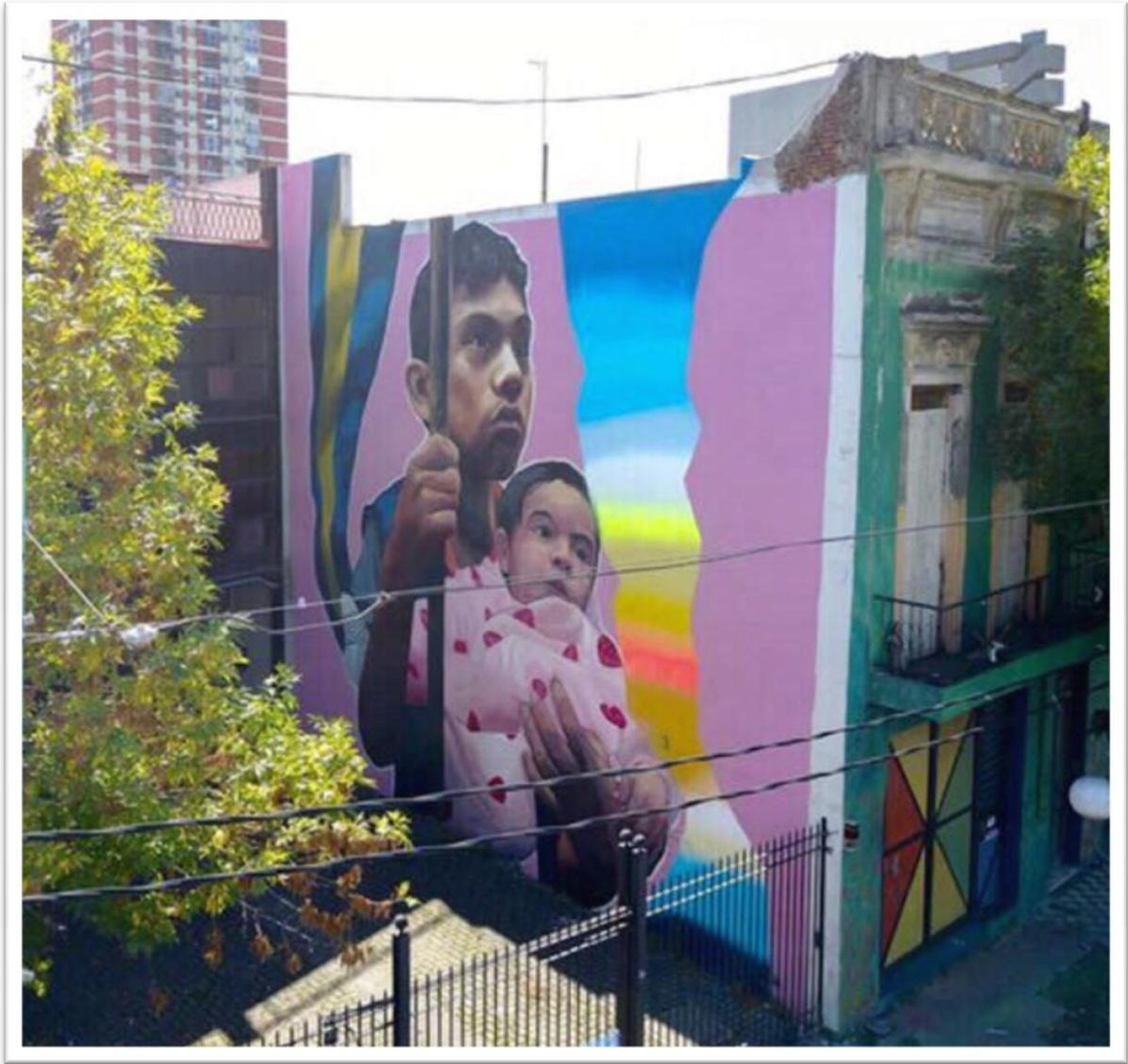| Street art festival La Boca |

| San Telmo |

| Street art festival La Boca |

| La Boca |

| Palermo |

| Street art festival La Boca |

Appendix B: Reflections

B.1 Anna-Maria Patsouraki

Now I truly understand and feel the importance of *being there* when it comes to anthropological research. Not only led this fieldwork to a great theoretical enrichment of my previous basic knowledge on muralism and politics in Buenos Aires, but it was also one of the biggest challenges I have ever been confronted with. In a relatively short time, I learned as much about others, as about myself as a person and as a researcher.

First of all, my already existent personal engagement with Argentina and Buenos Aires in particular, showed to be as much of an advantage as an obstacle for my participation in the field. My physical appearance and the appreciation of my local accent gave me the false impression that I was 'one of the guys', that I could melt in with my research population almost effortless. '*Pero sos como Argentina!*'' was constantly repeated to me and although it gave me a certain satisfaction and idea of social acceptance, it also reminded me of the fact that I was *not* local. So what was I then? All the time I was called to reflect on myself as a foreign resident of the city, my own cultural background(s) and the reason of my stay in Buenos Aires. Legitimizing my Argentinean attitude to others made me conscious of my proper cultural being, while explaining my research could be confronting, as I was not always sure of what I was doing there. As the time passed by, I noticed more confidence and clarity in my answers to others regarding my research.

Something I feel incredibly grateful for is the way I was received by Argentineans during those three months, whether research related on in my daily life. Locals' spontaneous and open attitude toward me as a 'newcomer' not only made me feel comfortable but also helped me through my research through a constant 'snowball effect''. Even though in the first weeks I found myself struggling with the fieldwork's uncertainty and the overload of research material, I learned to 'go with the flow' and count on my informants´ spontaneous and inviting character. Mentally, I was sometimes overwhelmed, for the constant filtering during the (in)formal conversations meant that I could never be there without being a researcher at all and that in the end, everything would always concern 'others'. As the weeks passed by, I learned how to create a balance in which I would take my personal time to disconnect from the research as much as the context would permit this, in order to be extra filled with energy afterwards.

Regarding my research topic, I was 'lucky' to be present in Buenos Aires during a

very politically intense period, thus being able to participate in several happenings and talk to people about ongoing matters, which helped me empathize with my informants. From a lost beginner searching for answers within the city's sea of seemingly relevant murals, I learned how to open up to all stories and then filter my data until I started seeing parallels, differences and interesting explanations regarding my research questions. This triggered me to continue with the research on a subject which I interestingly enough already knew much more about than I had ever expected. However, three months of fieldwork felt way too short for me doing this research, as the more I learned about it, the longer I felt I needed to expand and deepen my research.

As to my co-operation with Laure, I am only grateful to have had the chance to share this new and challenging experience with her. Since we did our research separately, I felt the freedom to focus on my own topic and thus do my research independently, while we were also able to talk about certain struggles and situations during the research with each other, which gave me a very safe feeling. Besides, we had a lot of fun together!

B.2 Laure Andriesse

As the ever-critical and doubtful Liberal Arts and Sciences student I always wondered about the scientific value of anthropological fieldwork. Of course, the numerous ethnographies I have read and the lectures of recent years taught me about the importance and usefulness of ´immersing in a culture´ in order to understand it. Nevertheless, the anthropological fieldwork always remained something quite abstract for me. This fieldwork experience, my first, made me realize how valuable, and not un-important, how difficult this type of research is. It has not only changed my image of anthropology as a discipline but also me, as a person. It made me eager and curious for more.

The first thing I would like to emphasize is the length of the fieldwork. In my opinion, three months is way too short, especially for a completely inexperienced anthropologist who is not yet familiar with his research location. Fortunately we were able to enter our research field; the 'mural world', relatively quick and easy. Something of which we ourselves are very much aware. The open character, the willingness and the enthusiasm of most of our informants to assist us in our research, gave us the opportunity to learn so much, in a relatively short period of time, about a world we did not know in advance.

Also, I am very pleased with our deliberate choice to undertake most of our research activities individually and not share all of our informants. This has ensured that our research is based on a large amount of stories, which, I believe, increases the validity and reliability of our research. In addition, I think it has made us both better anthropologists and researchers. Anthropologists who can move independently within the field, but at the same time can work together effectively when needed. For me, this has been very important in discovering my identity as an anthropologist in the field. However, the idea that Anna-Maria was always there to help out and saw my personal proceedings from another perspective, has been of great value to me. Since me being the research instrument, there was not always space for objective thinking. Having someone close that coped with similar situations but saw and did things differently, has been very important.

Finding my role in the field, moving far beyond my comfort zone, has been quite a challenge, given that I did not really blend in the Buenos Aires´ society. Because of my appearance and lacking Spanish I often felt like I had to prove myself to be taken seriously, and because I really did not want this to affect our research, I chose to take a clear position during my fieldwork activities; the position of a well-prepared, confident, easy going but serious researcher, while I actually felt insecure and inexperienced most of the time. I believe

this attitude has made people feel that 'I knew what I was doing', and also contributed to my own confidence of what I was doing. So, an appearance that started as 'an act' actually became reality along the way.

  Looking back at my experiences in Buenos Aires as an anthropologist, my development as a researcher, and the research results presented in this thesis, I can only be satisfied and proud. Still, it doesn't feel like this 'story' is done with writhing down my last words in this thesis. There are so many more stories to be heard, so much more to discover in this fascinating 'world', and regarding my skills as anthropologist, there is still a lot to be learnt. This is just the beginning, just the tip of the iceberg.

Appendix C: Resumen (Summary in Spanish)

Este estudio se ha basado en un trabajo de campo de diez semanas en Buenos Aires, Argentina, entre el 6º de Febrero y el 14º de Abril 2017.

La cultura moderna que caracteríza Buenos Aires, por gran parte orientada a Europa en relación con la historia de inmigración Europea, se enfrenta con una crisis de identidad entre los ciudadanos: nacidos Latinos, pero imaginandose como Europeos. Esta comparación étnica ha resultado en muchas personas que no entran en categorías de 'moderno' o 'Europeo', siendo, o por lo menos sintiéndose, excluídas de la sociedad porteña. Esta noción de la modernidad Argentina está contaminada por connotaciones de racismo y de clase y forma por lo tanto parte de una expresión de discriminación racial contemporánea en Buenos Aires.

Dentro de una fragmentación socio-económica y una desigualdad naturalizada predominante, los ciudadanos se encuentran en una estructura social de poder que se ha construido por parte del gobierno, pero también entre los distintos agentes locales. Durante un período muy políticamente intenso en la ciudad, muchos ciudadanos compartieron la necesidad de salir a las calles para expresar sus pensamientos y sentimientos relacionados con asuntos económicos, políticos y sociales, como la problemática actual de una violencia de género creciente tanto en el país, como en la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Varias protestas masivas, marchas, paros y quejas diarias sobre la vida cara e insegura en la ciudad, mostraron una incorformidad abrumadora en cuanto a la existencia de una libertad de acción en acuerdo con los valores de los ciudadanos como agentes. El espácio público se manifestó como un punto de encuentro donde las identidades de los agentes se pueden negociar bajo de una idea de propiedad pública común y en consecuencia, igualdad de derechos de expresión pública. En las intervenciones en las calles de Buenos Aires se revelaron relaciones de poder entre los agentes, asociadas con cuestiones políticas y étnicas.

El muralismo resultó ser un instrumento muy poderoso en la (re)construcción de identidades étnicas, ya que muestra la diversidad cultural que predomina en Buenos Aires, una imágen más completa que la identidad distorsionada representada por parte de los medios de comunicación comerciales. Personas afectadas por una cierta invisibilización cultural, o ciudadanos que se sienten ignorados o que dudan de su identidad, tienen la oportunidad de expresarse e identificarse públicamente mediante el muralismo. Manteniendo una identidad cultural o un patrimonio histórico o creando conciencia y por lo tanto un espacio de discusión e interacción, el muralismo porteño contribuye en la formación de identidad de personas que

se relacionan con los murales que les rodean.

El 'acto' del muralismo, siendo los procesos alrededor y durante la creación de un mural, tiene el poder de conectar a personas y crear un sentido de comunidad y de unidad, lo cual invita a la gente a seguir (re)construyendo su identidad. De esta manera el muralismo ofrece un punto de referencia donde identidades políticas y étnicas se pueden llegar a (des)empoderecer, dependiendo de las distintas libertades de los ciudadanos como agentes.

Los murales en Buenos Aires desafían a las ya existentes relaciones de poder entre los ciudadanos, dado que su presencia o intervención en las paredes como parte del ambiguo espacio público invita a la toma de una cierta postura hacia ese tipo de transformación urbana. Teniendo en cuenta que el espacio público es 'de la gente', al mismo tiempo está regulado por el gobierno autónomo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, en su intento promocionado de 'mejorar la ciudad'. Los festivales de muralismo organizados por el estado para 'colorear la ciudad', son parte de un proceso que por algunos se considera como gentrificación (invasiva) y por otros como un desarollo urbano positivo. Ya que en el acto y la imágen del muralismo aparecen diferentes tipos de agencia entre los ciudadanos, se crea un espacio de discusión entre los distintos agentes sobre cuestiones de poder y de libertad en la calle, pero también sobre asuntos estéticos o simbólicos. De este carácter dialéctico del muralismo porteño se genera la posibilidad de (re)construcción ideológica sobre cuestiones políticas y étnicas y por lo tanto una (re)construcción de las identidades relacionadas a estas temáticas en Buenos Aires.