CHAPTER 6

Hesitant Place-Making

Dwellings and Avoidances in a Popular Mall in Argentina

Franziska Reiffen

When train and subway passengers arrive at Constitución Station in southern Buenos Aires and step out onto Lima Street, they first perceive the flashy red walls, lights, and music that emerge from the popular mall Paseo La Estación across the street. On one of my last days of research in March 2020, I arrived at the station with Verónica and Malena, whom I had known from Paseo La Estación since 2018.[1] Verónica, from Peru, worked as a vendor in the popular mall for some years but had recently given up that job. Malena, from Corrientes in northern Argentina, had been living in Buenos Aires for several decades but had no place to stay, spending her nights in different shelters close to the mall. On that day, upon arriving at Constitución, Verónica left to do some errands, and Malena and I headed toward Paseo La Estación. Before stepping into the premises, Malena pointed to the escalator that would take us directly from the pavement to the second floor. "Let's walk upstairs," she said. "Because if we walk downstairs, they will start talking." I didn't have to ask who "they" were. Malena wanted to avoid running into Verónica's sisters, Luz and Sandra, who worked on the mall's first floor. Malena spent much time with the sisters, but their relationship was not without conflict. The relationship the women had forged there was why Malena frequently headed to the mall, and it was sometimes a reason for her to avoid it.

In this chapter, I explore Paseo La Estación as an "along-the-way" place (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume) where different urban mobilities

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

concentrate. Paseo La Estación is along the route passengers take when arriving at Constitución Station and heading to other destinations in the city. It is also part of internal and international migrants' trajectories as they arrive and settle in Buenos Aires, seek jobs and a sheltered place to stay, and forge social connections. Paseo La Estación acts like a border zone in which people shift between inclusion and exclusion, formality and informality, transit and dwelling. I argue that place-making and dwelling in transit and amid precarious conditions is possible because the mall as a border zone allows for meaningful relations, multiple spatial uses, and creative ways of allowing one's life to emerge. While working and socializing in the mall is fragile, I intend to show that this fragility does not preclude place-making and dwelling but is an integral part of it.

Dwelling, as used by Jared Zigon (2014), refers to a specific mode of being-in-the-world that differs from mere survival. Building on Martin Heidegger and Tim Ingold, Zigon (2014: 757) suggests that dwelling corresponds to a being-in-the-world that does not leave people "trapped in a world." Instead, dwelling means creatively building and caring for one's world. According to Ingold (2011: 173), from a dwelling perspective, life does not follow preestablished plans and forms but takes shape and meaning as people inhabit the world. Therefore, Zigon (2014: 757) suggests that dwelling always entails the possibility of becoming otherwise. Making dwelling possible involves a concrete engagement with place. In Zigon's (2014) study of anti–drug war activism in the Bronx, this concrete engagement occurs in the activists' efforts to create places for drug users where they can socialize, receive help without feeling stigmatized, and eventually become activists themselves.

Unsettled lives might become settled in sites that seem unlikely dwelling places at first sight. Kathleen Millar (2018) describes an astonishing example of such a dwelling site as she explores the comings and goings of *catadores*, garbage collectors, at a Brazilian garbage dump. Many of these *catadores* face uncertainty in all areas of life. They continually return to the dump, not out of sheer necessity, as Millar finds, but because the dump provides them a "form of living" (Millar 2018: 9) that accommodates their specific rhythm of life and social needs and opens up the possibility of pursuing specific life projects. The garbage dump, despite its apparent marginality, is a life-building site. People's changing presences and absences do not mean the site is unimportant. They are part of a specific way of place-making amid precarity.

Addressing malls as sites of dwelling and place-making along-the-way is also not self-evident. Marc Augé (1995) famously describes the mall as a "non-place" alongside other transitory places, such as airport terminals and public hospitals. According to Augé, these non-places are devoid of his-

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

tory, identification, and social relations, and people tend to pass through them without developing attachments. While many scholars have rejected this description, showing that malls are places of socialization and identification (Jackson, Rowlands, and Miller 1998; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012; Aceska and Heer 2019), one remaining question is how these possibilities for socialization and identification reinforce exclusion.

Indeed, malls have been characterized as “fortresses” (Dirsuweit and Schattauer 2004) or “fortified enclaves” (Caldeira 2000: 258). According to these conceptualizations, malls enhance urban segregation by enabling privileged city dwellers to retreat into highly surveilled and regulated spaces. At the same time, (racialized or lower-class) “others” are kept outside (Dirsuweit and Schattauer 2004). This exclusion is generally found in malls that cater to a wealthy clientele by offering expensive brand-name products or, especially in the United States, are only accessible by private cars (Stillerman 2015: 44).

However, Paseo La Estación is different. One of many commercial sites that have proliferated in Buenos Aires and the surrounding metropolitan area since the early 2000s, it is modeled after the vast market “La Salada.” La Salada was founded by Bolivian migrants on the city’s outskirts in the 1990s and became successful through its offers of locally produced, imitation brand products for cheap wholesale prices. In the context of the economic crisis and loss of purchasing power among Argentina’s urban middle class in the past two decades, the commercial strategy of La Salada has become a model for other, mostly privately owned indoor markets opening throughout the city. Some of these, including Paseo La Estación, have started using increasingly sophisticated designs. They carry logos and brand names reminiscent of more expensive shopping sites while selling the same merchandise as in other markets. The conditions under which people work here combine aspects of formality and informality.

In Argentina, places like Paseo La Estación are sometimes colloquially addressed as *bolishoppings*, a portmanteau of *boliviano* (Bolivian) and *shopping* (the Argentine expression for mall). *Boliviano* is used as a derogatory term that connotes racialized and classist ways of othering, referring to supposed backwardness, racial difference, and poverty (Grimson and Kessler 2005: 126–27). The term *bolishopping* contributes to constructing a place of consumption as marginal (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume), classifying it as supposedly of and for migrants and the poor. A different way to conceptualize the commercial practices that evolve in this place and that entail self-fashioned ways of earning a living in times of decreasing wage-labor is to consider them as part of the “popular economy” (Fernández-Álvarez 2016). As a place that defies conventional classifications, such as “mall” or “market,” “formal” or “informal,” I call Paseo La Estación a “popular mall.”

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

In this chapter, I discuss Paseo La Estación as a place that fits neither the idea of an upper-class enclave nor a migrant niche. Instead, the popular mall gains different meanings as city dwellers who would describe themselves as *gente humilde* (humble people, i.e., part of the poorer sector of society) work, stay, and encounter others within it. Exploring the popular mall as a border zone that unsettles unequivocal attributions of meaning and that, instead, enables place-making along-the-way also entails paying attention to how place-making in the mall bears signs of people's varying possibilities to dwell and feel in place in Buenos Aires more generally. In the following, I ask: Through what kinds of spatial practices and social interactions do people inhabit this place, become attached to it, or reject it? How do people's experiences in other temporary dwelling sites, such as hotels or shelters, contribute to their perceptions of this place?

For my analysis, I draw on data collected during eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork in Buenos Aires between 2017 and 2020.[2] Focusing on migrant and non-migrant emplacements in the popular mall, I conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews primarily in Paseo La Estación, the neighborhood of Constitución, and other popular malls in the city center and shopping district of Balvanera. Most of my research participants were vendors who worked in the mall and came from eight different countries, including Argentina; however, I also met with people who dropped by the mall for other reasons: to shop, to sit and wait, or to visit family members and friends. This segment of my research was complemented by interviews with city government employees and representatives of social institutions in Constitución.

In the following, I introduce Paseo La Estación as a place of consumption in a specific urban context before turning to various people who frequent Paseo La Estación and their place-making efforts. I further explore the meanings of Paseo La Estación as a place of (precarious) work, shelter, and social connection to discuss how this is reflected in the social relations taking shape in the mall.

The Popular Mall at the Urban Threshold

Paseo La Estación is indicative of a new retail format that has developed in Argentina since the early 1990s and whose emergence is linked to processes of un- and resettlement of the city's inhabitants. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, structural adjustments, including financial reforms, privatization, and trade liberalization, led to factory closures, skyrocketing unemployment, and an economic crisis in Argentina. In Buenos Aires, this crisis also led to the impoverishment of working-class neighborhoods (For-

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

ment 2015: 118), and many of their former inhabitants moved into shantytowns or informal settlements. There, they lived alongside internal and international migrants, especially from neighboring countries. For many, these shantytowns initially served as entry points into the city but increasingly became permanent places to live (Cravino 2018: 79). In a city in which boundaries of belonging and possibilities of participation often reflect in the city's spatial organization, the shantytown is a structurally disadvantaged and stigmatized site in which migrant and non-migrant city dwellers have nonetheless developed new ways of making a living.

At the edge of one such shantytown, La Salada emerged in the 1990s. La Salada, primarily comprising migrant owners of small garment workshops, served as a model for numerous indoor markets throughout Buenos Aires (Forment 2015). As in La Salada, many workers in these markets are migrants from an increasingly diverse list of countries, including member states of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and many Caribbean and African countries.[3] This heterogeneous and continued migration to Argentina (see Cerrutti 2018) occurred partly due to Argentina's economic stabilization after 2003. Additionally, migration was facilitated by the adoption of liberal migration policies by the Peronist governments in office until 2015 (Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015), as well as specific events that produced new migratory movements, such as the Haitian earthquake in 2010 and the political violence and economic instability in Venezuela (Reiffen and Drotbohm 2023).

Many migrants continue living and working in Argentina under precarious conditions. Especially migrants from non-MERCOSUR member states and those who have entered Argentina without a visa face difficulty accessing residency permits (Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015). Furthermore, at the time of my research, Argentina was mired in another economic crisis entailing high inflation and unemployment, further exacerbating the situation for migrants and other city dwellers.

In challenging times, indoor markets in Buenos Aires continue selling commodities at affordable prices and generating jobs. Some that I call "popular malls," like Paseo La Estación, draw on increasingly elaborate architecture and provide services such as restaurants and playgrounds for children. Their names allude to places of leisure, incorporating words such as "Paseo" (from *pasear*, to stroll), "Plaza," or "Centre." Many of them are placed at well-connected sites in the city center or near central train stations like Constitución.

As a high-traffic transit area, Constitución works as an urban threshold. Its train station and bus terminal are entry and exit points to the city center for those who live in poorer neighborhoods in the southern parts of the metropolitan area. Compared to adjacent neighborhoods, Constitución re-

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Figure 6.1. Paseo La Estación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018. © Franziska Reiffen

Figure 6.2. Shops in Paseo La Estación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018. © Franziska Reiffen

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Figure 6.3. Children's rides in Paseo La Estación, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018. © Franziska Reiffen

mains a relatively affordable place to live (Cifras 2020). Additionally, many who lack access to formal housing live in semipermanent and semiprovisional conditions in hotel rooms rented monthly and concentrated here. Constitución is also a go-to point for many city dwellers in need. The area around the train station hosts service points where people can access documentation, financial subsidies, and legal counselling, while soup kitchens and shelters provide material assistance to poorer city dwellers.

Paseo La Estación is privately owned, with security men patrolling its corridors, but it is also open to the sides and a commonly used passageway. While many passengers consider the train station and its immediate surroundings dangerous, a stigma that Constitución shares with other train stations that attract marginalized city dwellers (Stasik, this volume), Paseo La Estación is perceived as relatively safe. For many people I encountered during my research, the popular mall facilitated circulation in the neighborhood. They traversed Paseo La Estación on their way to and from work, doctor's appointments, or other commitments. Contrary to the idea of the mall-as-enclave, people tend to view the popular mall as an ordinary part of the neighborhood and its street pattern, which they integrate into their daily walking routines.

While the mall's position and open sidewalls make it a passageway, other aspects of its spatial arrangement encourage people to stay and al-

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

low for uses comparable to other dwelling places. Paseo La Estación has a pizza restaurant, two burger stands with tables and plastic chairs in front, and a small children's playground on the second floor. Benches on both floors invite people to sit, and its bathrooms are used by passersby. While leisure-oriented services and mall plaza arrangements might aim to motivate spending time and money, people use these sites in ways that exceed or counter mall officials' expectations. They might stay to meet friends or have family picnics (Stillerman and Salcedo 2012: 323–24; Dávila 2016: 105). In short, such spatial arrangements allow people to act out existing social relations and forge new social ties.

A key spot known to many passing through the Paseo is a bench on the first floor. The two-sided gray metal bench has three seats on each side, separated by low armrests, and is surrounded by shops, creating a little plaza around it. I observed people engaging in numerous activities on this bench: making calls and checking their social media channels, reading the newspaper, sipping *mate*, and chatting with others. Often, people discussed issues related to life in the city—the traffic, insecurity, politics, the economic situation—but they also occasionally talked about their private lives.

In Paseo La Estación, sociable interaction took place among relative strangers on this bench (Reiffen 2018). Drawing on Georg Simmel's (1949: 257) definition of sociability (*Geselligkeit*), which relies on acting "as though all were equal," Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2016) underline the importance of interactions based on a sense of commonality, not difference, for people to become emplaced in a city. While for Simmel (1949: 258), sociability ends where purpose-oriented interactions of "practical reality" begin, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2016) argue that casual meetings can develop into affective and lasting relationships tied to urban space. This is precisely what happened on the bench in Paseo La Estación.

Some of those who encountered one another on or around the bench took pleasure in the conversations that unfolded there. They started returning to the bench, recognizing and referring to one another by name or nickname. On this bench, the women mentioned in this chapter's introduction also met one another: Malena, who spent her nights in a nearby shelter for homeless women, and the vendors Luz and Verónica, as well as their sisters Sandra and Elizabeth. Luz, who had a shop right next to the bench, liked to entertain herself by talking to the people who sat on it. When Malena took her place on the bench for the first time in 2017, Luz began chatting with her, thus starting a long-lasting, though complicated, relationship.

Before turning to the specificities of this relationship, I want to further introduce Luz, Verónica, and Malena, as the different meanings they attributed to the popular mall can inform our understanding of experiences of mobility and place-making more generally.

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Luz and Verónica: The Mall as a Place of Hope and Frustrations

"When I see these clothes, I say: Do you know how much scarcity I suffered? And today I have ten pants to wear. . . . Having achieved this makes me happy. It makes me happy." Luz pronounced the last "happy" with a sigh, her voice seeming to come from a comfortable, reposing place deep inside her. We both stood behind her vending table while Luz turned her head toward the back of her shop, letting her eyes wander over the dresses, pants, t-shirts, and sweaters on plastic hangers, one on top of the other. I followed her gaze over the multiple fabrics with their different textures and patterns, the Mickey Mouse prints and imitation Nike logos, behind which the plywood walls of her shop almost disappeared.

Luz, Verónica, and their sisters Elizabeth and Sandra grew up in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, and had moved, one after the other, to Buenos Aires. The first to arrive was Elizabeth, followed by Luz in the early 2000s. Both sisters worked multiple jobs upon arriving in Buenos Aires. Like many recently arrived migrants, they also engaged in street vending. Luz, who sold mobile phones on the street, remembered feeling exposed to police raids and the weather and often feared having her merchandise stolen. Other former migrant street vendors in Paseo La Estación, especially from West Africa, expressed feeling uncomfortably visible in public spaces as racialized others, exposed to even more police control and racist remarks (see Vammen 2018).

For many former street vendors, renting a shop in an indoor market or mall offered the prospect of working in a more protected and stable environment. Furthermore, mall officials did not ask tenants for proof of documentation, which was attractive to migrant entrepreneurs lacking a residency permit. While the Argentine revenue service expected shop owners to register as *monotributistas* (self-employed), not everybody did so. Luz, however, had a residency permit, and she was glad when she had assembled the necessary funds to rent a shop in Constitución like her elder sister Elizabeth. When their sisters Verónica and Sandra joined them in Buenos Aires, they employed them as shop assistants.

Working in the popular mall was a physically and mentally demanding job. It required driving to the wholesalers and returning with heavy loads of bulk merchandise; it also required careful bookkeeping and reflection on good and bad investments in times of decreasing consumer demand and increasing shop rents. Although times were tough, Luz was relatively successful. She had managed to expand her business, rent a second shop, rent an apartment in the metropolitan area, and save enough money to buy a house in Peru. She sent her son to a private school in Buenos Aires and nurtured hopes for him to have formal employment one day. While

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Luz often spoke about her business concerns, the materiality of her shop filled her with satisfaction. The displayed merchandise reminded her of her achievements and carried the promise of upward social mobility.

Beyond generating optimistic prospects, being shop tenants allowed Luz and Elizabeth to employ their sisters, Verónica and Sandra. For them and many other recently arrived city dwellers, places like Paseo La Estación were starting points for an economically independent life in Buenos Aires. Like the bus station in Accra described by Stasik (this volume), popular malls constitute entry points for newcomers shaped by those who arrived before. Newcomers often sought jobs as shop assistants. Their employers, the shop tenants, did not ask them for residency permits. Shop assistants did not receive working contracts. The lucky ones relied on relatives working in the mall to arrange jobs for them. For those with no existing network, the job search was more difficult. If successful, however, the contacts newcomers forged with long-term city dwellers in the popular mall often benefitted them in multiple ways. Through crucial “weak ties” (Granovetter 1973), they learned about free hotel rooms, administrative procedures, and jobs for relatives.

However, Verónica was ambivalent toward Paseo La Estación. At times, she seemed to enjoy her work and take pride in her skills as a vendor, especially when she showed me how to arrange the clothes in the shop to look attractive or when she joked with customers. At other times, she was frustrated, calling her work “slave labor” and cursing the long working hours, minuscule pay, her aching back, and the cold that crept into her body on winter days while she sat for hours in the mall without heating. In Paseo La Estación, shop assistants worked eleven- to twelve-hour shifts, six or seven days a week, for little pay. In 2018, an assistant working six days a week would earn Arg$8,400–10,800 (€260–334) monthly.[4] Many of my interlocutors paid at least half their wage to rent a hotel room in Constitución.

Verónica lived in a hotel room with her younger daughter, her Argentine partner, and his son. These living conditions contributed to Verónica’s frustrations. One of Verónica’s motives for joining her sisters in Argentina in 2015 had been to separate from her husband. In Paseo La Estación, she met her new partner, Pedro, who had moved to Buenos Aires from Salta in northern Argentina in the early 1990s. However, the couple’s life together did not develop as Verónica had imagined. Verónica’s income and Pedro’s earnings from temporary jobs in restaurants and on construction sites did not allow for more than the rental of a hotel room that had just enough space for two bunk beds, a cupboard, a shelf that also held the television set, and a table with a small sofa and two chairs. They shared a bathroom and kitchen with the other residents. Both Verónica and her daughter dis-

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

liked this cramped lifestyle and felt uncomfortable sharing their bathroom and kitchen with strangers.

To make things worse, in May 2018, Pedro became unemployed and had difficulty finding work for several months. During this time, his only income was a small widower's pension. Hence, Pedro and Verónica looked for ways to earn extra money. Aside from the merchandise her sister offered from the shop, Verónica started to sell various items on her own from within the shop, including sneakers, bags, and even pillows. Pedro prepared warm meals and empanadas at home and brought them daily to the shop, where Verónica would sell them to other Paseo workers. To do this, they had to sneak around the security men, as mobile vending or food vending from within the shops was not allowed in the mall. Nonetheless, many people sold food or other items, and the security staff tolerated these practices if they were carried out discreetly. Thus, while Verónica found working at the popular mall frustrating, she and her partner could generate additional income here.

In terms of dwelling as a being-in-the-world that enables people to become otherwise, the mall offered workers various opportunities depending on the jobs they pursued and their establishment in Buenos Aires. This is also reflected in the attachments people developed to the mall, which had different spatiotemporal dimensions. Newcomers found the means there to make a living and valuable contacts that helped them transition to life in Buenos Aires. For many former street vendors, the mall was a desirable place to work because it was relatively protected and promised more permanence than work in the streets. The mall also allowed for other commercial activities that helped individuals weather times of shortcomings. For shop tenants, hopes of economic and social progress materialized in their shops. Often, these hopes were not only directed at life in Buenos Aires but also tied to broader migration projects reaching far into the future and out of Buenos Aires. These included ideas of making a place to return to, such as for Luz, who bought a house in Peru.

However, dwelling through work in the mall also remained precarious. Many in Paseo La Estación shared the experience of struggling without moving ahead and working a time-consuming, poorly paid job that did not allow for more comfortable living conditions. Furthermore, an increasing number of closed, empty shops were daily reminders for all workers that the economic situation was not in their favor and that each business endeavor could potentially fail. Paseo La Estación was not an island but a place in and of the city, and the uncertainties and risks of the pressing context of the economic crisis leaked into the mall, leaving visible marks.

While Paseo La Estación often assumed ambivalent and contradictory meanings for the workers, it presented different meanings for those who did

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

not pursue work there but spent much time in it for other reasons, as was the case for Malena.

Malena: The Mall as a Place of Social Connections

Malena, a woman in her forties, had moved from Corrientes to Buenos Aires in the 1990s. For reasons she did not speak about, she did not have a permanent place to stay and spent her nights in shelters for the homeless. She was one of several women from the nearby shelters who frequently came to sit on the Paseo's first-floor bench.

Those staying at the shelters with whom I regularly interacted in Paseo La Estación often described the shelters as burdensome—places of frequent conflict where many people, some with mental health issues, were cramped together in a relatively small space. They feared theft and had to relinquish control over the temporal and spatial organization of their lives (see Eichner, this volume). As Belen from the southern metropolitan area, who slept in a shelter together with her twin sister and would also frequent Paseo La Estación, put it: "I own nothing in a place like that. You feel like you're a prisoner, a prisoner because it's all [scheduled]. . . . [There are] schedules for . . . entering, schedules for leaving, schedules for eating, schedules for bathing, schedules for everything." Temporal control over everyday life is a common domination technique that becomes particularly visible in contexts of assistance (Auyero 2012; Ramsay 2017). While the shelters ensured that people did not have to sleep outside and had a hot meal, a chance to bathe, and access to the support of social workers, staying at the shelter only allowed for precarious place-making subordinated to the shelter's organizational principles. For example, most shelters were closed during the day, so people had to find other places to stay. Among those staying at the shelter, word spread about locations where their presence was not challenged, such as community centers and soup kitchens, parks and train stations, and Paseo La Estación.

While people spent their days in these sites, not all places allowed dwelling. For instance, the shelter was a place in which Belen felt like a "prisoner" rather than comfortably in place. Malena, too, reflected on how she experienced inclusion or exclusion at various sites across the city. In many places, she felt either directly rejected or uncomfortable. For example, at a well-known fast-food chain, her presence was only accepted on the condition of consumption. Sometimes, she experienced direct rejection, as when she traveled on a public bus with other homeless people, and another passenger loudly demanded that they take another bus. In other locations, she felt misplaced. For a while, she had slept and spent her days in a shelter in the

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

city center. However, she disliked the city center. "I feel like that is not my place," she told me, explaining that the tourists and "people with money" who populated the city center's streets made her feel out of place (Reiffen 2018). Meanwhile, other sites conveyed to her a sense of being "included" and "integrated," as she put it, such as a neighborhood assembly that organized a weekly soup kitchen that Malena frequented. This was also the case with Paseo La Estación.

Shopping malls where the security staff decides who can enter are not necessarily places one would assume are open for people experiencing homelessness. However, ethnographic enquiries have shown that in many malls, including high-end shopping malls, control and filtering practices are more permeable than expected. For instance, Arlene Dávila (2016: 105) describes malls in Bogotá, Colombia, as "open to anyone who 'performs' the role of a shopper," allowing many people without the necessary purchasing power to enter as window shoppers. Jacob C. Miller (2013: 854) has observed that in the Abasto shopping mall in Buenos Aires, the security staff allows people from the streets to sit and nap as long as they do not lie down.

Even so, in Buenos Aires's popular malls, security staff are responsible for filtering those who traverse and stay in the mall. Two security men told me that it was part of their job to prevent *indigentes* (indigents) from hanging out inside. When I asked a security man from another popular mall whom he perceived as an *indigente*, he pointed his finger at a bare-chested man with dirt-stained trousers who slowly staggered by, possibly drunk. "People without clothes, for example," he said. The women from shelters who spent time in Paseo La Estación did not display what the security man read as signs of indigence. They were properly dressed, and I never saw them display any behaviors that might have been interpreted as resulting from drug use. Generally, they did not draw much attention to themselves.

The women from the shelters made themselves comfortable on the bench. They placed their plastic bags full of belongings on the seat next to them, sipped their *mate* and ate small snacks they had brought, talked to one another, and sometimes dozed off, though the low armrests of the bench made it impossible for them to stretch out for a nap. Such designs exclude certain uses and, by extension, certain users. These designs correspond to the "hostile," "defensive," or "disciplinary" architecture (Petty 2016: 68) found in both private and public urban spaces. While the homeless women were accepted in Paseo La Estación, its material arrangements limited how they could make themselves comfortable.

To understand why Malena nevertheless attributed such a positive and inclusive role to the mall, one must know that Malena had made the mall her own place to a different degree than many others, primarily through the

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

social connections she had forged there. The presence of others was a significant reason why Malena felt in or out of place, and at Paseo La Estación, she felt socially at ease. By 2018, when I met Malena, she no longer needed to sit on the bench. She would drop by Luz's shop almost every day, moving in and out of the shop as she pleased to fetch hot water from Luz's water dispenser. Luz kept a stool for Malena in her shop, which Malena would place in the corridor. She would sit there for hours, chatting and laughing with Luz. Malena would also keep an eye on the shop when Luz was away. She knew all the prices by heart and sometimes assumed Luz's role as a worker.

Moreover, Luz regularly offered clothes to Malena and invited her to spend the night at her apartment. Malena slept better at Luz's place than in the shelter, and Luz enjoyed having Malena around. Malena also accompanied Luz to the wholesalers, where Luz bought her clothes, and Malena helped her carry the merchandise back to Paseo La Estación. Drawing on years of experience with social institutions, Malena sometimes helped Luz or other family members navigate challenging administrative procedures. She also offered support in other ways. When Verónica's daughter was ill, Malena took Verónica to pray for her daughter's health at the shrine of Saint Gauchito Gil in the southern metropolitan area.

What began as a casual meeting had developed over time into a friendship that involved interactions beyond the boundaries of the popular mall. For Malena, knowing Luz and her sisters had turned the mall into a dwelling place, which became visible through both the material and social aspects of place-making. Much more than sitting and waiting without attracting attention, Malena went to the mall to meet people she cherished. For Malena, Paseo La Estación had become a place of dwelling in which practices that would often occur in the home—sharing drinks and food, sitting and chatting with friends—took place.

Malena also saw more significance in her being-in-the-mall than simply waiting, as evidenced by her statements regarding how she "helped" Luz get her work done. However, when I asked Luz about this, she only laughed. "Yes, you see how Malena is helping me," she said with a smile and a wink at Malena, who sat on her stool, sipping her *mate*. According to Luz, she was the one who helped Malena, not the other way around. While helping or caring for each other is often colloquially perceived as having positive aspects, care as an anthropological concept entails both the practices that create and reinforce social connections and the normative evaluations, conditions, and practices of control that can have marginalizing effects (Drotbohm 2022). While caring for each other helped the women make Paseo La Estación a place of dwelling, their possibilities of supporting each other were not equal, and they did not necessarily share the same expectations concerning the contents and outcome of support.

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Confrontation and Avoidance

Despite the connections these women made with one another, their ways of life fundamentally differed. While they rarely addressed this in daily interactions, the moments when these differences were brought up could be very hurtful.

Especially in 2018, Verónica and Malena did not get along very well. At that time, situations that began as harmless teasing sometimes ended in violent disputes. One time, Verónica erupted at Malena, shouting, "You are crazy, you filthy *cochina* [pig], you live in the streets and starve to death!" Malena responded, "This is my country!" and, "At least I didn't abandon my daughters!" In such confrontations, the women expressed morally charged evaluations that legitimized their own way of life. Verónica would confront Malena with stereotypes about homeless people. At other times, she accused Malena of living off her government. In turn, Malena not only accused Verónica of being a bad mother who had migrated for her own sake and left her eldest daughter behind in Peru but also of being a foreigner. When she screamed, "This is my country!" she attributed to herself the entitlement of living as she saw fit in Argentina, in contrast to Verónica, who was "not in her country."

Beyond expressions of the women's personal conflicts, such insults reflect typical schemes of inclusion and exclusion in Argentina that create "hierarchies of deservingness" (Tošić and Lems 2019: 2), differentiating between those who "deserve" a certain life or support, and those who do not. For these differentiations, national belonging and merit-based thinking are important. Many of my interlocutors who worked in the mall made disparaging remarks about "*vagos*" (the lazy ones) and "*planeros*" (welfare recipients), often coupled with criticisms of the Peronist government, in office until 2015, that had supposedly promoted "laziness" by introducing social welfare programs. While such reservations about welfare are widespread in Argentina (Wilkis 2018), this accusation carried a particular connotation among the migrant workers at the mall. They accused the Argentines of being lazier than the hard-working migrants, who were ready to endure tiring and informal work to "*salir adelante*," or move ahead in life, pointing out that hardly any Argentines worked in the mall. Meanwhile, some Argentines I met in the mall who faced difficulties finding employment in Buenos Aires accused migrants of stealing their jobs, also citing the fact that hardly any Argentines worked in the mall.

While many people expressed which way of life and values they approved of (e.g., "hard work" and "moving ahead"), these ideals were often at odds with their needs. While Verónica accused Malena of living "off her government" and emphasized that "work dignifies," her partner, Pedro, was unemployed, and their family depended partly on state benefits. Malena also

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

struggled with conflicting feelings about her own way of life, including the discrimination she faced across the city. But in other instances, she said living off state benefits was not how things should be. In such moments, she expressed the desire to change her life, to "move ahead" and find a job. For instance, she pictured concrete scenarios of becoming a domestic worker or street vendor. However, during the time that I knew her, she never put these ideas into practice.

Luz, however, attempted to help Malena get her life back on track. She offered her small jobs, such as cleaning Luz's apartment for a remuneration or taking some clothes Luz had purchased for her shop to sell in the streets. However, Malena did not gratefully accept these offers in a way that Luz would have thought proper. Instead, she often reacted to these offers by disappearing from the mall for days or even weeks, as she did after disputes.

Even though well intended, attempts to help or care for others do not necessarily strengthen meaningful ties. They might also lead to disputes about who gives, receives, and deserves support (Drotbohm 2015). Especially in precarious circumstances, helping others can be a balancing act, as Clara Han (2012) shows regarding life in a Chilean shantytown. In the shantytown, acts of kindness and support are concealed to maintain one another's dignity (Han 2012: 87). Explicit offers of help, on the contrary, may evoke feelings of judgment and pressure to put plans into practice, exposing hierarchies and fomenting vulnerability.

In Paseo La Estación, when conflicts occurred based on different conceptions of the proper way to live or plans for improvement, social pressures became too high for Malena to feel in place there. In such instances, she avoided the mall. She was not the only one to do so. Other frequent Paseo visitors who had forged connections inside the popular mall would disappear periodically when they felt their presence or way of life was questioned or that others wanted to interfere in their lives. However, such disappearances were seldom permanent. Malena, for instance, would always reappear and behave as though nothing had happened.

Conclusion: Possibilities of Temporary Dwellings

Paseo La Estación allows for place-making and dwelling in a context in which multiple forms of mobilities overlap: the to-and-fro of passengers traversing the urban traffic node where the popular mall is located, the arrival of newcomers moving to Buenos Aires from different Argentine provinces or other countries, and the daily movements of those continually looking for places to stay in the city.

As people pass by, stay for a while, and continue their passage through Paseo La Estación, they attribute multiple and contradictory meanings

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

to it. Many perceive the mall as a safe passageway in a threatening urban environment. For some, it can be a place to find employment or build a business that inspires dreams of social ascent. For others, it is a place of socialization, respite, and acceptance, even a place in which interactions that one might expect to take place at home occur. In all of these cases, the popular mall becomes a place of dwelling, where people find opportunities to stabilize or improve their lives materially in a way that inspires hope and plans for the future, generating a feeling of social embeddedness.

However, dwelling in Paseo La Estación is also necessarily connected to and limited by experiences of socioeconomic uncertainty and exclusion in Buenos Aires more generally. As Millar (2018) shows in analyzing life at a Brazilian garbage dump, the constraints people face in all areas of life must be included in an analysis of how people engage in life-building. The popular mall, like the garbage dump, extends a precarious form of being-in-the-world that does not preclude place-making and dwelling but provides such efforts with a fragile frame. As experiences of uncertainty and exclusion converge in the popular mall, they contribute to the negative connotations associated with it. Workers can feel "trapped" in the mall for many hours of poorly paid work that does not help them fulfill their aspirations. Others become filled with anxiety at the sight of abandoned shops emerging due to the economic recession. And those who socialize while staying in the mall temporarily avoid it when the expectations of and inquiries into one another's way of life, characteristic of intensifying relationships, become too burdensome.

The examples mentioned in this chapter offer essential insights into the ambivalent nature of socialities that occur in places of transit (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume). The relationships described in this chapter were sometimes perceived as a vital reason to stay in or return to the popular mall. However, the same relationships were also, at times, perceived as burdensome. For example, mutual support in unequal relationships exposed people to unfulfilled expectations and critical evaluations.

Temporary dwellings, even if they alternate with moments of distancing, are crucial for people to establish their sense of place. These temporary dwellings are made possible through relationships of relative openness that can emerge in a place like the popular mall. In these place-based relationships, affective engagement and care for one another play central roles. At the same time, they leave room for temporary avoidances when necessary, which, in turn, can help maintain relationships in precarious conditions despite their contradictions and the vulnerabilities that float to the surface in conflict situations.

Building on these insights, analyzing the popular mall enables us to see how anchoring and unsettling qualities of place (Drotbohm and Winters, this volume) come together. In the popular mall, emplacement and dis-

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

placement are not reduceable to an either-or; people are not either totally in or out of place, mobile or immobile, socially connected or isolated. Rather, in this case, as in other areas of transit, moments of passing and transiting alternate with moments of staying and dwelling, while moments of sociable interaction alternate with moments of avoidance. This also means that conflict and avoidance are not equivalent to the endpoints of emplacement. On the contrary, alternating avoidances and reappearances illustrate the stubbornness of people who attempt to make places and dwell in them.

Franziska Reiffen completed her PhD at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at Mainz University and currently works for the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes). In her dissertation, "The Social Life of the Mall: Working and Dwelling in Urban Argentina," she analyzes how migrant and non-migrant city dwellers become emplaced through work, consumption, protest, and social connections.

NOTES

1. All names in this chapter have been changed.
2. This research was made possible by funding from the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes), which provided me with a three-year doctoral scholarship, and the Gutenberg Council for Young Researchers, which funded an exploratory research stay. I would also like to thank the editors of this volume and the reviewer for their critical reading and helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.
3. For migrants in Argentina, whether they are citizens from another MERCOSUR member or associated state or not makes an important difference, as migrants from these states do not need visas to legally move within MERCOSUR and enjoy facilitated access to temporary residency permits (MERCOSUR 2014).
4. In July 2018, when I collected these figures, the average euro–peso exchange rate was 32.3.

REFERENCES

Aceska, Ana, and Barbara Heer. 2019. "Everyday Encounters in the Shopping Mall: (Un) Making Boundaries in the Divided Cities of Johannesburg and Mostar." *Anthropological Forum* 29(1): 47–61.

Acosta Arcarazo, Diego, and Luisa Feline Freier. 2015. "Turning the Immigration Policy Paradox Upside Down? Populist Liberalism and Discursive Gaps in South America." *International Migration Review* 49(3): 659–96.

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. New York: Verso.

Auyero, Javier. 2012. *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Caldeira, Teresa P. R. 2000. *City of Walls. Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in Sao Paulo.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cerrutti, Marcela. 2018. "Migrantes y migraciones: Nuevas tendencias y dinámicas." In *La Argentina en el siglo XXI: Cómo somos, vivimos y convivimos en una sociedad desigual*, edited by Juan Ignacio Piovani and Agustín Salvia, 443–65. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.

Cifras. 2020. "Precio del M2 de un departamento en CABA." *Cifras*, 16 December 2020. Retrieved 30 March 2023 from https://www.cifrasonline.com.ar/precio-del-m2-de-un-departamento-en-caba/.

Cravino, María Cristina. 2018. "Evolución cuantitativa y transformaciones cualitativas de los asentamientos populares del Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (1980–2015)." In *La ciudad (re)negada: Aproximaciones al estudio de asentamientos populares en nueve ciudades argentinas*, edited by María Cristina Cravino, 67–101. Los Polvorines: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento.

Dávila, Arlene. 2016. *El Mall: The Spatial and Class Politics of Shopping Malls in Latin America.* Oakland: University of California Press.

Dirsuweit, Teresa, and Florian Schattauer. 2004. "Fortresses of Desire: Melrose Arch and the Emergence of Urban Tourist Spectacles." *GeoJournal* 60: 239–47.

Drotbohm, Heike. 2015. "Shifting Care among Families, Social Networks and State Institutions in Times of Crisis: A Transnational Cape Verdean Perspective." In *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life Course*, edited by Erdmute Alber and Heike Drotbohm, 93–116. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Drotbohm, Heike. 2022. "Care beyond Repair." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 23 March 2022. Retrieved 30 March 2023 from https://oxfordre.com/anthropology/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.001.0001/acrefore-9780190854584-e-411?rskey=9Yodlx.

Fernández-Álvarez, María Inés. 2016. "Experiencias de precariedad, creación de derechos y producción colectiva de bienestar(es) desde la economía popular." *Revista Ensambles* 3(4–5): 72–89.

Forment, Carlos A. 2015. "Ordinary Ethics and the Emergence of Plebeian Democracy across the Global South: Buenos Aires's La Salada Market." *Current Anthropology* 56 (Supplement 11): 116–25.

Glick Schiller, Nina, and Ayşe Çağlar. 2016. "Displacement, Emplacement and Migrant Newcomers: Rethinking Urban Sociabilities within Multiscalar Power." *Identities* 23: 17–34.

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6): 1360–80.

Grimson, Alejandro, and Gabriel Kessler. 2005. *On Argentina and the Southern Cone: Neoliberalism and National Imaginations*. New York: Routledge.

Han, Clara. 2012. *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.

Ingold, Tim. 2011. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, Peter, Michaels Rowlands, and Daniel Miller. 1998. *Shopping, Place and Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR). 2014. "Acuerdo sobre residencia para nacionales de los Estados partes MERCOSUR." Refworld.org. Retrieved 30 January 2024 from https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/54f46f934.pdf.

Millar, Kathleen M. 2018. *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio's Garbage Dump*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Miller, Jacob C. 2013. "The Spatial Dialectics of Modernity and Retail Affect at Abasto Shopping, Buenos Aires, Argentina." *Urban Geography* 34(6): 843–63.

Petty, James. 2016. "The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of 'Hostile Architecture.'" *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 5(1): 67–81.

Ramsay, Georgina. 2017. "Incommensurable Futures and Displaced Lives: Sovereignty as Control over Time." *Public Culture* 29(3): 515–38.

Reiffen, Franziska. 2018. "Bench Acquaintances: Finding One's Place in a Buenos Aires Shopping Centre." *Allegra Lab*. Retrieved 30 March 2023 from https://allegralaboratory.net/bench-acquaintances-finding-ones-place-in-a-buenos-aires-shopping-centre-displacement/.

Reiffen, Franziska, and Heike Drotbohm. 2023. "Südamerika." In *Handbuch der Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung*, edited by Marcel Berlinghoff, Birgit Glorius, J. Olaf Kleist, and Tabea Scharrer, 769–74. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Simmel, Georg. 1949. "The Sociology of Sociability." Translated by Everett C. Hughes. *American Journal of Sociology* 55(3): 254–61.

Stillerman, Joel. 2015. *The Sociology of Consumption: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stillerman, Joel, and Rodrigo Salcedo. 2012. "Transposing the Urban to the Mall: Routes, Relationships, and Resistance in Two Santiago, Chile, Shopping Centers." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 41(3): 309–36.

Tošić, Jelena, and Annika Lems. 2019. "African-European Trajectories of Im/mobility: Exploring Entanglements of Experiences, Legacies, and Regimes of Contemporary Migration." *Migration and Society* 2: 1–11.

Vammen, Ida M. S. 2018. *The Madness of Migration: An Ethnographic Account of Senegalese Migrants' Mobility and Lives in Buenos Aires*. Frederiksberg: SL grafik.

Wilkis, Ariel. 2018. *The Moral Power of Money: Morality and Economy in the Life of the Poor*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. "An Ethics of Dwelling and a Politics of World-Building: A Critical Response to Ordinary Ethics." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20: 746–64.

The electronic open access publication of (Un)Settling Place has been made available under a
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license as a part of the Berghahn Open Migration and Development Studies initiative.
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805398103. Not for resale.