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Between a guest and an okupa: Migration and the making of insurgent citizenship in Buenos Aires' informal settlements

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Tanja Bastia
University of Manchester, UK

Jerónimo Montero Bressán
Ministerio de Trabajo, Argentina; Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales (Universidad Nacional de San Martín) y CONICET

Abstract

In this paper, we explore initiatives for the construction of substantive citizenship by transnational migrants in Buenos Aires. In looking at migrants' political participation across the city, we found that the spatiality of citizenship practices is important. At the city level, there are migrant organisations representing specific nationalities. However, in informal settlements, where many migrants reside, we found that migrants engage in political practices across nationality and ethnic lines by coming together with their neighbours in grassroots organisations. These different forms of organising embody critically different views of migrants in their relationship with rights. While the former promote practices linked to ethnic belonging and see migrants as 'guests' in a foreign country, unable to make claims to the local or national governments, the latter see them as rights-bearing individuals with power to claim their right to the city. We argue that activism at the scale of the neighbourhood proves to hold more potential for the building of substantive citizenship than actions by organisations active at the city level. This is because migrant organisations active at the city level organise on the basis of nationality, while those at the neighbourhood level bring migrants and non-migrants together on the basis of their class-based interests.

Keywords

Citizenship, migration, informal settlements, Buenos Aires, right to the city

Corresponding author:
Tanja Bastia, Global Development Institute, University of Manchester, 1.064 Arthur Lewis Building, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK.
Email: Tanja.Bastia@Manchester.ac.uk

Introduction

Despite attempts since the 19th-century to move citizenship to the national level, cities today remain critical spaces for the construction of citizenship. This continued importance of the city has led Holston and Appadurai (1999) to coin the term 'urban citizenship', which is particularly useful for understanding the construction of what they call 'substantive citizenship' as opposed to 'formal citizenship' (Lazar and Nuijten, 2013). In other words, they understand that the city is the scale where "the (processes) and practices that make someone into a full member of a given political community" (Lazar and Nuijten, 2013: 3) take place. The city, from this perspective, provides greater opportunities compared to rural areas for the building of alliances across different groups and stronger social movements (Lefebvre, 1996). Since Holston and Appadurai's seminal piece many have contributed to the development of our understanding of urban citizenship (Baubock, 2003; Bauder, 2016; Painter, 2005; Smith and McQuarrie, 2012; Varsanyi, 2006).

Cities are, however, highly heterogeneous places and this has implications for how claims for urban citizenship are made. While in the literature on cities and citizenship there was initially a tendency to look at the city as a whole more recent work, particularly that which emerged from research in the Global South, has highlighted the importance of peripheries for the construction of urban citizenship (Bayat, 2000; Holston, 2008, 2009; Kanai, 2011; Lazar, 2008; Lederman, 2013). This literature has shown that different spaces within the city give rise to different forms and practices of citizenship.

A further level of differentiation is provided by the fact that many of today's peripheries are also home to an increasing number of migrants, particularly in countries that have become regional poles of attraction for migrants, such as Argentina, South Africa and Malaysia. Since transnational migrants often lack formal citizenship status and those on low income often end up living in informal settlements, they constitute a group of citizens with common difficulties of access to substantive citizenship (CEPAL, 2006; Cerrutti, 2009, 2012; Landau and Freemantle, 2010). While there is a vast literature on migrants and cities (Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2011; Sassen, 2002, 2005; Wills, 2009), there is still a need to improve our understanding of how lack of formal citizenship status has a bearing on migrants' claims to urban citizenship and the right to the city.

In this paper, we therefore explore how migrants organise and to what extent these different forms of organising and their different claims relate to urban citizenship. Our approach contributes to filling two main gaps in the urban citizenship literature. Although migrants play a significant role in the making of cities in Latin America (Gilbert, 1998; Perlman, 1976; Seekings, 2012), there tends to be a fragmented approach in the ways in which migration is studied. There is a vast literature on internal migration and how this has contributed to the making of cities, particularly in Latin America (Lazar, 2008; Paerregaard, 1997; Roberts, 1978) but less attention has been paid to transnational migrants and cities (Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2011). Transnational migrants are often seen as divisive and portrayed as a 'transient' population (Kanai, 2011). They are usually addressed in research on migration flows, human trafficking and migrant workers' organising in which their migration status is not taken into account (for example, because they are seen as workers) or their national identities dominate the discussion, because of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). Some exceptions do exist, particularly in more recent studies of cities in South Africa (Landau, 2014a, 2014b; Winkler, 2013, 2014) but there is still a need to better understand how different scales of action and participation have a bearing on the different types of claims that migrants make for their right to the city. Moreover, in providing empirical evidence from a city in the Global South, we address

the need to extend urban theories to reflect the experiences of cities outside of North America and Europe, a gap recognised by a number of scholars (Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2006).

By analysing migrants' political participation in Buenos Aires, we find that migrants participate in two main types of organisations: class-based grassroots organisations prevalent in informal settlements in which migrants organise as 'neighbours' around issues of housing and work; and organisations that are explicitly migrant-focused and based on the migrants' country of origin. These organisations have radically different views of migrants in terms of their relationship with rights. Grassroots organisations see migrants as rights-bearing individuals who can make claims on the state despite their lack of formal citizenship. By contrast, migrant organisations view migrants as 'guests', unable to make claims to substantive citizenship (see also Simbiosis Cultural, 2011). As we shall illustrate, these two points of view entail different scales of action as well as different forms of understanding citizenship. We argue that grassroots-organising by migrants with their neighbours in informal settlements provides greater potential for the creation of more just cities than organising on the basis of specific nationalities and ethnicities.

Urban citizenship, migration and informality

Through our fieldwork we found that the migrants we interviewed in Buenos Aires are active political agents, especially in informal settlements, where they participate in collective problem-solving initiatives and raise claims to the local government for access to services and better health and education provision. In trying to understand these practices we have followed Lazar and Nuijten (2013: 3), who argue that "citizenship (is) a very helpful way of framing anthropological enquiry into politics." Given the prevalence of methodological nationalism it is, however, unsurprising that citizenship and migration have been explored for a long time almost exclusively from the point of view of the nation-state, with a specific preference for European countries and the US (for early examples, see the work of Brubaker, 1989; Soysal, 1994). Nevertheless, debates around urban citizenship have started to challenge the focus on the nation-state (Bauder, 2014, 2016; Painter, 2005), including in cities in the Global South. However, there has been relatively little exploration of the significance of lack of formal citizenship for making claims to the right to the city. That is, while the literature on urban citizenship has acknowledged noncitizens (Holston, 2009), it has not, as yet, analysed how lack of formal citizenship status influences migrants' claims to urban citizenship (see, for example, Chatterjee, 2004; Holston, 2009; Zhang, 2001). We are not disputing the fact that cities "remain the strategic arena for the development of citizenship" (Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 2). Rather, we ask whether different spaces within the city hold different potential for achieving urban citizenship and the 'good city' (Amin, 2006) for migrants in particular.

The mainstream understanding of citizenship is Western-based and relies on the history of European cities. 'Citizenship' is here understood as dating back to the Greek and Roman cities, where the status of 'citizen' was granted to those who lived in Rome and Athens. The term itself rested on the notion of the city including a clear demarcation between fellow citizen and foreigner (Balibar, 1999). However, such demarcations were never so clear-cut and in Athens itself they also had an intermediary category between citizen and non-citizen, 'metoikoi', which was used to identify a permanent foreign resident (Balibar, 1999; Garnett, 2013). Balibar (1999) argues that the term itself is a contradiction, since a person who is a permanent resident in a city would or at least should cease to be a foreigner. This point was also made by some of our interviewees in relation to a newcomer becoming increasingly

familiar with the city. However, for Balibar (1999), this also refers to the normative position that all long-term residents should have equal status and equal rights, which echoes Bauder's concept of 'domicile citizenship' (2014).

With the development of the nation-state, the national level became the most significant arena for both defining and granting legal citizenship status. As argued by Isin and Turner (2002: 3), "modern citizenship itself was born of the nation-state in which certain rights and obligations were allocated to individuals under its authority". The modern conception of citizenship as developed by Marshall (1950) was based on the nation, understood as "a community of shared purposes and commensurable citizens" (cited in Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 6) where the national community works for the common good. It relies on citizens understanding themselves as "sufficiently similar to form common purpose" (Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 6), which is sustained in time through the "performance of citizenship" (Marshall, 1950/2009). However, the rise of globalisation has contested the ability of the nation-state as being the guarantor of citizenship (Fraser, 2005) and has given rise to different forms of understanding citizenship. For many, including Isin and Turner, "the sovereign state is no longer the only locus of citizenship" (2003: 5).

Other ways of conceptualising citizenship have emerged since the 1990s. For instance, Ong (1999) refers to the community of citizens who can claim 'flexible citizenship', the highly valued workers, either national or local citizens, who migrated to a given city. Holston (2008) argues for an 'insurgent citizenship' in identifying those who claim citizenship and highlights the importance of peripheries as sites where citizenship claims are constructed. Also of importance here is Centner's (2012) reference to those claiming microcitizenship, as all residents who struggle for belonging to specific urban spaces. While some of these different framings of citizens do potentially include non-citizens, i.e. those who do not hold formal (national) citizenship, these authors have not explicitly taken lack of formal citizenship into account, nor have they discussed the processes or the consequences of non-citizens claiming substantive citizenship. The literature on migration has covered the consequences of undocumentedness for migrants' claims to citizenship (De Genova, 2005; Hagan, 2008). However, in the Global South undocumentedness is often not such a critical issue, because states have less capacity to enforce their migration regimes, borders are more porous or, as in the Argentinian case, migration legislations are more progressive.

In fact, in our research context, South American transnational migrants often have access to legal residency and permission to work, especially if they are nationals from a country that belongs to the MERCOSUR. However, the living and working conditions are such that they lack substantive citizenship, a condition they often share with Argentinian nationals, but they are additionally disenfranchised on the basis of being foreigners. The racialization and the informalisation of the migrant population, in both work and housing, limits their access to substantive citizenship (Bastia 2007, 2015; Montero Bressàn, 2011, 2017; Grimson, 1999, 2006; Margulis, 1998, 1974). This is evidenced, for instance, in the discourse of the leaders of the City's ruling party PRO (Propuesta Republicana) against migrants from neighbouring countries, who are blamed for the expansion of informal settlements and associated with crime, evasion of the law, drug abuse and violence (Gutman, 2010; Perasso, 2009). This is why migrants' ability to participate in grassroots politics and make political claims becomes critical and provides the basis from which to resist such negative stereotyping.

Cities are not just important for citizenship in and of themselves. In addition to the argument of the different scale at which citizenship is defined, as discussed in the introduction (Holston, 2008; Holston and Appadurai, 1999; Lederman, 2013; Smith and McQuarrie, 2012), other authors have also suggested that citizenship is no longer a given but is something that needs to be struggled for. Painter (2005), for example, has argued

that "there are good reasons to reconnect citizenship with cities, especially if we focus on 'bottom-up' citizenship and on citizenship as practice and participation" (: 7). Similarly, Balibar (1999) argues that the concept of citizen needs to be based on a conception of commune and not on the basis of formal belonging to the state, given that citizenship is based on a collective political capacity to constitute the state and public space. Indeed, some of our interviewees lacked formal status altogether yet made claims to being Argentinian on the basis of their belonging to the political community. In the words of Isin and Turner (2003: 4):

> Rather than merely focusing on citizenship as legal rights, there is now agreement that citizenship must also be defined as a social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights. Being politically engaged means practicing substantive citizenship, which in turn implies that members of a polity always struggle to shape its fate. Such developments have led to a sociologically informed definition of citizenship in which the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings, and identities.

Participation and being part of the political community, the polis, is therefore critical for making claims to citizenship, not just formal citizenship but 'substantive citizenship'. This concept has been developed in recent decades and is underpinned by the argument that "the process and practices that make someone into a full member of a given political community are at least as important as the end result itself (status)" (Lazar and Nuijten, 2013: 3). For us, citizenship is constructed through the process of claiming one's place in the city. Of particular interest here is Chatterjee's (2004) distinction between 'formal' and 'real' citizenship to highlight citizenship rights granted to merely participate in the realm of governance, as opposed to real citizenship which is built in the making of democracy. In fact, migrant's access to formal citizenship in Argentina is relatively easy, but they still face constraints typical of irregular migrants in other countries.

Many authors who work on social movements agree that the local territory is the most significant scale for bringing people together and as the arena where substantive citizenship is constructed (Bebbington et al. 2008; Santos et al., 1994; Zibechi, 2012). However, cities are highly heterogeneous territories, and this has key implications for the discussion presented here. For example, Holston (2008), based on his research in Brazilian cities, has shown how 'insurgent citizenship' emerges especially in the peripheries, despite the fact that it may use central civic spaces to perform acts of claims to citizenship. He makes the case that claims to urban citizenship are shaped in the "realm of everyday and domestic life" (Holston, 2009: 246). Following his argument, we take the discussion on the diverse forms of citizenship practice further by showing that, despite the high levels of social and economic exclusion experienced in informal settlements (Auyero and Berti, 2015; Auyero and Swistun, 2009; Koonings and Kruijt, 2006; McFarlane, 2011; Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2013; Perlman, 2010), activism in informal settlements is particularly relevant for the construction of citizenship, not just for all informal settlement dwellers but also for transnational migrants in particular.

Once they decided to stay for some time in these new places, those migrants we interviewed began to engage in activities that actively promote the construction of their substantive and potentially also their legal citizenship. In so doing they engaged in a number of practices that rendered the informal settlement into one of the places with most potential for the construction of citizenship. Our evidence suggests that similar to the examples described by Chatterjee (2004), the exclusion from citizenship leads the urban poor to engage through political society, through the 'politics of the governed'.

Like in Calcutta's Gobindapur Rail Colony Gate Number 1, in Buenos Aires the informal settlement dwellers active in grassroots organisations we interviewed are bound by a history of eviction and are territorially defined on the basis of the informality of their lack of land tenure. However, unlike Calcutta, claims are not made to extended kinship (Chatterjee, 2004), but instead are built around their shared experience of living in an informal settlement, that is, their shared class interests.

On the basis of these findings, we argue that there exist competing understandings of citizenship between migrants active at the neighbourhood level and migrants' organisations that work at the city level. While the former develop a number of practices of citizenship on a daily basis, the latter, who claim to represent people from specific nationalities, reject the practices of those active in the neighbourhoods and highlight their character of foreigners. We argue that so-called 'migrant organisations' rely on a modern and statist vision of citizenship that precludes migrants from making claims to substantive citizenship and rather, places them in a subservient position as 'guests' in a 'host' country. Migrant and grassroots organisations also have a different relationship to politics: while migrant organisations tend to give preference to formal politics, grassroots organisations gear their actions towards 'the political' (Swyngedouw, 2009), that is, the expansion of democratic possibilities that are available to everyone. Grassroots organisations in fact rejected sectarian politics linked to formal political parties.

Methodological notes

To better understand the practices of substantive citizenship by cross-border migrants in Buenos Aires, we carried out 18 semi-structured interviews between April and June 2013 with representatives from a range of grassroots and migrant organisations, as well as city authorities who work on informal settlements and housing issues. Although we focus on organisations in which migrants are actively involved, the paper is not aimed at reflecting a 'migrant point of view', because we wanted to have a broader understanding of the organisations in which migrants participate. In total, half of our interviewees were Argentines and the other half were born in Bolivia, Paraguay, or Peru, which represent the main current migrant nationalities in Argentina (see Annex for a list of interviewees). Given the qualitative approach and the limited number of interviews we are not making the case for representativeness. Instead, we present these findings as a way of generating discussion on the potential of different kinds of activism and their spatialities for the building of substantive urban citizenship.

We focused on three of the four main *villas,* or informal settlement, in the City of Buenos Aires and interviewed migrants and non-migrants in trying to understand migrants' involvement in activism. We soon realised that grassroots organisations active in *villas* were not identifying themselves as migrant organisations, despite the fact that a large proportion of those participating in them are migrants. Migrant organisations identified as such were active at the city level and showed to have only a limited understanding of the daily reality of migrants' lives in *villas*. We interviewed four leaders of such migrant organisations. Although there are many migrant organisations, most are short-lived. We chose to interview those that have been established for some time and were identified by other interviewees as representative of 'migrant organisations'. The ones we interviewed have links with the City's authorities when the City organises street festivals on migration-related themes. We also interviewed an organisation dealing with migration and mostly made up of migrants of mixed nationalities and a fifth one that represented migrant women. To help us gain access to informal settlements we also interviewed the local parish priests, who were all

members of 'Curas Villeros'. This is a group of progressive priests formed in the 1960s who are based in the *villas*. Besides parish-related activities, they also provide everyday support to *villas*' dwellers and raise awareness related to their everyday lives in newspapers and political debates. For a full list of interviewees, see Annex.

Cross-border migration and informal settlements in Buenos Aires

There has always been a clear link between migration and informal settlements in Buenos Aires. With the growing industrialisation in the 1930s and 1940s there were significant migrant flows from the countryside to the country's industrial belt, which includes the city of Buenos Aires, and more specifically the Southern part of the city. Despite the facilitation of access to mortgage credits between the 1940s and the 1970s, several newly arrived internal migrants settled in degraded public lands through unorganised occupations and built their own houses, giving birth to the informal settlements called *villas miseria* (henceforth *villas*) (Cerrutti and Grimson, 2004; Clichevsky, 2003). During the 1976–1983 dictatorship, the city government evicted many *villa* residents, but with the return to democracy *villas* began to grow again. New ones emerged with the increasing unemployment and economic stagnation of the 1980s and the early 1990s. Internal migrants were at this point joined by a growing share of international migrants from neighbouring countries given the legal barriers they faced to enter the formal hosing market (Cravino, 2009).

Buenos Aires is a city of 2.8 million people and a main destination of South-South, regional migration flows. For the country as a whole, migration from neighbouring countries, such as Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru, has become more important since the 1970s, as the historic migration from Europe diminished in the post WWII period. The share of migrants from neighbouring countries in the foreign born population increased from just below 10 percent in 1914 to almost 70 percent in the latest census (INDEC, 2012). In relation to the population as a whole, however, their share remained fairly constant between 2 and 2.9 percent throughout the 20th-century, and increased to 3.1 percent during the last inter-census period 2001–2010 (INDEC, 2012, various dates). This increase can be attributed to the sharp economic growth from 2003 to 2009 and the amnesty granted to migrants from South American countries through the 'Programa Patria Grande', which started in 2006 and led to an increase in legal migration and permanent settlement permissions granted.

Of all those who migrated to Argentina from neighbouring countries, almost a fifth (19.1 percent) live in the city of Buenos Aires (INDEC, 2012). These represent 70.3 percent of all the 381,778 migrants in the city. Of them, 38.8 percent arrived between 2001 and 2010 (INDEC, 2012). This is the case especially for migrants from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru, who today account for over 80 percent of the migrants from neighbouring countries. This preference for the capital city as a destination for international migrants follows the internal migration streams that favoured Buenos Aires since the 1930s. The shift in the destination of migration from neighbouring countries from the northern regions to Buenos Aires was accompanied by a feminisation of this migration, given the increasing demand for domestic workers in the city (Pacecca, 2013).

In recent years, there has also been a sharp increase in the population living in *villas* in Buenos Aires. While in 2001 there were 107,422 people living in *villas*, in 2010 the number had increased to 163,587 (DGEyC, 2011). Research on housing in Buenos Aires and the surrounding areas demonstrates that the city faces a severe housing crisis, despite the fact that 24% of the houses (a total of 341,000) are vacant (Cravino et al., 2013; García Pérez, 2014; INDEC, 2012). The crisis affects particularly the Southern part, which was strongly hit

by the neoliberal policies applied firstly by the dictatorship (1976–1983) and later by the Menem government (1989–1999). The shutting down of factories located in the South accelerated the North-South divide. Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 1 all of the large *villas*, of which there are 14 in total, are located in the South except for Villa 31, which is close to the city centre and is surrounded by some of the most expensive buildings in the country.

Despite the passing in 2004 of an immigration law that grants legal access to work, health, education, housing and other rights for all migrants, their access to these basic rights continues to be limited (Basok et al., 2013; Cerrutti, 2012). Apart from the poor working conditions they usually face, especially in garment sweatshops and in the building trades (Bastia, 2007; Montero Bressán, 2011; Montero Bressán and Arcos, 2017), their most urgent need is the access to proper housing. Migrants arriving into Buenos Aires, be it from other provinces or from Latin American countries, do not fulfil the highly demanding requirements for entering a formal rent contract. These include a payment of four months in advance, plus a collateral property located in the city and owned by a close relative in case of lack of payment. As pointed out by one of our interviewees, a member of a left-wing

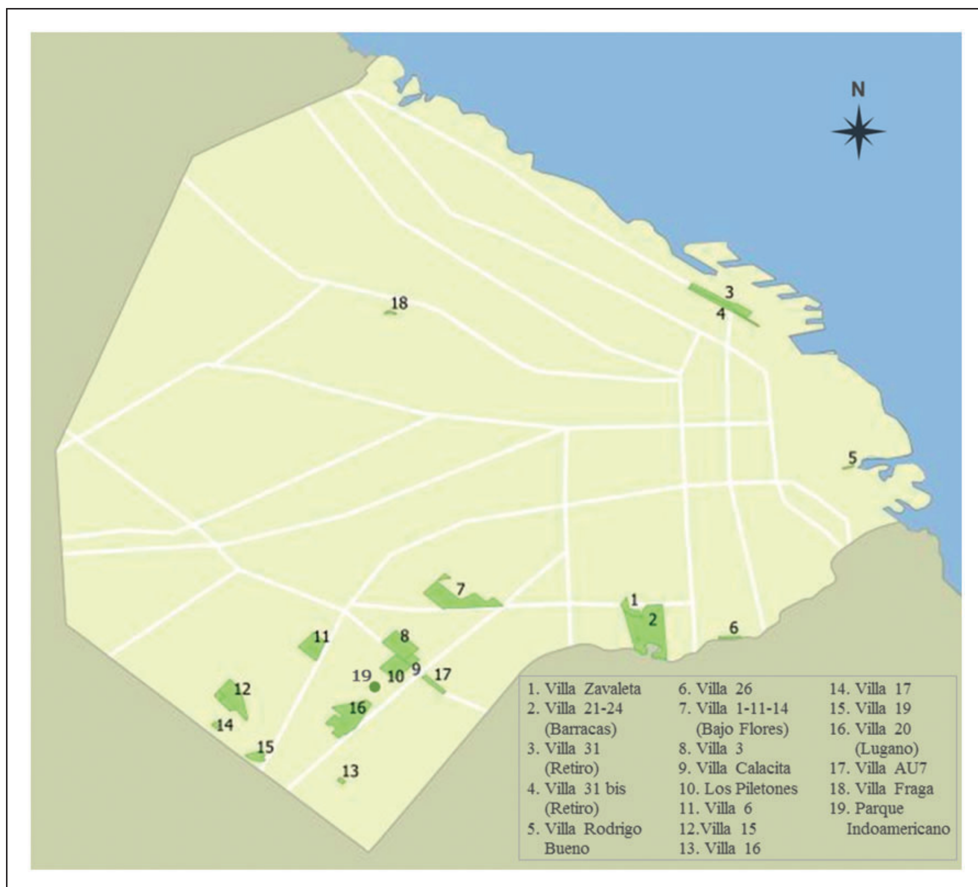

Figure 1. Location of villas in the City of Buenos Aires.

organisation active in one of the *villas* we studied, the lack of formal and stable jobs also forces many of them to move far away from the city or alternatively, to rent properties, usually a small room, in the informal housing market.

> The majority of our comrades have never had a registered job ... They don't have work stability. It's a vicious circle, because having no stability means being unable to leave the *villa* ... Then these people are condemned to go and live far away, in the outskirts of Greater Buenos Aires (where there are no public services), or stay in the *villa*, which is bad but at least, as they say, we are in the big city. (SJ6)

Although official data on migrants living in *villas* is not available, many have shown that there is a significant presence of recent migrants from neighbouring countries (Cerrutti, 2009; Mitchell, 2011). Some data show a link between the districts where migrants live and the poorest districts: the four districts with the highest numbers of migrants from neighbouring countries (*Comunas* 1, 4, 7 and 8) concentrate 75.6 percent of the population in *villas* (DGEyC, 2011; INDEC, 2012). The high proportion of international migrants making up the population in the city's informal settlements has also been observed by recent ethnographic research in these (Auyero, 1999; Bastia, 2015; Grimson, 2006), and has been confirmed by our own research.

In media and popular discourses, this link between migrants from neighbouring countries and *villas* was often used during the 1990s to blame them for problems such as rising crime levels, housing shortages and unemployment (Bastia, 2015; Carman, 2006; Grimson, 2006, 2008). This open discrimination has resurfaced more recently as illustrated by the statements of the former City governor (now president) on the occasion of a massive occupation of a public park (Parque Indoamericano) in December 2010, when he blamed increasing informality on migrants from neighbouring countries (Gutman, 2010; Kanai, 2011; Lederman, 2013). A further example of this was the linking of migrants with crime by the Secretary of Security of the previous national administration in 2014 (Berni, 2014).

The severe social and economic exclusions experienced in informal settlements and by those who dwell in them are often compounded by the migrant condition. Migrants have been discriminated against as 'ethnic others' historically (Bastia, 2015; Grimson, 2006; Ratier, 1972) and have suffered from material constrains. Both cross-border and internal migrants experience these inequalities. As we will see below, many of them join their neighbours in place-based organisations aimed at improving access to basic needs and claiming their rights, in actions that transcend their diverse nationalities.

To better understand the involvement of migrants in grassroots organisations in *villas*, it is worth noting that since the late 1950s, *villas* were lively spaces of struggle for substantive citizenship. As they began to grow, neighbours organised commissions to demand not only recognition of their properties but also resources from the state for the building and improvement of the social infrastructure needed. A cross-*villa* Federation of Neighbourhoods and *Villas* de Emergencia was set up in 1958 (Clichevsky, 2003). Struggles against evictions during the dictatorship, especially since 1978, also contributed to building solidarity between neighbours (Blaustein, 2006). Despite the growth of clientelistic practices since the mid-1980s and the consequent divisions between different leaders and their followers (Levitsky, 2003), the crises of 1989–1990 and 1998–2002 gave birth to initiatives for securing the most basic needs, especially food, some of which laid the base for the neighbourhood-based organisations that exist today (Cerrutti and Grimson, 2004; Neufeld and Cravino, 2007). Once they decide to stay in the city, some migrants join their neighbours in these kinds of organisations.

Migrants organising: Between class and ethnicity

The social uprising of December 2001 and the political mobilisations during the following months, created a general resurgence of politics among Argentinians (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005; Sitrin, 2006; Svampa, 2008; Triguboff et al., 2010; Wharen, 2012). Organising at the grassroots level also grew exponentially (Centner, 2012; Kanai, 2011; Lederman, 2013). According to an official from the city government interviewed for this research, "things have never been so politicised" (SJ7). Indeed the political life of the *villas* is simply impressive, inspiring for anyone interested in politics and social change.

> I think there is a before and an after 2001 in the informal settlement, as in the country in general. During the 1990s there was basically nothing... there were 7 soup kitchens, a migrant organisation, a mutual guarantee company, an organisation working for human rights [...] and that's it. Today there are organisations, institutions, etc... some 70 organisations, political, social, creative. (SJ8, man active in grassroots organisation in a *villa*)

In this context of growing mobilisation in the *villas*, we interviewed a number of organisations, which we divide into civic associations and grassroots movements. On the one hand, civic associations, whose aim is to provide services to vulnerable people, generally lack national or even city-wide networks. Most are set up by women who start soup kitchens, who stress that their organisations are "apolitical" (SJ9, SJ14 and SJ16) (see also Bastia, 2017), as has also been the case in other parts of Latin America for a long time (Laurie, 1999). This stance was clearly influenced by the usual identification of politics with clientelism, following the steep growth of the latter since the mid-1980s and its strong influence in *villas* (Auyero, 2002; Levitsky, 2003). On the other hand, grassroots movements in the *villas* have a clear left-wing political agenda, and despite being place-based, some are also linked to national networks. They were formerly part of *piquetero* movements. After the 2001/2002 uprisings they became known as 'territorial movements' (Merklen, 2001, quoted in Svampa and Pereyra, 2003; Zibechi, 2012). They deal with issues of housing and jobs, organise cooperatives among unemployed neighbours and demand resources from the state to start and support these projects. Their approach is more structural and activist than that of civic associations, since they understand politics in the *villas* as strongly influenced by a broader local, national and international context, and organise on the basis of their shared class interests.

Both types of organisations included participation by people from various nationalities. As the following statement from a migrant active in a grassroots left-wing organisation shows, it was the material necessity, which is shared by all neighbours in the *villas*, which led him to get involved in political militancy: "How did we start? Well, because we had the real need to put the food for the children on the table. That's what led us to get involved" (SJ2).

In looking for 'proper' migrant organisations, we were directed to organisations set up outside the *villas* in formal neighbourhoods of the city. We interviewed the leader of an organisation of migrant women (SJ15) and leaders of three organisations claiming to represent migrants from specific nationalities: Bolivians (SJ3), Peruvians (SJ10) and Paraguayans (SJ12). When asked about the nature and level of political participation of migrants in the city's political life, their responses tended to refer to formal institutional politics. They appeared to have little understanding of the conditions migrants faced in *villas*. Moreover, their activities were not related to improving migrant's access to rights. An exception was the leader of the organisation representing migrant women who distanced herself from other migrant organisations by saying that these do not have a social agenda:

"There are many [migrant] organisations. Now... organisations with a social agenda? I don't see any (SJ15)". Instead, their activities are more related to organising large city-wide events like religious festivals and cultural promotions, appealing to the migrants' feelings of belonging to their country of origin. In so doing they sometimes liaise with the City's authorities to obtain support for the organisation of these events.

In the interviews, it became clear that their leaders are interested in institutional politics. The president of one of these organisations (SJ12) is a member of a party in his home country. In the interview, he subtly expressed interest in becoming a Member of Parliament for his home country when this option becomes available. Another one (SJ10) mentioned that she wants to become a Member of Parliament in Argentina. A third interviewee (SJ3), also a director of a migrant organisation, openly said that he is interested in offering support to a political party (be it in his home country and/or Argentinean) in return for financial help. Accumulation of political capital through social capital is a strategy commonly employed by leaders of migrant organisations and indeed it has been observed elsewhere (Morales and Ramiro, 2011).

It is clear, therefore, that there is a strong separation between the activities organised by migrant organisations and the political militancy of migrants in place-based organisations, where they join Argentinians, internal migrants and other transnational migrants. This is illustrated by the experience of one of our interviewees (SJ16, female, migrant). She is an active member of a left-wing group with a growing presence in one of the *villas* under study. However, when asked about the political militancy of Bolivians in Buenos Aires, she turned to the 'migrant organisations' stating that

> the Bolivian community, doesn't get involved in those things. Most Bolivians don't like it... We get together to dance in the *fiestas,* our dances, our folkloric shows, to show that we exist. In terms of getting involved in an organisation, no. Politics, no... We don't get involved. No. (SJ16)

Grassroots and migrant organisations do not generally confront each other openly. However, they entail different types of political participation by migrants, including different ways of understanding citizenship practices. When participating in grassroots organisations in *villas*, the migrant condition is put aside as they pose claims on the local governments, such as improving their material living conditions or their access to rights for themselves and their neighbours. Although in some cases these organisations are linked to political groups with a national agenda, their territorial activism at the level of the neighbourhood gives them a more direct contact with the everyday practices that are linked to the construction of substantive citizenship. However, in migrants' organisations active at the city level it is much more common to find actions solely linked to ethnic claims. Their activities are limited to specific calendar dates linked to festivities and subordinated to the decisions made by the leaders. Their leaders are interested in formal, bureaucratic politics and they do not want to associate themselves with 'insurgent' politics. The differences between these two organisations, albeit loosely defined, relate to the place they assign to class and ethnicity in their practices: while the former put aside their ethnic belonging to join their neighbours in *villas*, the latter emphasise ethnic differences and national identity, while at the same time rejecting the possibility that non-citizens can make claims for substantive citizenship in the country in which they reside.

Between a guest and an okupa[1]

The above referred differences between place-based territorial organisations and city-level migrant organisations illustrate tensions in terms of whether migrants should or should not

engage in actions towards the improvement of material conditions and better access to rights. On the one hand, members of grassroots territorial organisations (be them migrants or not) accused migrant organisations of "depoliticising" migrants by organising only religious and cultural festivities that gather thousands of people on festive occasions (SJ2, SJ6 and SJ8). These events celebrate diversity but do not put forward claims for the improvement of substantive citizenship. Moreover, they allow organisers to accumulate power and present themselves as political leaders of large groups, which in turn serve their interests in negotiating political positions and favours from parties both local and those of their countries of origin. It is on the basis of these leaders that migrants lend support to political parties in their home countries during elections.[2] One interviewee (SJ1) specifically referred to what in his view would be the particular case of Bolivian migrant organisations. He stated that by homogenising migrants on the basis of nationality and therefore emphasising differences between nationalities, these organisations contribute to hiding the significant class and socioeconomic inequalities among Bolivians, particularly between garment workshop workers and their bosses. This claim has been substantiated by recent research (Gago, 2011; Montero Bressàn, 2017).

On the other hand, migrant organisations claim that migrants' activism related to place-based claims like housing and access to public health services is misplaced. These organisations are critical of migrants' involvement in grassroots activism. Our evidence suggests that they do not see migrants as rights-bearing individuals that may be interested in progressive social change or in making claims that they might share with other 'neighbours'.

This contrast became clearest in the positions these organisations assumed in relation to the occupation of Parque Indoamericano in December 2010, when 13,000 people occupied a large public park in the South of the city in demand for a housing improvement plan that the city government had agreed to years earlier (Canelo, 2016; Kanai, 2011; Lederman, 2013). The occupation brought out the generally latent differences we have discussed so far. Many of the families who participated in it were from Bolivia and Paraguay.[3] On that occasion, according to the findings of our research, the leaders of migrant organisations played an active role in demobilising the migrants who were participating in the occupation. One of these leaders referred to the occupation saying that:

> there is no space in the City of Buenos Aires . . . but we don't want to . . . occupy [. . .] We never supported the invasion of the Parque Indoamericano, never. We were the ones calling the people to leave. Indeed, we called the Bolivian Consulate and Evo Morales said 'brothers you didn't go there to occupy land. You went there to work.' We agree with that statement. (SJ3, male leader of migrant organisation)

He justified his position on the basis that the occupation was illegal and generated a new wave of discrimination towards Bolivians. Another interviewee (SJ6) referred to the involvement of two consulates in actively encouraging migrants to leave. A third interviewee who represents a loose collective of Bolivians, Argentinians and migrants of other nationalities pointed out that:

> Many people from the Bolivian community started calling. In fact, there was a demonstration asking people who were occupying the park to leave, because –allegedly– 'we come to work, we are grateful that they [the Argentinians] give us work, education, health. We don't want to bother anyone [*No venimos a molestar*].' That was the petition, called through the radios . . . In fact, in a restaurant they had a notice saying 'We are not okupas.' (SJ1)

There might have been a genuine interest in demobilising migrants on the grounds that these actions were being made public by the media through a strongly racialised discourse that favoured racism towards migrants. Still, there is an interest in keeping migrants away from claims related to access to housing and other material needs, especially if they do it through initiatives not organised or controlled by migrant organisations. Events like the occupation of the parque Indoamericano illustrate their lack of power to control migrants beyond the organisation of populous festive events. In this same line, and without denying the existence of racist reactions from locals, one of our interviewees argued that this follows a conscious strategy by migrant organisations that he deems as the promotion of 'the guest's conscience' (SJ1). According to this, migrant organisations impose the role of guests onto migrants, which means that as guest in a foreign country, they are not allowed or supposed to make claims. In his words:

> It works more or less like this: I am in my uncle's house and I don't have a right to anything. I cannot make claims, because I am not in my own home. I am in the house of somebody else where I don't have that possibility of demanding certain things. It's like 'we are here, we are grateful that they give us work' and we will be silent, will work, and nothing else. (SJ1)

The events and the positions taken by migrant organisations in relation to the occupation therefore illustrate the existence of a tension between a vision of the migrant as an apolitical guest, who has to remain grateful for any work given, and as an okupa, a politicised grassroots militant able to fight for access to rights and for better resources in the city that s/he now calls home. The tension between these two stances arose during our fieldwork and seemed latent in several interviews. These groups may come together in specific situations, such as the organisation of dance groups for festive events (SJ1, SJ16), or when the leaders of migrant organisations (SJ3, SJ10) come close to grassroots organisations in the fight against sexual exploitation of migrant women (SJ10). However, the events of Parque Indoamericano crystallised these different stances: while migrant organisations tried to stop migrants from occupying the Parque alleging that ''we are not okupas'', grassroots organisations supported (but did not start) the occupation, arguing that migrants can make claims onto the national and local states given that they live there. They effectively claim hold of the historic 'citizenship', as used in the Greek and Roman times of being a citizen of the city they inhabit, essentially invoking the image of a metoikoi (Balibar, 1999). These stances have significant repercussions for how these different organisations understand citizenship and who they consider to be able to have rights to claim rights (Arendt, 1998).

Conclusion

By examining the political goals of diverse organisations through the ways in which migrants participate in the political life of the city of Buenos Aires, our analysis suggests that the scale of action chosen by political groups speaks of their objectives and holds different potential for the building of substantive citizenship. In Buenos Aires, it is in the areas of greatest deprivation that participation in grassroots organisations creates significant potential for the construction of an inclusive, just city. It is here that transnational migrants join internal migrants and other neighbours regardless of their places of origin. They become political subjects claiming rights to the city and to the nation, notwithstanding their lack of formal, legal citizenship. The 'migration condition' tends to disappear as they mobilise around

claims that affect them not as migrants or Argentinians but rather, as people living in the city. The ways in which these claims are made, as shown in this paper, suggest greater potential for a ‘society of equals’, of citizens, ‘‘sufficiently similar to form common purpose’’ (Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 6). However, the terms for defining this similarity has been remoulded through grassroots political action from the original reference of ‘belonging to the same nation’ to that of inhabiting the same urban space, as argued by some of our interviewees.

The types of organisations that claim to represent migrants and are active at the city level, outside of the informal settlements, rest their claims on the basis of country of origin and nationality. In so doing, they foster nationalist feelings and highlight the distinctions between migrant and non-migrant, between Argentinians and ethnic ‘Others’, and between migrants of different nationalities. This differentiation poses obstacles to the common ground similarity required for the creation of a more equal and just city. In holding a modern, state-centred understanding of citizenship, these migrants’ organisations with a city-wide agenda promote the image of passive migrants who are guests in a foreign territory and have no right to pose radical claims like fair pay, access to decent health and housing, and other claims related to substantive citizenship. Political militancy is reserved to their leaders and linked to formal, partisan politics.

As has been shown elsewhere, migrants make cities (Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2011), often in material ways or by providing key services to other residents. We have shown that they also make cities through their coming together with others in the making of public spaces and/or participating in grassroots organisations. In adopting progressive or even radical political agendas despite the everyday discrimination they face, they leave aside their migrant condition and become citizens who make claims to accessing their rights in full. A foreign born migrant resident of an informal settlement we interviewed, put it this way: ‘‘We are all Argentinian!’’ (SJ2). As he said so, he felt no need to elaborate on this claim. It was only when we returned to this point at the end of the interview that we understood the significance of his statement: having no formal Argentinian citizenship was no objection to claiming citizenship, here understood as belonging to the nation. He was claiming Argentinean citizenship based on his experience of participating in grassroots political activism and contributing to making Buenos Aires a more just city. He therefore regards himself as a citizen because he belongs to the neighbourhood where he lives, which in his eyes is a political community, echoing the use of the term by Lazar and Nuijten (2013) and embodying Balibar’s idea of the ‘metoikoi’.

Apart from showing, in line with previous research on urban citizenship, that peripheries provide the most opportunities for the creation of alternative, more inclusive political agendas, our research also shows that the basis on which claims are made also matters. Those organisations and actions that highlight ethnic differences and promote the idea of migrants being different on the basis of their national identity effectively create distance between different nationality groups and put forward a depoliticised notion of migrant as ‘guest’. On the other hand, those actions that are built on the experiences of migrants’ daily lives and transcend ethnicities and national identities provide greater potential for the construction of a more equal and just city.

Authors’ Note

Jerónimo Montero Bressán is currently affiliated with Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales (Universidad Nacional de San Martín) y CONICET.

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Notes

1. We use 'okupa' as the emic term used by migrant organisations to describe those who occupied the Parque Indoamericano in December 2010 and by extension the grassroots activist organisations that would support such actions. As used by our interviewees, it has a derogatory connotation.
2. In all the countries neighbouring Argentina, citizens are allowed to vote from abroad.
3. This event – the largest occupation of public land in several decades in Buenos Aires – spurred a series of violent protests by neighbours living in low income but formal neighbourhoods surrounding the park, and was combined with repression from the police, which ended with three migrants murdered under unclear circumstances.

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Annex: List of interviewees.

Leader of young group of migrants from various nationalities	SJ1, male migrant
Members of grassroots organisations	SJ6, male, Argentinean SJ8, male, Argentinean SJ9, female, migrant SJ14, female, migrant SJ17, male, migrant SJ16, female, migrant SJ2, male, migrant
Leaders of migrant organisations, all migrants	SJ3, male SJ10, female SJ12, male SJ15, female
Representative of the government of the City of Buenos Aires, all Argentineans	SJ5, male SJ7, male SJ18, female
'Curas Villeros', all Argentineans, all male	SJ4, SJ11, SJ13