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The appeal to culture as an argument for socio-spatial segregation *L'appel de la culture comme un argument pour la ségrégation socio-spatiale*

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The purpose of this study is to illustrate how culture acts as both an argument for urban improvement and as an evicting agent of “undesirable” inhabitants in the city of Buenos Aires. In fact, certain state-fostered *culture cults* (Delgado 1998) arise along with social deterioration and increasingly alarming spatial injustice. The hypothesis I will try to explain here is that although it stems from an supposed spirit of universality, the state-driven cultural policy transforms the city into a unique, special place, and consequently, more worthy of socio-spatial segregation processes. In fact, the city can be temporarily “inhabited” for the occasion, but we are not allowed to permanently reside in it unless we possess all the attributes of a good citizen.

To account for this tension between cultural inclusion and socio-spatial exclusion, I will analyze the case of two low-income settlements which are currently being evicted by the local government to clear land for the development of an open space along the coast of the River Plate, the city’s eastern boundary. In fact, the realization of this project depends solely on the displacement of those settlements as well as on the expulsion of their “undesirable” residents.

The most widely spread official policy focuses on attaching green areas to the city coast both to enlarge the *Reserva Ecológica (Ecological Reserve)* and foster luxurious private urbanization projects (in the case of Costanera Norte and Puerto Madero), and also to build a memorial park to honor the victims of Argentina’s last military dictatorship, the “*desaparecidos*” (Costanera Norte). Moreover, the local government has recently proposed this coastal area as a UNESCO cultural landscape site.

Nevertheless, the official policy resorts to less visible courses of action such as poor housing subsidies and subtle manipulation and extortion by public officers to speed the expulsion of those “undesirable” groups. This policy concerning the displacement of low-income groups from the city’s most prestigious areas may be explained in terms of spatial inequality since it does not only deepen the current socio-urban segregation process but it also discloses an authoritarian viewpoint with regard to which social groups “deserve” to live in the heart of the city of Buenos Aires, the alleged “cultural Capital of Latin America”.

Furthermore, I will explain how these arguments regarding the eviction of these people from key urban areas focus on the *cultural advantages* deriving from the recovery of such public spaces. The paradox lies in that these popular groups are noticed only when they become a menace: a menace which threatens to damage, to hinder the *aura* of nature, of our heritage or of our collective memory. The apparently democratic cultural policy of public space enjoyment entails a fictitious integration, and at the same time, renders all the vestiges of state violence unreal.