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The homocapitalist politics of queer tourism: global LGBTQ+ activism, queer travel, and other queer mobilities in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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ABSTRACT



The article sheds ethnographic light on the homocapitalist politics of queer tourism in Argentina. Tracing the growing incorporation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) inclusion into the country's tourist offer as a "global brand," it interrogates how different forms of access to queer mobility, liberation, and privilege unfold across different "zones of encounter" within the landscape of queer tourism in Buenos Aires. I suggest that while homocapitalist investments in queer tourism strongly resonate with an entrepreneurial class of global(ized) elite LGBTQ+ activists and small business owners who are able to "sell liberation" by forging partnerships with tourism authorities and corporations, their effects are more ambivalent for those who are unable and/or unwilling to appropriate the products and processes of globalization in pursuit of their own goals. These tensions come to the fore in the city's LGBTQ+ nightlife, where encounters between local sexualities and the mobile subjectivities of Global North LGBTQ+ tourists take place against the backdrop of global economic crisis, economic precarity, and inequalities within lesbian, gay, bisexual, *travesti*, trans, transexual, and intersex (LGBTITI) communities.

KEYWORDS Queer tourism; homocapitalism; LGBTQ+ activism; global economic crisis; neoliberalism

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Introduction

It was 9 a.m. at the Alvear Hotel, a luxurious Parisian-style hotel in the heart of the sophisticated neighborhood of Recoleta in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Some of the biggest names in the region's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) tourism industry were pouring out of cars and making their way through the golden atrium past rows of luxury shops to the welcome

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session of the Gnetwork360 conference. Sponsored by KLM and Delta Airlines, this is the biggest LGBTQ+ tourism event in Latin America, bringing together LGBTQ+ activists and entrepreneurs as well as representatives from global corporations, international LGBTQ+ organizations, and local/national tourism authorities to foreground the importance of queer travel dollars for the private sector and to promote Argentina as a global queer tourist destination with remarkable LGBTQ+-friendly appeal.

Investments in queer tourism such as this can be read as an example of what Rahul Rao (2015, 2020) refers to as “homocapitalism”: an ideology “forged in interaction between elite LGBT activists and technocrats in international financial institutions (IFIs)” that promises a “rosy future redolent with growth and productivity” to states that embrace LGBTQ+ rights (Rao 2020, 25, 12). As a weapon of global governmentality, homocapitalism marks out certain sites and “race-, class- and gender-sanitized queers” (Rao 2015, 47) as laden with economic potential but others as “backwards” or “unproductive” (see also Wahab 2021). As an analytic, homocapitalism helps us to understand the ways in which queerness is converted into a mechanism of capital accumulation as well as to trace the effects of this for those who are unable and/or unwilling to become “productive” according to capitalist logics (see also Charrett 2021). While Rao does not explicitly discuss queer tourism in his work on homocapitalism, I suggest that it provides an interesting opportunity to investigate the tensions that emerge when LGBTQ+ inclusion become tethered to the demands of capital.

Tourism is a remarkably under-researched topic in international politics (for exceptions, see Lisle 2016; Lynn Kelly 2020; Puar 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Wahab 2021). Yet, queer tourism remains “one of the most important aspects of the globalization of sexuality and sexual identities” (Puar 2002a, 1). Its exponential growth has been facilitated by the internationalization of corporations associated with leisure and accompanied by the transnationalization of queer lifestyles, culture, and activism (Conway 2022; Markwell 2002; Wang 2000). Indexes produced annually that rate top LGBTQ+ tourist destinations act as powerful mechanisms for “locating homophobia” (Rao 2014) and LGBTQ+-friendliness on a global scale (see also Wahab 2021). Homocapitalist investments are in turn lubricated by increasingly globalized networks of LGBTQ+ activists, who partner with global corporations and international LGBTQ+ organizations such as the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as well as national tourism authorities to promote queer travel as beneficial to local economies and integral to queer people’s own liberation (Ten Eyck 2021).

While most accounts have tended to emphasize the political and economic benefits of queer tourism, homocapitalist investments in queer travel should be considered in relation to “differential mobilities of queer travelling subjects” (Puar 2002b, 939). In particular, we should contextualize the

emergent queer mobilities of (predominantly white middle-class) gay and lesbian tourists from the Global North in relation not only to the increasing hardening of borders – both physical and normative – for queer Others who are under “global lockdown” (Agathangelou 2008), but also to local sexualities who are “touristed upon” (Puar 2002c, 126), who maintain tourist infrastructures, who do not fit the image of the gay and lesbian economically privileged consumer, or who continue to be marginalized by extant relations of imperial global capital accumulation (see also Alexander 2006; Padilla 2007; Puar 2002c). In this vein, I suggest that queer tourism – understood both as a lucrative industry and as a “zone of encounter” (Wahab 2021, 81) that ultimately reflects many of the violences of global capitalism – is an interesting site within which to explore the complex entanglement of sexuality, capitalism, and globalization in the context of international politics.

This article sheds ethnographic light on investments in queer tourism in Argentina, exploring what new queer politics are emerging from homocapitalist promises of a “rosy future redolent with growth and productivity,” and who ultimately benefits from proliferating opportunities for queer tourist consumption. I focus in particular on two “zones of encounter” within the context of queer tourism in Buenos Aires. The first is that between LGBTQ+ activists and entrepreneurs, and global corporations, international LGBTQ+ organizations, and local/national tourism authorities at LGBTQ+ tourism conferences such as Gnetwork360, organized by the Cámara de Comercio Gay Lésbica Argentina (CCGLAR), the Argentinian LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce. The second is that between local sexualities and more globalized notions of queerness emerging in one of Buenos Aires’ most irresistible queer tourist attractions: its LGBTQ+ nightlife.

Thinking about how different forms of access to queer mobility, liberation, and privilege unfold across these different “zones of encounter,” I suggest that homocapitalist investments in queer tourism attempt to convert queerness into a good to be sold on the market as part of the tourist offer by portraying an image of Buenos Aires as an LGBTQ+-friendly destination for global queer tourist consumption. While these investments strongly resonate with an entrepreneurial class of global(ized) elite LGBTQ+ activists and small business owners who are able to “sell liberation,” their effects are more ambivalent for those who are unable and/or unwilling to appropriate the products and processes of globalization in pursuit of their own goals. These tensions come to the fore in Buenos Aires’ LGBTQ+ nightlife, where encounters between local sexualities and the mobile subjectivities of (predominantly white middle-class) queer tourists (and ethnographers) from the Global North take place against the backdrop of global economic crisis, precarity, and inequalities within lesbian, gay, bisexual, *travesti*, trans, transexual, and intersex (LGBTITI) communities. In particular, I suggest that the production of LGBTQ+ bars and *boliches* (clubs) as liberating “playgrounds” (Collins 2009) for US gay male

consumption largely relies on the labor of local queers who not only experience the violences, but also contest the homocapitalist logics, of queer tourism.

Through the article, I use “queer” both as a (more or less accurate) synonym for “LGBTQ+” (such as in “queer tourism”) and as a critical analytic that is theoretically and politically at odds with mainstream gay and lesbian politics and critical of its manifold race, class, and gender privileges (see Duggan 2003). I hold onto both of these meanings of “queer” not only to address some of the problems regarding the (forever incomplete) enumeration of gender/sexual identity categories, but also to open up a space for alternative readings of queer mobility beyond those promoted by mainstream LGBTQ+ travel organizations largely for the benefit of economically privileged gay white men and lesbians from the Global North. When referring to Argentinian queer communities and activism, I use the acronym “LGBTTTI” because it is far more widely used than “LGBTQ+,” which I instead use when discussing international LGBTQ+ organizations and globalized networks of LGBTQ+ travel activists.

Argentina offers an interesting case study because it “reveals global capitalism both from above and below” (Conway 2023, 736), with global elites and “entrepreneurial oligarchs” (Zimmerman 2019) who control much of the country’s wealth existing in the same space as the globally marginalized whose lives have been devastated by decades of neoliberal policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Proliferating opportunities for queer tourist consumption are intricately tied to both economic crisis and advances in the field of LGBTQ+ rights. These contradictions unfold through the lives of local LGBTTTI communities, whose experiences of queerness are heavily fragmented along lines of wealth, class, gender, race, and urbanity/rurality (Kanai 2015).

Situating investments in queer tourism and new forms of queer mobility within a broader critique of neoliberal capitalism and economic crisis, the article contributes to extant debates about the neoliberalization and de-politicization of LGBTQ+ activism and queer politics (see Agathangelou 2008; Burchiellaro 2022; Conway 2022; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2013; Rao 2020). It challenges the homocapitalist logics of global LGBTQ+ activist efforts that embrace emergent forms of queer travel and mobility as evidence of “progress” and “liberation.” Tracing the effects of these homocapitalist investments in the context of Buenos Aires’ LGBTQ+ nightlife, the article also demonstrates the significance of LGBTQ+ bars and *boliches* as important yet often overlooked sites of global politics.

Methodology

The analytical work underpinning this article is based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Buenos Aires between August and

December 2022 at the Gnetwork360 conference and in the city's spaces of LGBTQ+ nightlife. I wrote extensive fieldnotes documenting my observations and reflections across these different "zones of encounter," sometimes transcribed from voice notes recorded on my phone. In these spaces, I spoke to both tourists – mostly gay male *gringos* (a term used to refer to foreigners from the United States (US) and/or Europe) and especially *yankees* (a term used to refer specifically to foreigners from the US) – as well as local Argentinians who worked in the tourist sector as tour guides or bartenders, cleaners, and security guards at local LGBTQ+ bars and *boliches*. All interactions with tourists were conducted in English while interactions with locals were conducted in Spanish. Alongside participant observation, I also draw on an analysis of online articles, queer tourist blogs, social media posts, and comment threads "to understand the terrain of debates and contestations" (Wahab 2021, 81) within which queer tourism in Buenos Aires unfolds.

As Jasbir Puar (2002a, 1) notes, one of the reasons why tourism remains such an under-researched topic is because it "intrudes on many of our personal and professional desires for mobility and travel." As an Italian who identifies as a lesbian and lives and works in London, my experience of fieldwork was predicated not only on the desire but also on the economic privilege to participate in economies of queer tourist consumption. During my stay in Buenos Aires, I lived in the fashionable area of Palermo, close to many of the commercial LGBTQ+ bars and *boliches*, with easy access to dollars to be exchanged at a favorable rate to fund my own queer tourist-ethnographer mobile lifestyle. At the same time, however, sites of queer tourist consumption that tend to privilege gay men can also be sites of exclusion and marginalization for lesbians (see Puar 2002b).

Moreover, because I am fluent in Spanish, because I stayed in the city for much longer than most tourists do, and because Italians have a somewhat privileged position within the Argentinian national imagination, I was also able to develop close relationships with local participants, especially those working in LGBTQ+ bars and *boliches*, where I would spend most of my nights. Such closeness affected our topics of discussion; yet, it was only after our third or fourth meeting that participants began truly reflecting on their (often fraught) interactions with tourists and tourist economies. It also enabled access as I began socializing with participants beyond "the field" (however defined) and meeting friends who also worked in LGBTQ+ tourist sectors. At the same time, however, my economic privilege continued to inflect our interactions and my lived experiences of tourist spaces. For example, on more than one occasion, a participant jokingly invited me to "go hang out with your people [tourists] in places I can't afford." My fieldwork is a product of these complex ethical entanglements, desires, positionalities, privileges, and mobilities that constitute my "place of speech"

(Ribeiro 2019) and that I attempt to unpack through the ethnographic material.

The politics of queer tourism in Argentina: LGBTQ+ rights and economic crisis

Over the last decade, Argentina has emerged as a highly attractive LGBTQ+ tourist destination. The country is consistently recognized as one of the top five LGBTQ+ tourist destinations in the Spartacus Gay Travel Index. In 2020, it was selected as “Best International LGBT+ Tourism Destination” at the Latin American International Tourism Fair (FITUR). Travel experts estimate that about 20 percent (approximately 300,000) of Argentina’s annual tourists are LGBTQ+ and that they spend around \$600 million a year, 30 percent more than other tourist groups (Barrionuevo 2007). Of these, 70 percent choose to remain in Buenos Aires, making the city one of the most visited destinations in Latin America. A 2017 survey conducted by the local tourism board of Buenos Aires also emphasizes the considerable spending power of queer tourists to the city, finding that over half of these belong to one of the consumer groups that has been most attractive to marketers in recent years: single gay men without children (Turismo Buenos Aires 2017; see also Puar 2002b).

Argentina experienced a particularly marked tourism boom after the macroeconomic crisis and devaluation of the peso in 2001, which rendered the country especially affordable for LGBTQ+ tourists and foreign currency holders from the US and Europe. The crisis was the result of an extreme neoliberal policy implemented by the IMF and the government of conservative impresario Mauricio Macri, who borrowed obscene amounts of money that he used to finance his election campaign and line the pockets of his rich friends while subsidizing capital flight. The outcome was decades of economic crisis with unprecedented levels of unemployment, inflation, and poverty. As queer activists and feminists suggest, the effects of the crisis were especially pronounced across gender/sexuality lines (Cavallero and Gago 2020; Conversaciones Feministas 2009). It also spurred a massive wave of emigration, the largest since the military dictatorship (1976–1983). Those who could – mostly Argentinians of European descent – left; those who could not stayed and paid the IMF’s bill. I suggest that recent investments in queer tourism and travel to Argentina cannot be examined unless we consider these other mobilities and the racialized, classed, and gendered experiences of those Argentinians, queer or otherwise, who have been displaced and/or unable to escape the violences of neoliberal capitalism.

The legalization of same-sex marriage in 2010 also paved the way for the country to be recognized as a new mecca for gay marriage tourism, with queer tourists increasingly choosing Argentina as a wedding destination

and taking advantage of fast-track same-sex marriage ceremonies that allow international visitors to get married in under five days (Kanai 2015). At the state level, the adoption of LGBTQ+ rights was not driven by homocapitalist logics; rather, legalization was supported by post-crisis government as part of a new rhetoric of rights enhancement that sought to establish a paradigm shift against neoliberalism and a decade of IMF-imposed structural adjustment and austerity cuts (Cutuli and Keller 2015). At the same time, however, LGBTQ+ rights also became a way of managing particular dimensions of the crisis of capitalism and, as activist Alejandra Sardá (2008) points out, of satisfying “some of the movement’s most urgent ... symbolic demands” while simultaneously sidelining redistributive concerns and co-opting some activists into the machinery of party politics.

While LGBTQ+ rights were “by no means gifts” from the government (Sardá 2008), LGBTQ+ inclusion became increasingly institutionalized as part of the tourist offer as a “global brand.” At the national level, public policy experts have sought to attract LGBTQ+ tourists by promoting the country as a queer-friendly destination (Kanai 2015). The national tourism board explicitly targets LGBTQ+ tourists in its marketing and promotional material (Visit Argentina 2022; see also Kanai 2015). At a more local level, the entrepreneurial and autonomous local government of Buenos Aires has also sought to aggressively court queer dollars, pounds, and euros by representing the city as the LGBTQ+-friendly capital of Latin America and including a diverse geography of LGBTQ+ spaces and activities in its tourist offer (see Kanai 2015; *Turismo12Ar* 2022; *Turismo Buenos Aires* 2017; UNWTO 2017).

News coverage celebrating Argentina’s emergence as a new mecca for gay tourism often contrasts LGBTQ+ -friendliness with the country’s previous association with “macho men, high testosterone levels, thick slices of red beef and beautiful women” (Goni 2004; see also Barrionuevo 2007). Here the proliferation of opportunities for queer tourist consumption is in itself taken as a sign of queer progress that marks the country’s accelerated entry into modernity; through the presence of queer tourists, Argentina is leaving behind its “backwardness” and “the repressed, conservative mores that prevailed under military rule” (*Gay Buenos Aires 4U* 2021) and, moving ahead on a global map of progress, is proving itself to be, finally, modern, democratic, and contemporary (see also Giorgi 2002). Queer tourists are encouraged to validate such an entry into modernity and “spend [their] pink dollars” to reward extant investments in LGBTQ+ inclusion (Ocean 2010). As discussed later in the article, from the perspective of (predominantly) gay white male tourists from the US, it is this specific deployment of both “backwards”/exotic (Latin American) yet ultimately modern/familiar (European) racialized tropes that renders Argentina – and its men – particularly attractive.

The new politics of rainbow inclusion may certainly be attractive to LGBTQ+ tourist providers, business owners, and entrepreneurs who benefit

from influxes of (mostly English-speaking) LGBTQ+ international tourists. However, not everyone stands to gain from the promotion of international LGBTQ+ consumption, and investments in queer tourism can also generate exclusions and new internalized differentiations and hierarchies within local LGBTTTI communities. First, as Miguel Kanai (2015) suggests, investments in LGBTQ+ tourism have largely benefited cosmopolitan professional and middle-class locals, who use international terms such as “gay” and “gay-friendly” to make sense of their everyday experiences, over older gay men such as those interviewed by Ernesto Meccia (2011), who came of age during the military dictatorship in a period of secrecy and persecution and for whom such terms represent the emergence of a youth-oriented gay consumer culture. Second, investments in queer tourism do not necessarily signify more inclusive sexual landscapes for residents and often run the risk of becoming performative acts that privilege international visitors (Kanai 2015). For several years now, queer activists with links to more left-leaning and dissident movements have challenged tourist attractions such as Buenos Aires Pride by organizing a *contramarcha* (counter-parade) behind the official march and chanting their own anti-capitalist slogans. In this sense, investments in LGBTQ+ tourism can be understood as forms of pinkwashing that work to represent Argentina externally as an LGBTQ+-friendly destination while ignoring – and sometimes exacerbating – internal inequalities and divisions by replacing radical (albeit covert) queer spaces with more commodified venues (Figari 2017; Lynn Kelly 2020; Simonetto 2017; Zimmerman 2019).

Indeed, while for (predominantly) middle-class gay men, the emergence of Buenos Aires as a new destination for international LGBTQ+ tourism has been largely welcomed as evidence of “progress,” for politically minded lesbians or *travestis* such those interviewed by Soledad Cutuli (2012) and Aluminé Moreno (2010), or for queers such as members of the queer organization Putos Peronistas (discussed later in the article) who live outside of the main metropolitan areas and more markedly experience the everyday links between poverty and gender-based discrimination, the limitations of such commercialized spectacles are more pronounced (see *Conversaciones Feministas* 2009). Thus, while important advances in the realm of LGBTQ+ inclusion have contributed to making Argentina into a LGBTQ+-friendly tourist destination, this seems to mostly benefit those who are already rewarded by existing capitalist relations of accumulation and marginalize those queer Others who are systematically failed by the system.

Queer tourism and homocapitalism

Mainstream queer tourism publications and organizations suggest that queer tourism can benefit countries by “associating their brand image with acceptance, inclusiveness and diversity” (UNWTO 2017, 10). Queer tourism has

played a key role in promoting the global appeal of established LGBTQ+-friendly destinations such as Tel Aviv (Lynn Kelly 2020), Sydney (Markwell 2002), Cape Town (Oswin 2015), London (Hubbard and Wilkinson 2015), and Madrid (Giorgi 2002). Queer tourism has also reached Latin America, where cities such as Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Bogota now regularly compete to capture flows of queer tourists traveling to the region as a new LGBTQ+-friendly destination (Corrales 2010; Lamond 2018). These destinations are often configured as sites where (predominantly white middle-class) tourists from the US and Europe can consume local (queer) culture(s) in exoticizing ways that reproduce colonial relations and racialized stereotypes about the sexual availability of “native” masculinities (Cantú 2002; Mitchell 2015; see also Alexander 2006; Padilla 2007).

With an estimated worth of \$17 billion, queer tourism is also increasingly promoted as “a powerful vehicle for economic development” (UNWTO 2017, 8). Queer tourism functions in this way through an articulation of the discourses of LGBTQ+ rights and economic prosperity, both as a “diagnosis of the times” (Giorgi 2002, 58) that marks out certain sites and populations – predominantly across Africa and the Caribbean – as “backwards” (see Puar 2002c; Wahab 2021) and as a homocapitalist promise of growth and productivity that points toward a “rosy future redolent with growth and productivity” for destinations that embrace LGBTQ+ rights. In Latin America, queer tourism has become tied to broader neoliberal urban strategies of place promotion that capitalize on significant advances in LGBTQ+ rights to promote cities as “open for business” (Kanai 2015; Open for Business 2022). While queer tourism was obviously curtailed by COVID-19, this has not undermined its seductive force as a vehicle for economic prosperity; on the contrary, it actually seems to have reignited confidence in its productive potential to contribute to economic recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic (Miller 2020).

Queer travel bloggers who describe themselves as “activists” promote LGBTQ+ travel as a way to express pride and encounter a newfound sense of liberation (Ten Eyck 2021). LGBTQ+ activists have also embraced the benefits of queer tourism by suggesting that queer travel can boost local economies and correct biases by exposing local communities to greater LGBTQ+ visibility. As Puar (2002c, 124) notes, the queer tourism industry increasingly uses the rhetoric of queer liberation in tandem with “the power of the pink dollar” to “fuel consumers’ interests.” International travel organizations such as the IGLTA and the UNWTO have also worked to promote tourism to local activists and “sell liberation” to tourists as a tool for queer progress (Luongo 2002; Prager 2020). In this sense, tourism can no longer simply be understood as a pleasurable “escape” from the inauthenticity of everyday life under modern capitalism (see for example MacCannell 1976); it is also increasingly emerging as a form of “activism” that is seen to

advance the goals of both business and queer liberation (see also Mitchell 2015). I suggest, following others (Conway 2023; Rao 2020), that this is but one example of the replacement of queer politics with a capitalist politics that is characteristic of homocapitalism and that ultimately obscures issues of precarity, (im)mobility, social injustice, neoliberal violence, and privilege in global politics.

Underpinning queer tourism is a neoliberal discourse of visibility and mobility that celebrates particularly mobile, cosmopolitan, and privileged individualized consumer lifestyles – especially those of white gay men and lesbians from the Global North – while marginalizing those who do not have access to such forms of queer travel (Collins 2009; Mitchell 2015). Indeed, scholars have pointed out that queer tourism can reproduce class inequalities and colonial relations, particularly in Global South contexts marginalized through a global neoliberal economy (Puar 2002c; Wahab 2021). Scholars have also suggested that queer tourism can lead to the expansion of commodified spaces of queer tourist consumption in ways that reproduce exploitation and privilege global – and ostensibly North Americanized – gay identities, cultures, categories, and lifestyles over local sexualities (Cantú 2002; Kanai 2015; Lamond 2018; Puar 2002c; Wahab 2021).

At the same time, however, I also contend that we should refrain from positing the “global” in global queer tourism simply in opposition to a pure, resistant, and subaltern “local.” Indeed, local activists have at times invoked the economic promises of queer tourism themselves in a bid to “turn both the state and the business sector more LGBT friendly” (Corrales 2010). Moreover, the kind of commodification produced by global queer tourist consumption is neither complete nor unchallenged. While queer tourism has facilitated the “expansion of commodified space” (Cantú 2002, 160), the effects of this can be both exploitative and liberating (Mitchell 2015). Rather than drawing facile dichotomies, a growing body of scholarship has instead sought to analyze the flows, exchanges, and contradictions between global aspirations for queer modernity and localized resistances (Manalansan 2015; Puar 2002c). I too suggest that, rather than merely being “touristed upon,” local sexualities both lubricate and contest extant homocapitalist investments in queer tourism, revealing the tensions that emerge from various encounters between local elites with global aspirations, economically privileged and mobile queer tourists, and the different queer mobilities of local queer subjects who work within and at the margins of Buenos Aires’ economies of queer tourist consumption.

“Selling liberation”: the Gnetwork360 tourism conference

Gnetwork360 is an annual LGBTQ+ tourism conference organized by CCGLAR. Created in 2009, CCGLAR works with the Argentinian National Tourism

Promotion Institute to promote the country as a top international destination for queer tourists. For the past decade, CCGLAR has been one of the main drivers of investments in LGBTQ+ tourism not only in Argentina but in the wider region, with direct impact on public policy both nationally and internationally. In 2010, it produced the first piece of market research on LGBTQ+ tourism in Latin America; in 2020, it successfully pushed for the adoption of a National LGBTQ+ Tourism Day in Argentina and other 27 countries.

CCGLAR's influence on public discourse and policy regarding LGBTQ+ tourism partly stems from its ability to establish partnerships with global corporations, tourism agencies, and LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs as well as international LGBTQ+ organizations such as the IGLTA, the UNWTO, and Out & Equal to assert the importance of queer travel dollars for economic development and the private sector. The Gnetwork360 conference is one of the main sites for the establishment of these kind of partnerships. As CCGLAR's main annual event, the conference regularly attracts over 1,000 people from over 20 countries for three days of activities including workshops, presentations, and expositions. I suggest that the event is an important "zone of encounter" in the politics of queer tourism, acting not only as a way of showcasing businesses and destinations that embrace LGBTQ+ inclusion and promoting Argentina as a desirable LGBTQ+-friendly tourist destination, but also as a site where local LGBTQ+ activists and entrepreneurs can forge partnerships and "sell liberation" to global corporations and international LGBTQ+ travel organizations. Ultimately, it is through events such as this that LGBTQ+ inclusion becomes markedly tied to global homocapitalist logics that seek to extrapolate the productive potential of queerness (see also Zimmerman 2019).

I took a seat in a stylish conference room of the Alvear Hotel, where around 40 tables were arranged facing the stage. The lights were dim and a series of videos from the corporate sponsors were being projected onto the main screen. "KLM wishes everyone a wonderful Pride," "At Avianca we celebrate diversity," "My favourite thing about Delta is that I can be myself": the words echoed across the room as latecomers took their seats. In the opening speech, Gustavo Noguera, co-founder of CCGLAR, thanked the sponsors as well as the Ministry of Tourism for their support, acknowledging that "companies have come a long way in recognizing that the value of diversity is the way."

Over the course of the next three days, I attended over 30 talks on the importance of LGBTQ+-friendly tourist destinations, products, services, and workplaces. One of the key messages emanating from the speakers was that LGBTQ+ inclusion is not only good on moral grounds but also, crucially, good for business. "Pride generates a lot of money for the city," explained a representative from an LGBTQ+ tourism company. A representative from the

official government tourism agency also suggested that Buenos Aires is an “inclusive city because it is strategic,” explaining that LGBTQ+ tourists bring over \$600 million to the city every year. This sizeable market of LGBTQ+ tourists fuels an industry of both local and US-based entrepreneurs such as Laetitia Orsetti, who gave a talk on the economic benefits of inclusion and her LGBTQ+ wedding-planning business, which caters to couples from around the world who want to get married in Argentina. LGBTQ+ inclusion is also a lucrative business strategy for companies. Throughout the event, representatives from the travel company Expedia, the multinational hotel chain Accord, Delta Airlines, Accenture, IBM, and SAP also each made comments suggesting that “diversity is a key factor for business success.” Pointing to a “rosy future redolent with growth and productivity” for both destinations and businesses that embrace LGBTQ+ inclusion, such homocapitalist discourses represent queer people both as consumers with remarkable spending power and as workers whose full productive potential is unleashed when they can be themselves.

The promise of this “rosy future” also works to fold queer people into homocapitalist investments in queer tourism. “You feel like a normal person ... With this course we can have a fixed job”: these were the words of a young trans person being interviewed on camera about their experience of training to become a pastry chef as part of a trans employment program sponsored by the Argentinian Chamber of Tourism and the National Association of Hotels. The video was filmed in the kitchen of the training institute and included testimonies from a number of recent graduates, each of whom expressed a similar sentiment regarding the difficulty of finding employment and the hope that this program would help them to secure a stable job in the service industry, perhaps working in a hotel, catering a corporate conference such as this one. While such an idea might be a seductive and even logical response to exclusion, there are limits to the premising of inclusion on queer people’s ability and willingness to be(come) “valuable” to business (Conway 2023; David 2016; Irving 2008; Rao 2020). Indeed, such neoliberal discourses offer individualized and commodified promises of upward mobility over collective liberation and erase the experiences of those queers “who are systematically shut out of these institutional worlds” (David 2016, 402; see also Irving 2008).

At the same time, however, while Gnetwork360 is first and foremost a corporate event, it also posits that investments in queer tourism should advance not only financial objectives but also the goals of queer liberation. Indeed, the event that I attended also featured LGBTQ+ activist speakers such as Alba Rueda, the first openly trans woman to hold a senior governmental position in Argentina, and a vogue performance, a dance that originated as a critique of the exclusion of queer people, particularly queer people of color, from high-society spaces such as this exclusive hotel. “Pride was a protest,”

exclaimed Nicolas Briceno, an advertising and branding guru who has worked on marketing campaigns for some of Latin America's biggest corporations. Betraying "an understanding of the political, legal, and social reality as being predicated on and refracted through corporate power" (Conway 2023, 743), investments in queer tourism thus also absorb queer activism and dissent, feeding on queer struggle and oppression, co-opting queer activist demands, and ultimately commercializing queer liberation as something cool, progressive, and modern – effectively, a good to be sold on the market.

While this vision of a more LGBTQ+ -inclusive world enabled by queer travel dollars and corporations might look and feel progressive, it is still driven by homonationalist distinctions between liberated queers in "progressive" countries and queers living in "backwards" countries who need "saving." Throughout the Gnetwork360 event, Argentina was discursively aligned with the US, Europe, and Israel as supposedly modern and democratic places imagined as regions of "friendliness" that LGBTQ+ tourists should visit. Such homonationalist discourses are the product of increasing market assimilation and are gaining traction in Argentina, aligning with the conservative agendas of (both old and new) right-wing movements and reproducing liberal white supremacist imaginaries about the need to protect "Western values" from external threats (Campos 2022; see also Puar 2002a).

Those entrepreneurial LGBTQ+ subjects who are able and willing to inhabit these institutional spaces can, in turn, use homocapitalist investments in queer tourism to "sell liberation" in pursuit of their own goals and careers. This includes less obviously purely corporate actors or "entrepreneurial oligarchs," such as LGBTQ+ small business owners, influencers, bloggers, tour guides, and other entrepreneurial members of the LGBTQ+ community. For example, Meg Ten Eyck, an award-winning US lesbian queer travel blogger and CEO of *EveryQueer*, Pol Terrera, the owner of an LGBTQ+ café in Buenos Aires, Quimey Toro, who runs the popular lesbian club night *Rose Girls*, and Mariana Radisic Koliren, co-founder of *Lunfarda Travel*, had been invited to the Gnetwork360 event that I attended as speakers and shared their thoughts on how LGBTQ+ tourism has helped them to grow their businesses. I suggest that, while corporate investments in LGBTQ+ tourism are clearly part and parcel of a global homocapitalist logic that is unable "to imagine queers as (wanting to be) anything other than upwardly mobile capitalist subjects" (Rao 2020, 147), they are also lubricated by and strongly resonate with an entrepreneurial class of elite LGBTQ+ activists who can "sell liberation" and "supersede their locality" (Puar 2002c, 125) by forging partnerships with tourism businesses and corporations "in a bid for upward mobility in a capitalist system that they have no intention of dismantling" (Rao 2020, 216).

An irresistible destination for queer tourist consumption: Buenos Aires' LGBTQ+ nightlife

Proliferating opportunities for queer consumption have come to symbolize Buenos Aires' appeal for LGBTQ+ tourists (Barrionuevo 2007). One of the city's most popular queer tourist attractions is its LGBTQ+ nightlife. This centers on a number of LGBTQ+ bars and *boliches* largely concentrated in the wealthiest or rapidly gentrifying parts of the city in neighborhoods such as Palermo and San Telmo, and explicitly marketed as part of the city's LGBTQ+-friendly tourist offer. While the majority of these spaces cater to gay men, events for lesbians are emerging. This includes Rose Girls, which Ten Eyck (2021) describes in her travel guide *EveryQueer* as "one of the best events for queer women I've ever attended," encouraging lesbian tourists to plan their trip around one of these parties.

Most of the tourists with whom I interacted during my fieldwork were white gay men from the US. From our conversations, it emerged that they strongly favored commercialized parties playing pop or techno music (such as Peuteo, Amerika, Club69, and Fiesta Plop) over more historic establishments such as Contramano (described by one tourist as "old" and "boring"), cultural venues such as Feliza Arcoiris (in which the language barrier often prevents tourists from participating in events), and venues that predominantly play reggaeton and/or cumbia such as Puticlu, located in the Microcentro. As with the more impoverished neighborhoods of Barracas and La Boca, travel guides discourage LGBTQ+ tourists from wandering around this "dangerous" area at night and engaging in public displays of affection "outside of the more affluent gay-popular neighbourhood of Palermo" (*Queer in the World* 2023; see also Arestis 2023). Yet, unlike the more commercialized venues in Palermo, Puticlu hosts activist events, caters to local queers – including visibly non-binary, genderqueer, trans, and *travesti* people – and is largely ignored by official LGBTQ+ tourist marketing initiatives. An overview of the LGBTQ+ tourist nightlife offer thus reveals a number of "border tensions" (Cantú 2002) through which Buenos Aires emerges as a city of contrasts and contradictions, where affluence and poverty, homophobia and LGBTQ+ -friendliness, and the lure of consumption and the danger of homophobic attacks co-exist in a constant and "contaminating immediacy" (Giorgi 2002, 63).

These "border tensions" play out especially noticeably between local(ized) and more global(ized) notions of queerness that are incorporated into the tourist offer as products for (predominantly US gay male) tourist consumption. For example, in a bid to attract queer tourist dollars, some commercialized LGBTQ+ venues refuse to play reggaeton, cumbia, and/or funk – popular Latin American music genres that have, each in their own contexts, important associations with poor, urban, and racially marginalized youth – in favor of

more global(ized, and ostensibly North American) pop. At the same time, however, the lure of a distinctly Latino quality remains very much part of the tourist offer. LGBTQ+ travel blogs largely aimed at gay white male tourists from the US explicitly sell LGBTQ+ venues as desirable because of the possibility of meeting “gorgeous Argentinian men” (Arestis 2023) on whom to “feast your eyes” (Vacationer 2022). Such exoticizing fantasies are constructed through (homo)erotic racialized appeals to an almost primal Latino sexuality that depict Argentinian men as “almost obsessively sexual” (Out Traveler 2010; see also Arestis 2023). White gay male tourists frequently discussed the possibility of meeting local (hyper)masculine, straight-passing men (referred to as *chongos*) as one of the things that renders Buenos Aires most “exciting.” At the same time, however, such masculinity is rendered “safe” because, unlike the Mexican or Colombian kind, for example, it is ultimately characterized by the queer travel blog *Gay Buenos Aires 4U* (2021) as “unmistakably European” (that is, white) or “essentially a heady mix of Spanish ... with a large scoop of Italian thrown in.”

Underpinning these gay male tourist fantasies of sexual freedom, conquest, and exploration is a particular kind of homonormative mobile gay masculinity that, much like neoliberal masculinities more broadly, invites gay tourists to consume difference “with a focus on individualized pleasure” (Collins 2009, 469). The city’s spaces of LGBTQ+ nightlife emerge here as “playgrounds” for US white gay male tourists and as places in which they can “escape” some of the constraints of modern queer life “back home” (see also MacCannell 1976). The fact that Buenos Aires is considerably cheaper than many other Latin American LGBTQ+-friendly capitals only seems to lubricate the fantasies of US gay male tourists, who, as the popular LGBTQ+ travel magazine *Out Traveler* (2010) attests, get to “feel rich in Argentina.”

Queer travel can be read in this vein as a neoliberal lifestyle that abandons queer liberation in favor of the de-politicized search for self-actualizing experiences to consume (Collins 2009). At the same time, however, the pursuit of an individualized and pleasurable queer lifestyle is increasingly packaged as a form of queer activism (Conway 2022). This is particularly visible in the discourse of organizations such as the IGLTA, the UNWTO, and CCGLAR, as well as of queer travel bloggers who describe themselves as “activists” and suggest that queer tourism is not only pleasurable or good for business, but also advances the goals of queer liberation, benefiting local economies, rewarding states’ investments in LGBTQ+ inclusion, and promoting visibility by “revealing LGBTQ+ people to the world and the world to LGBTQ+ people” (Ten Eyck 2021; see also Puar 2002c; Mitchell 2015).

This homocapitalist reconfiguration of queer tourism as a form of “liberation” through the economic promises of the market obscures issues of precarity, social injustice, neoliberal violence, and privilege in global politics. Indeed,

the self-actualization of queer tourist lifestyles is dependent on and informed by political and economic structures that allow particularly mobile and privileged queer bodies (including my own) to travel freely for pleasure (or research), “while placing economic, political, and socially normative controls on others” (Collins 2009, 488). Commercialized spaces of LGBTQ+ tourist consumption are experienced as sites of violence by others, particularly racialized *travesti*, trans, and non-binary people. This includes people such as Juani, a Colombian non-binary person who lives in Buenos Aires whom I met one evening in a venue in San Telmo that remains outside circuits of gay tourist consumption, and who explained to me that they often feel “out of place” in LGBTQ+ spaces in Palermo because they are ignored by white gays – tourists and locals alike – in favor of lighter-skinned masculine-presenting men.

Moreover, queer tourist discourses often fail to recognize the forms of labor on which LGBTQ+ tourist “playgrounds” depend, the politics of the workplace, and the fact that LGBTQ+ tourists’ freedom often relies on and reproduces forms of unfreedom for other queers working in these spaces (Rushbrook 2002). For example, during the course of my fieldwork, one of the most popular LGBTQ+ *boliches* attracted criticism after a trans woman and former dancer/host of the night accused the event organizers of sexual assault and transphobia. In a Twitter post, she explained that “there is not a single employee [who] hasn’t been made to be precarious and ignored ... lawsuits that never got paid, sexual harassment followed by dismissal ... [and] drugs.” In conversation with local queers working in the city’s LGBTQ+ tourism industry, it became clear that experiences of sexual assault by tourists are not uncommon. These violences and unfreedoms seem particularly pronounced for the most marginalized members of the local LGBTTTI community. In an Instagram post, Dolly Fierce, one of the few Black drag queens and performers in a predominantly white commercial LGBTQ+ nightlife scene, explains that she “doesn’t think drag queens are treated fairly” and that while

the parties pay [gay male] strippers 15–20 thousand [pesos, roughly 90 dollars] for them to come and wave their dick around ... [D]rag queens [who] have to buy make-up that is very expensive, [who] have to pay designers to make our clothes, [who] work so hard and with so much energy ... sometimes ... I can’t even give myself the pleasure of a good meal, I can’t buy wigs, I can’t buy new shoes, because all the money they pay us just goes to my rent.

At the same time, however, local sexualities are not simply “touristed upon” but actively critique and engage with the touristification of both LGBTQ+ nightlife and politics. Indeed, the labor that maintains these spaces is ultimately informed by decisions taken within a context of economic crisis that both limits and sustains survival. Take Gustavo, one of the bartenders who works at Peuteo in Palermo and with whom I became particularly close. Over a glass of fernet and cola during his shift, he explained to me that abandoning

his academic career as a chemist after the 2001 financial crash to work in LGBTQ+ venues was sad but affords him more financial freedom. While the economic pull of a dollarized tourist economy took him – as well as many others – away from a career that, as he himself admitted, was his passion, working for LGBTQ+ tourists enables him to live a life that his real vocation cannot offer him. The homocapitalist politics of queer tourism are thus an intricate site of contestation in which the promises, the violences, and ultimately the accommodations that one must make in order to survive the economically precarious landscapes of global neoliberal capitalism come to the fore.

The homocapitalist politics of queer tourism and other queer mobilities beyond the capital

The new politics of rainbow inclusion may certainly be attractive to LGBTQ+ tourist providers, business owners, and entrepreneurs who stand to gain from influxes of (mostly English-speaking) LGBTQ+ international tourists. This is especially true in the well-off, metropolitan, and autonomous area of Buenos Aires, where a professional middle class of “entrepreneurial oligarchs” controls much of the city’s wealth and economy. Yet, the interpellation of some “race-, class-, and gender-sanitized” LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs – including economically privileged lifestyle bloggers and influencers – into international circuits of queer tourism produces violences for those who are not able to convert their queerness into a product for LGBTQ+ tourist consumption and are instead forced to sell their (queer) labor. As Rao (2015) himself points out, the co-optation of some (primarily white gay and lesbian) privileged queers into global homocapitalist circuits should not be understood as an expression of their lack of agency or of mere “voluntarism,” but rather as the product of structural conditions that constitute unequal socio-economic relations – including those of queer tourism – and that have, since 2001, been compounded by rampant economic crises, precarity, and maldistribution in Argentina and other countries subjected to the most virulent forms of imperial global financial speculation and accumulation.

In this final section, I want to bring our analysis of queer tourism and homocapitalism to bear on a broader discussion on the spatial politics of labor, LGBTTTI rights, and differential urban/rural regimes of queer (im)mobility in Argentina. Scholars have pointed out that investments in LGBTQ+ inclusion often privilege the urban as the focal center of queer life, obscuring non-metropolitan, rural, and peripheral experiences of queerness (see Halberstam 2005). This is especially relevant in Argentina, where investments in LGBTQ+ tourism are refracted through an already unequal socio-spatial landscape in which the capital’s grand *avenidas* (avenues), business districts, wealthy residential areas, and high-end entertainment districts co-exist with the more impoverished housing and infrastructure of the *conurbano* (peripheries of

Buenos Aires) and at times stand directly opposite train tracks leading to *el interior* (the interior of the country) – a land of largely impoverished suburbs and slums where the South begins (Borges 1953).

In US gay travel blogs and guides, “less-developed areas” (*Queer in the World* 2023) and “rural communities ... outside of the big cities” (Arestis 2023) are often discussed as places of intense homophobia where a “Latino obsession with aggressive masculine pride” (*Queer in the World* 2023) may persist. The dangerous unfamiliarity of these non-urban landscapes is often contrasted with Buenos Aires’ “Europeanness” in racialized terms (*Out There* n.d.). Attempting to move beyond Eurocentric perspectives on queer travel, we might ask: what do homocapitalist promises of a “rosy future redolent with growth and productivity” look like outside of the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, and what might emergent opportunities for queer mobility for some (predominantly white middle-class) gay and lesbian tourists mean for those peripheral queer Others for whom movement is not the expression of “liberation” but simply a form of survival?

I offer some brief thoughts on these questions by drawing on insights emerging from the Argentinian documentary *Putos Peronistas* (Cesatti 2012), which follows a group of poor, working-class queer activists based in La Matanza, in the *conurbano* on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, who are members of the leftist organization from which the film takes its name. The documentary was filmed soon after the economic collapse of 2001 and therefore in a period of great economic precarity but also of important advances in LGBTTTI rights. It focuses almost exclusively on a specific group of activists: poor queers (sex workers, manual workers, delivery drivers, and militants) whose labor directly and indirectly sustains the capital, and who identify as *putos* (fags), *tortas* (dykes), and *travestis* (and therefore outside the parameters of the more globalized LGBTQ+ identity categories embraced by global travel institutions such as IGLTA and the UNWTO) and as *peronistas* – that is, supporters of a populist nationalist ideology named after military general Juan Peron that emphasizes social rights and economic redistribution in a context in which the majority of the wealth is controlled by oligarchs with landed property.

The protagonists live in an impoverished provincial area, where there is no evidence of the kind of investments in LGBTQ+-friendliness that can be found in Palermo. Largely marginalized from the LGBTQ+-friendly circuit that defines Buenos Aires’ emergence as a desirable destination for global gay consumption, these queers’ infrequent interactions with the capital are through trips that they make – on the back of *camionetas* (small open trucks commonly used for the transport of goods), on buses or trains, or packed into tiny cars – to go to work or to participate in organizing, both the leftist and the LGBTTTI kind. Against the increasingly assimilatory trajectories of LGBTTI organizing in the city – of which LGBTQ+ tourism is but one

bedfellow – members of the group distance themselves from Palermo's gayness and instead embrace the word "*puto*"; while the gay is *gorila* (right wing, from the capital, anti-Communist), the *puto* is *peronista* (revolutionary, peripheral, and provincial – queer).

The film offers us a compelling language with which to articulate a critique, from the peripheries, of queer travel discourses' emphasis on LGBTQ+ tourism as an expression of "progress" and "liberation." Indeed, aside from a powerful attack on the ways in which extant homocapitalist investments in queer tourism privilege globalized expressions of queerness, what emerges most clearly from the film's reality-style documentation is a detailed account of how capitalism and queerphobia sustain each other. In celebrating the mobile lifestyles of a privileged few while ignoring the economic structures that enable such neoliberal mobilities, contemporary homocapitalist investments in queer tourism miss the various material precarities that sustain emergent forms of queer travel. How might the kinds of futures and queer mobilities articulated by the *putos peronistas* differ from those envisaged by homocapitalism? At least one distinction seems clear. Whereas homocapitalism seeks to interpellate queers as model capitalist subjects "whose inclusion promises a future of growth and economic dynamism" (Rao 2020, 25), the protagonists in the film carve out alternative queer mobilities and futures based not on upward mobility but on survival, conviviality, humor, and class solidarity.

Conclusion

In this article, I have traced homocapitalist investments in queer tourism across two "zones of encounter" within the landscape of queer tourism in Buenos Aires. These foreground the contradictory effects of extant such investments. In so doing, I have demonstrated the ways in which these investments attempt to convert queerness into a good to be sold on the market as part of the tourist offer by portraying an image of Buenos Aires as a desirable LGBTQ+-friendly destination for global queer tourist consumption. Rather than merely being "touristed upon," I have suggested that local sexualities both lubricate and contest these homocapitalist investments, revealing the tensions that emerge from various encounters between local elites with global aspirations, economically privileged and mobile queer tourists, and the different queer mobilities of local queer subjects who work within Buenos Aires' commercial landscapes of queer tourist consumption. In this way, I have attempted to open up a discussion about neoliberal violence and queer tourism that situates emergent forms of queer mobility within a broader context of economic crisis, precarity, and inequality. In particular, I have suggested that the production of Buenos Aires as an LGBTQ+-friendly global destination largely relies on the labor of local queers who both experience the violences and contest the workplace politics that underpin queer

tourism in pursuit of their own version of a better life. In so doing, the article has challenged the homocapitalist logics of global LGBTQ+ activist efforts that embrace emergent forms of queer travel and mobility as evidence of “progress” and “liberation.” Further research on the global politics of tourism should continue to examine the ways in which tourism and tourist mobilities – queer or otherwise – are shaped by and shape processes of economic precarity and inequality in an effort to problematize the relations, spaces, practices, and subjectivities that investments in tourism generate.

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