ABSTRACT
Given the renewed arrival of Spanish migrants in Brazil since 2008, I analyze how post/colonial power relations are re/configured and contradictions produced when legal and economic precarity question status hierarchies based on origin, race, and class. Brazil currently hosts the largest number of illegalized Spaniards worldwide. Illegality and precarity contest the favorable effects of nearly unconditional whiteness in Brazil and globally racialized, colonial power hierarchies. Derived from 2.5 years of ethnographic fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro since 2014, my interlocutors’ trajectories show how they struggle with and embrace the urban fabric and its structural post/colonial configuration.

KEYWORDS
Brazil; postcolonial; whiteness; Europeanness; precarity; coloniality; status; hierarchy

Introduction
Since the outset of the economic crisis in Europe in 2008, the new European emigrants who left the heavily affected southern European countries to go to Latin America have received some attention (e.g. Caro et al., 2018; Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2018; Valero-Matas et al., 2015). However, the question of how the social relations in societies in the Global South to which Europeans emigrate reconfigure has not been dealt with systematically. The local lives of Spaniards who have left in the past ten years to Rio de Janeiro are influenced by several historical and conceptual shifts, the study of which contributes to an understanding of the current dynamics of the lives of Europeans abroad. This article investigates two arenas in which Europeanness is unsettled (Stoler, 2010) and which are interrelated in the case of Spanish newcomers in Brazil: firstly, precarity in international mobility and, secondly, whiteness in Brazil. Taken together, they clarify how the relations of ‘the West and the rest’ (Hall, 1992), or better, the relations of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011) are reconfiguring which demands the reevaluation of Europeanness in status trajectories.

The case of Spaniards in Brazil is particularly revealing since the colonial and postcolonial power relations are offset given that no direct colonial links exist between Spain and Brazil. Instead, the last century saw large-scale Spanish and Galician immigration to Brazil (Romero Valiente et al., 2013). Historically, even economically precarious European immigrants were favored since they were seen to contribute to the whitening of the Brazilian population, in accordance with the eugenic politics that were then regulating migration to the country. The relations of coloniality are thus broader than the direct links between territories established under
colonization. It is therefore relevant to ask how the power relations of coloniality are reconfiguring when young Spaniards emigrate in the context of the 2008 economic crisis to Brazil and how status trajectories can incorporate contradictions between new legal and economic precarity in migration and privilege that derives from unconditional whiteness linked to Europeanness and colonial status hierarchies of origin, race, and class. This article discusses the emerging contradictions that result from the contentious reconfigurations of the multiple intersecting power asymmetries active in Rio de Janeiro. These reconfigurations and asymmetries define the circumstances and glocal conditions of the lives of European newcomers in the Global South. An ambiguous, at once colonial and postcolonial framework of social hierarchization is the result.

On a first analytical level, the ambiguous post/colonial framework documents the continuity of coloniality, a system of hierarchies based in racial classification and difference (Mignolo, 2011). Coloniality defines the broader geopolitical relation of Latin America and (Southern) Europe. The continuous movements of Europeans into Brazil articulate these historical configurations of coloniality, particularly as they took place under the Brazilian whitening policies at the turn to the 20th century (Schwarcz, 1999; Seyfert, 1989). Spaniards who have migrated to Brazil in the last decade—whether self-described as precarious or privileged—thus arrived in a historically grown, highly segregated, exclusionary, and racist city (Roth-Gordon, 2017; Vargas, 2005). The equally existent and powerful discourses on mixing and peaceful race relations in Brazil (Guimaraes, 2001) merely conceal the continuous existence of racial discrimination and white privilege (Corosazcz, 2015; Muller & Cardoso, 2017). The intersections of racist discrimination with class are manifold and not straightforward, which make it impossible to collapse them into one (Guimaraes, 2002). The renewed arrival of Europeans into Brazil’s racially and socially stratified society furthermore mobilizes the social imaginaries about, and the lived experiences of, Brazilian migrants in Southern European countries as its transnational flipside (Feldman Bianco, 2010; Feldman-Bianco, 2001; Machado, 2002; Piscitelli, 2008). Against this backdrop, neither the reception nor the incorporation of new residents from Spain in Rio de Janeiro can be foretold. This article analyses a highly charged encounter that is permeated by the post/colonial configurations of racism and its intersections with sexism, classism, and xenophobia in the context of transnational migration. These historically grown configurations of prejudice and discrimination, as well as of power and privilege find expression in concrete practices, aspirations, and idealizations of Europeanness and whiteness as they undergo the processes of both sedimentation and reconfiguration.

On a second analytical level, these emergent, complex, and multi-layered Brazilian configurations modulate the recent European mobility that has so far mainly been contextualized within the contemporary global landscape of wealth and (perceived) opportunity. The ongoing economic crisis in Spain has brought the neo-liberal conditions of global labor relations into focus under which a new global workforce has formed that is forced to migrate (Knight & Stewart, 2016; Sabaté, 2016). The struggles, precarity, and exploitation of often highly-skilled young Southern Europeans in Northern European countries make this explicit (Glorius & Domínguez Mujica, 2017; González-Ferrer, 2013; Lafleur & Stanek, 2016). Such analysis contradicts the narrative of Europeans as global ‘expatriates’, their symbolic space of privilege, and their recurrent claims to moral high ground (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2019). The reemerging presence of Portuguese and Spanish in former colonial territories lend themselves for such analyses (Matos, 2009; Miorelli & Manóvil, 2018). To understand these highly divergent mobility trajectories, the legal frameworks that currently regulate the status of migrant newcomers have become a key variable as they intersect with the broader configurations of race, origin, and class (Meissner, 2018). Discussing economic and legal precarity in the case of Spanish newcomers in Rio de Janeiro juxtaposes the struggles and privileges of Europeanness in the context of the city’s historically grown, globally contextualized racial and social configuration.

The article proceeds in three parts: the following section presents the methodology of this study and the material analyzed in this article. The second part discusses four narrative strategies of the Spanish newcomers in Rio de Janeiro that engage with the questions of economic and legal
precarity during migration and in the new local context. The third part then returns to the analysis of racist prejudice, discrimination, and privilege (Ahmed, 2007; Müller & Cardoso, 2017) by revealing how my interlocutors’ continuous access to the symbolic capital of whiteness and Europeanness is linked to Brazil’s colonial past and whitening ideology. I conclude that revealing the ambiguities and contradictions in the lives of young Spaniards in Rio de Janeiro regarding economic and legal precarity, typical of global migrations, as well as white privilege, characteristic of coloniality, provides a key to understanding the status trajectories and societal reconfigurations characteristic of the renewed Southern European outmigration of the past decade.

Methodology

This article presents selected results of two and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2019 with migrants from Spain and Senegal in Rio de Janeiro. The project analyses how newcomers carve out their social position in a highly stratified and unequal city and how they see their own position relative to that of other urban dwellers. The project’s initial hypothesis was that in a racially and socially stratified urban society that grew out of colonialism and slavery—such as Rio de Janeiro’s—new immigration from Europe and Africa could lead to both affirmations and reconfigurations of racialized power asymmetries and status differences. This article only uses the data of Spanish participants that were collected with ethnographic methods. Contact to Spanish newcomers in Rio de Janeiro was established through thematic Facebook groups of Spanish residents, the author’s personal networks in Spain and their links to Spaniards in Rio, and Spanish diaspora institutions present in the city, such as cultural clubs. From these diverse entry points snowballing led to further participants.

Most Spanish research participants (36 interviewed and numerous in participant observation) and all participants considered in this article were highly qualified individuals with university degrees in different areas. Male and female interlocutors were in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, roughly my age range. Typical when studying sideways or up, participants rigidly questioned the project design, its rationale, and promise (Nader, 1974; Ortner, 2010). Many participants were initially astounded to be compared to African migrants, outright rejecting the ‘migrant’ label for themselves. This initial irritation revealed how deep certain categorizations run that had become linked to racialized human mobilities (Erel et al., 2016; Kunz, 2019). At the same time, participants also distanced themselves from the expatriate label due to the neoliberal lifestyle and privilege it implied (cf. Cranston, 2017, p. 10). It was used as a shorthand, but hardly ever as a self-identification. Most interlocutors actively defied simple categorization, due to their complex migration histories, ambiguous local conditions, and personal preferences, all of which this article analyses and systematizes.

The data analyzed with the help of atlas.ti consists of daily fieldwork protocols and 36 semi-structured interviews. The protocols document the participant observation in events and the countless informal conversations and discussions that took place. These discussions were unstructured and part of the interlocutors’ everyday life, outside the workplace. The semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2017 and lasted between one and two and a half hours, the majority being longer interviews. For approximately half of the original interviewees follow-up interviews were also conducted. Furthermore, I accompanied more than two thirds of the interviewees over several years in participant observation which facilitated valuable triangulation between the various data sources. Starting from 2017/18, many of the Spanish interlocutors have moved on or returned to Spain due to personal decisions, sometimes linked to the economic, political, and social crises in Brazil.

Both in formal, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, interlocutors were asked about their migration histories, the process of finding their way around in their new place of residence, their first impressions, and what they found noteworthy over time. Participant
observation complemented the narratives and criteria the participants autonomously developed to understand urban life around them and to participate in it. Over time, I directly addressed particular dimensions of social life, including the media, social relations, and the body, also inviting transnational comparisons between the places which participants had inhabited in earlier life stages and Rio de Janeiro. In rare cases questions on racism, classism, and sexism needed to be actively formulated, as these themes had come up by themselves. Finally, my profile as a German researcher being transnationally mobile between Europe and Brazil every six months became part of the debates that unfolded with the study participants. This was of particular relevance given the tensions that the 2008 crisis and the subsequently imposed austerity politics—personified by German chancellor Merkel—had sparked in Europe, which became a last reference point in this research context.

My explicit effort to diversify the Spanish sample according to class, gender, age, profession, legal status, and migration trajectory through various contact strategies was successful. Conducting a qualitative study, no representativeness nor quantitative data was sought. Rather, it became a crucial question of how ambiguous status positions and status trajectories depend on the respective transnational and local context, its history, and dynamic presence.

**Being precarious? Two conflicting sides of European mobility**

After the 2008 crisis in Europe, Latin America once more turned into a destination country for Spanish migrants (Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2018; Valero-Matas et al., 2015). The growing stock of Spanish abroad (Figure 1) shows the severity of the outmigration, particularly of youth. After presenting an overview of the scale and key political narratives of this outmigration that stress economic precarity, I present four crucial narrative strands that my interlocutors developed to position themselves in relation to different forms of precarity associated with either migration dynamics or local socio-economic stratification, or both. The narratives were influenced by the social location which the individual participant occupied in the complex social fabric of Rio de Janeiro.
Janeiro and the conscious or unconscious enactment of white privilege, discussed in the following section. The narratives ranged from denying both precarity and privilege, over denying either one or the other, to acknowledging both precarity and privilege, as well as the contradictions and unsettling feelings this combination caused.

Young, highly qualified ‘economic refugees’

With a promising economic outlook at the beginning of the 2010s, Brazil turned into one of the destination countries for renewed Spanish outmigration. Between 2009 and 2018, the stock of registered Spanish in Brazil increased by roughly 40 percent to just over 130,000, the vast majority of whom belonged to the economically active age groups (Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2018a). Those leaving were mostly young, well-trained, and unemployed in Spain (Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2016). Among those aged 25 and below, unemployment rose to nearly 57 percent in Spain at the beginning of 2013 and has remained, until 2018, at over 34 percent (INE, 2018b). Regarding Spanish outmigration, official statistics only provide an indication since far from all Spanish abroad formally register their geographic mobility (González-Ferrer, 2013). Regarding the case of Brazil, mainstream news outlets reported on the high numbers of irregular Spanish citizens in Brazil. For example, in 2015 the tabloid Spanish program En tierra hostil (In hostile territory) reported that Brazil held the record in numbers of ‘illegal’ Spaniards.²

This image resonates with the representation of Spanish outmigrants as economic refugees. As one of the various Spanish protest movements that formed as mareas (waves) at the height of the 2008 crisis, many of the Spanish going abroad assembled as marea granate, the burgundy red wave, named after the color of the European passport (Ballesté Isern, 2017; Martínez Martínez, 2017). Reports on the coming generations being once more forced to emigrate to look for subsistence were recurrent due to unemployment and other political factors (Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2016). The members of the movement identified as economic refugees who were forced to leave against their will by national and European politics. While the macro-economic context was relevant to situate my interlocutors’ arrival in Rio de Janeiro, it was frequently silenced in personal narratives.

Choosing mobility

The above narrative of being forced to leave was unpopular among my interlocutors. They frequently framed their move to Brazil as an opportunity through which they constructed their preferred life story. Mónica³, for example, had come as a highly qualified university graduate to work in the construction sector of Rio de Janeiro, which had been booming in the years leading up to the mega events staged in Brazil and Rio in the past decade. Unasked, she reproduced a narrative shared by many others that clarified that she was not an economic migrant. Rather, Mónica had opted to travel and gain international experience. While she had a secure job and consumed the cultural offers of the more affluent and bohemian parts of the city, she also admitted that the working experience did not really satisfy her. Mónica assured me that she could always choose to change jobs, move on, or return.

Other interlocutors similarly foregrounded such autonomous choices, with slight variation. Maria, equally in her twenties and with a university degree yet with some previous international experience, had acted according to her ethical conviction, trying to benefit from the crisis in Spain and choosing to go abroad to ‘do good’. Paralleling the narratives of some of her compatriots, Maria tried to make a living or at least live ethically immersed in the non-governmental sector of Rio de Janeiro, running social and environmental projects in the most precarious favelas. Especially in the first years after arriving in Rio de Janeiro, these interlocutors frequently produced a somewhat truncated reasoning: Given the inequality in Rio de Janeiro, social projects
were needed and to engage in them was a meritorious undertaking in which they had chosen to participate. After years in the sector, during which Maria had gained considerable experience and professionalized, she eventually reflected upon her initial levels of naivety and the very real challenges she had encountered. This reflection made the legal precarity that she also experienced during this time as a holder of a Spanish passport appear in a different light.

Reciprocity at the border

Due to the Brazilian rule of reciprocity at the border, Spaniards faced the same immigration requirements as Brazilians in Spain. At least until the reform of the Brazilian immigration law in 2017, this was worse than for other Europeans. Spaniards had to provide an invitation letter, a proof of residence for their stay in Brazil and a minimum of 65 Euros per day they wanted to remain on Brazilian territory. They also could not renew their tourist visa. None of this was the case for other European citizens. Like in the case of Europe, these requirements played a key role in the ‘legal production of “illegality)” (Genova, 2002).

The legal production of illegality was case sensitive. Among my interlocutors, Maria belonged to a minority who admitted coming from a family with the means to permanently transfer 5000 EUR onto her bank account, one of the prerequisites to always obtain a new three-month tourist visa. Others skillfully manipulated their documentation to meet the immigration criteria. Yet others benefited from a legal union with a Brazilian partner. Sometimes these unions dated from a shared passed in Spain when the economic odds between Brazil and Spain had been reversed. Others pragmatically entered a legal union with a local partner in Brazil, if they had one at hand. All participants ultimately found a way around the legal hurdles of immigration and residence, yet this involved significantly higher economic and emotional costs for some than for others. While Spaniards were worse off than other Europeans, they still did not have to apply for a visa before arrival, a privilege that most of the time was taken for granted.

Such privilege could turn into a sense of entitlement among those Spaniards who had come on international ‘expat’ work contracts or as investors, the minority among my interlocutors. Among expat workers, substantial differences still existed, not least since their companies did not care for all of them equally (cf. Sandoz & Santi, 2019). Those who had come as entrepreneurs relied on their investments for legal security. They still struggled with the arbitrariness and sometimes hostility of the Brazilian immigration apparatus, such as administrative hurdles or refoulement at the border. Oriol, a high-ranking staff of a Spanish multinational firm in his late thirties, had traveled in the wake of an acute political retaliation, in which the Brazilian authorities responded to a much-discussed denial of entry of Brazilians in Spain. Despite his residence permit, he found himself barred entry upon arrival at an international airport and back in Spain some 24 hours later. Such concrete demonstrations of power were only the most visible outbursts of the overall struggle with the Brazilian (immigration) bureaucracy. Ultimately, the backup of a company acted as a double switch. First, corporate capital simply assumed the financial burden (Sandoz & Santi, 2019) which, second, could change any sense of being exposed to legal precarity into acting condescending toward the Brazilian authorities who ‘clearly’ lacked professionalism, efficiency, and ‘development’.

Becoming illegal or obtaining a possible status only

Although all my interlocutors were able to navigate the legal challenges of the Brazilian immigration system, the experience of precarity, vulnerability, and continuing marginality was unequally distributed, defying a straightforward pattern. Apart from aspects related to immigration control and the ability to remain in the territory, the difficulties in accessing certain parts of the city’s material and social landscape and the avenues people had to make a living constituted additional
factors that could unsettle someone’s individual status and lead to a reevaluation of their well-being. The countless debates on how to best remain in Brazil, how to stay economically afloat, or how to achieve the most favorable conditions possible frequently became passionate rather than remaining cool-headed and strategic.

Any available tactic to remain within the country came with its respective risks. When illegality was about to afflict them, my interlocutors became nervous, annoyed, or worried, and sometimes exhausted. Regularly, someone expressed with a sincere voice that s/he was going to become illegal. Jordi, a well-traveled architect in his forties who I regularly met after work, one day professed that his employer would not provide him with the necessary documentation to obtain legal residency after his student status would expire. Despite having a job in his sector that paid his bills, Jordi struggled to deal with the prospect of illegality and concomitant vulnerability. Apart from losing his regular immigration status, he would continue to only receive half of the sector-specific minimum income he had received on the student visa. Only with time, Jordi made peace with his legal precarity and economic disadvantage compared to his Brazilian colleagues who were equally or less qualified than him.

Never having expected the possibility to one day being illegalized, and disliking the idea, it took my interlocutors time to emotionally deal with such uncertainty and vulnerability, otherwise common in international migration (Andersson, 2014; Goldring et al., 2009; Menin, 2017). Beyond their decision to remain in Brazil, my interlocutors regularly felt stripped of their autonomy and ability to choose. To avoid ending up without a formal migration status, they oftentimes acquired a possible legal status, that is, legal documentation which they could somehow access through their respective means. Entering a legal union was an obvious option, but far from the only one.

**Facing precarity**

Settling into the social fabric of Rio de Janeiro caused unforeseen experiences of precarity and vulnerability beyond the legal hassles of immigration. Clara, a multimedia professional in her twenties, had gone to Brazil with her Brazilian partner when their economic situation in Spain had become precarious. Upon arrival, they stayed with her partner’s family in a stigmatized and insecurity-ridden municipality of the metropolitan area. She recalls being shocked when they tried to move into their own place and could not find decent and affordable housing closer to the center and the more desirable southern zone other than in a gentrifying favela. In February 2015, she invited me to their second flat in a favela, far up the hill, yet quiet and with stunning views of Rio de Janeiro’s beaches. She narrated on their first move:

Well, […] Let’s try it, right? Because we had not found anything […] we said: Come on, then, let’s go. And we moved […] [laughs nervously] The first day I started to cry, I said: What am I doing here! Fuck, what a shitty home! And then on top- There were no views of the beach, nothing. You only saw the water tank […] It was very hot, those at the bar below were listening to music to the fullest, like this.

To leave the northern outskirts, Clara and her partner moved into one of the gentrifying favelas on the hills behind the richer neighborhoods of the southern zone (Freire-Medeiros, 2009; Gaffney, 2016; Richmond & Garmany, 2016). Even there, they only found a flat high up, above a bar, exposed to the burning sun and without a view, one of the imagined and marketized advantages of living in a gentrifying favela. The story was emblematic of how she regularly realized her economic weakness in the competition for a decent life in Rio de Janeiro. At the same time being aware of being an agent of gentrification resulted in discomfort on the one hand, but also in a crucial reevaluation of the city’s humbler residents (Heil, under review). Clara made a point that she neither belonged to the affluent, (petty) bourgeois newcomers with a middle-class background nor to their equivalent in Rio. Different from those of my interlocutors who at least discursively tried to carve out a global privileged space in which they could choose their living conditions
freely, Clara more readily felt and embraced the multiple forms of precarity that Rio de Janeiro had on offer for them all.

As a direct consequence of precarious legal statuses, several of my interlocutors were excluded from the formal labor market. Spouses accompanying their partners working on expat contracts or people on tourist visas in this sense faced a similar condition. Legal gymnastics using transnational networks or simply irregular working arrangements were the common result. Less obvious, even those who had their immigration or residence status in order frequently struggled to be hired on regular terms. As a result, salaries for someone with a university degree could be as low as 1500 BRL (350 EUR), roughly the equivalent of two minimum incomes at the time. Statistically, this made them worse off than half of the Brazilian population but already defined them as lower middle-class despite lacking the capital to participate in mainstream middle-class consumption. As Jordi, other interlocutors reported to earn considerably less than their Brazilian colleagues while having the same or better qualifications, and sometimes more responsibilities. At the time of my research, young European architects, for example, received a symbolic salary or even worked for free at a renowned firm executing trendy re-structuration projects in favelas. Aware that such arrangements could not be sustainable, my interlocutors justified them as a way to ‘formar currículo’, build a CV.

Engaging with the legal and economic living arrangements of mainly young Spanish newcomers to Rio de Janeiro has revealed a first set of factors influencing the on-going reconfigurations of status hierarchies. A picture emerged of hustlers, a term coined for the mode of life of young Africans (Thieme, 2018) that, when applied to Europeans, challenges the hegemonic imaginary of privileged European mobility (Croucher, 2012). Still, narratives of freedom and choice co-existed with experiences of precarity and vulnerability that indexed the ongoing glocal reconfigurations. When these narratives became foregrounded, they revealed a conviction that young Europeans could speak from an unmarked location, which resonated with the comfort and privilege of whiteness to disidentify with the stigma of migration (Lundstrom, 2014). At times this white Europeaness seemed precarious, yet it strongly resonated with the historically grown racial hierarchies of Rio de Janeiro.

**Actualizing white privilege?**

Understanding the historical configuration of Rio de Janeiro is crucial to explain some of the contradictions I encountered regarding the current positionality of Spanish in Rio de Janeiro. The various pasts of Rio de Janeiro’s social formation, from colonialism and slavery over episodes of whitening politics and European immigration at the turn of the 20th century, to the formation of the myth of a new Brazilian race and racial democracy during the last century each produce their particular effects (Guimarães, 2002; Schwarcz, 1999; Silva, 2016).

Whiteness and Europeaness questioned and worked against some of the postcolonial reconfiguration regarding the effective social status of the Spanish newcomers that emerged in the light of their economic and legal hustling. I firstly discuss how the ideological effects of whiteness reproduced privilege from which the Spanish newcomers benefited in Brazil, before I reveal how this whiteness is equally, and increasingly, put into question. The final subsection then shows how my interlocutors inadvertently switched to another mode of coloniality and transposed whiteness into Europeanness by re-constituting European superiority over Brazil.

**The vitality of whiteness in Rio De Janeiro**

At the turn to the 20th century and after the abolition of slavery, a quasi-scientific eugenic theory justified the privileged immigration of Europeans to Brazil to counterbalance the negative effects of racial miscegenation. Miscegenation was the origin of a sense of inferiority, however, also the
way to whiten, a goal supposedly achievable in three generations (Guimarães, 2002). In order not to destroy the project of national union, immigrants from the Latin countries, including Italy, Portugal, and Spain were eventually favored (Seyferth, 2013). Whiteness was the stated aim and perceived as the prerequisite to develop and prosper. Furthermore, whiteness was ideologically embraced by the discursively very successful attempts to install the myth of racial democracy (Seyferth, 1989, p. 18). While racial democracy has been unmasked as wishful thinking at best or outrightly misleading, silencing the harm done by past and current oppression and inequality in the name of race, gender, origin, and class (Silva, 2006; Vargas, 2004), critical studies on whiteness furthermore raise awareness for the hierarchies of different shades of white, in which the Portuguese become the least white given their European and colonial pasts of miscegenation (Cardoso, 2017).

In this complicated history of whitening, the effects of Spanish immigrants to Brazil around the turn to the 20th century introduces further nuance. With a predominance of Galician among them (Romero Valiente et al., 2013; Villares & Fernández, 1996), they strongly resembled the Portuguese, who themselves were negatively nicknamed galego (Sarmiento, 2006, pp. 61–65). Furthermore, in the urban context of Rio de Janeiro, Sarmiento shows that a large majority of Galician immigrants initially did not occupy prestigious social positions. They mingled with the urban poor, ex-slaves, and migrants from other Brazilian regions in the city center, a fact the urban white elite did not appreciate (Sarmiento, 2006, p. 316). Only with time did the Spanish immigrants join the (upper) middle classes, a social position proper to satisfy the ideological imaginary of the Brazilian elite and favorably contribute to the whitening of society and its development. This historical complexity of existing hierarchies sits awkwardly with any simplistic ideology and complicates a master narrative of whiteness.

**European (white) superiority no more?**

Some of the status trajectories of my Spanish interlocutors revealed that Brazil had moved on from an unquestioned hegemony of European whiteness. Still, strong traces of it reverberated in everyday life which smoothened some of my interlocutor’s trajectories or changed them outright. Clara’s case clearly spoke to this conflict, yet she also automatically benefited from the legacy of the whitening ideology, whether she herself believed in it or not. She recounted what she was told about being European:

“But you are European […] There must be everything better.” And many told me: “Why did you come here? Do you know what a bagunça [mess] is?” […] They are not happy with the situation in Brazil and they see Europe as paradise. […] And another: Not that I have been told directly, but I have read comments from people who say: “Look, as Europe is fucked up, now all the gringos come to take advantage, after having colonized us and treated us badly.” And this one: “Their airports kick us out because they do not want us” […] The other one happened to me more, the: “How did you come to this fucking country, coming from paradise?” And to that I said: “Wait a moment, Spain is anything but paradise.” (February 2015)

In comparison, Cristian, a geographer in his 30s, embraced the advantage of being European, which, he recognized, lacked any objective basis:

Then I started working there for a good salary, which was about two thousand euros, about six thousand [reals] pre-tax. The woman said it, imagining that since I was European, I would have the best salary, which in reality I did not, because I was earning a thousand euros [in Europe] […] She said, “I can only offer you six thousand reals!” I laughed inside because it was so much for me. […] There are those who think that the European foreigner is better than the Brazilian and can work better and can have a more interesting conversation. When in fact the public university here is good, […] even better than many Spanish universities. […] But there is still this idea that the European, that being European you have a better education. (January 2015)
The local pervasion of imaginaries of superiority that Brazilians have attributed for over a century to European whiteness (Cardoso, 2017) reproduced white privilege from which the Spanish in Rio de Janeiro benefited, and which contradicted the precarity some of them equally experienced. Aware of how arbitrary the effects of whiteness were, my interlocutors challenged me as a German with provocative statements about how their whiteness would have been called into question if they had gone to Northern Europe (Glorius & Domínguez Mujica, 2017): ‘In Germany, we would be those not considered to be white, right?’ The same critical self-reflection was at the origin of countless critiques of contemporary race relations in Brazil. Sooner or later, every one of my interlocutors condemned the continuous racialized injustice at work in Brazil, in general, and in Rio de Janeiro, in particular.

**The (inadvertent) production of European superiority**

In the attempt of giving a balanced assessment of racism, Carlos in his forties, language teacher and entrepreneur, explained to me:

> Well, that is, bisexuals, homosexuals, transsexuals - whatever. You see it and say: Oh no, well, it seems that here it is- Now, really, if you are going to see the average family from Rio, the level of conservatism they have- And in this I speak of racism, I speak of machismo, I speak [...] discrimination on the grounds of sex [...] I hear about bicha [pejorative term for gay], or I hear about preto [pejorative term for black], these bad pretos- And I’ve sometimes heard [them] speak with levels of hatred, which, well, are symptomatic, right? Of how things are. (February 2015)

Such commentaries, even if meant descriptively, were deeply problematic. They revealed a tendency to actualize a racist idiom turned against Latin America, in general, and Brazil, in particular. Firstly, critiquing Brazil for its high levels of contemporary inequality often neglected its genealogy which consciously or unconsciously silenced the crucial part European powers had in it (Machado, 2002). Secondly, any essentialization of difference between Brazil and Spain/Europe was only superficially innocent as they reproduced a mode of coloniality. Finally, numerous narratives inadvertently ended on an—only sometimes implicit—proclamation of civilizational superiority.

Luiza, a highly self-reflexive professional in her forties identified a fundamental difference between herself and Brazilians:

> Let us start once more by saying that it is not good to generalize. What I have noticed is that the Carioca women are very different to what I am. Therefore, it would be very difficult to enter a deep friendship relationship with a Carioca woman. [...] they are much more feminine, much more, I do not like to use the word but, macho. I want to say that I feel different from them, neither good nor bad, ok? But different. Thus, I do not manage. [...] I feel at a long distance from them, neither above nor below – distance. (August 2016)

Luiza added that she had discussed this issue with many other Spanish women and they all felt the same. Luiza’s concern to have me understand that she was not judging or evaluating the difference she perceived between her and local women in Rio de Janeiro precisely indexes the vigor of the hierarchies of coloniality at play. Difference is never neutral, no matter how much self-reflexivity is put to work in order to avoid judgment or a claim to superiority. To say the least, naming a difference is the basis on which categorical hierarchies are easily reproduced. This is especially the case when an old discourse of colonial desire materializes, which characterizes the mestizo Brazilian woman in exactly the ways Luiza did, thereby instituting her as a subaltern, nonwhite social subject (Silva, 2006).

When my interlocutors spoke of how they experienced everyday life differently in Rio de Janeiro, the same disquiet arose. Cristian, the geographer, eventually commented: ‘And how they share the bus! They invade your personal space, stay without a shirt on, scream, there is no space
for you, there are people that smell. I think this is what shocks me most.’ Broadening the scope, the architect Núria used her professional impetus to reason more starkly:

The principal characteristic of Rio de Janeiro is chaos. Everything seems to break down but continues to work: public transport, waste collection, the favelas, the way urban infrastructure is constructed. It seems there is no central planning agency. Certainly, architects (and urban planners) are badly trained in Brazil.

(Notes taken after interview, February 2015)

No matter how such judgements were meant, they happened in a political space of globally circulating classifications of more or less developed—to avoid having to say civilized—spaces and of a locally active und largely unconditional believe in ‘white supremacy’ (Vargas, 2004). As categories of distinction, whiteness and Europeanness—the historically grounded transposition of whiteness—mediated more of the everyday encounters than most of my interlocutors were aware of or admitted. The genealogy of a colonial slave society as well as of decades of racist eugenics came into play with global power relations in which whiteness, Europeanness, and coloniality remain intact (Mignolo, 2011). While they were independent of the actual living conditions and political consciousness of my interlocutors, whiteness and Europeanness symbolically and socially became effective to their benefit, wanted or not. My interlocutors’ derogative statements on Rio de Janeiro as a whole or on its population matched in troublesome ways with the century old pessimism and inferiority complex of Brazilians, which Almeida (2015) even identified at the height of the World Cup in 2014. Despite the ongoing postcolonial reconfigurations of which many of my interlocutors were in favor and which they perceived as linked to global, neo-liberal restructuring processes and the economic crisis in Europe, the well-known colonial configuration remained dominant once more.

Conclusions

The case of renewed migration from Spain to Brazil produces the most contradictory dynamics of asymmetrical power relations that structure global migrations. These contradictory dynamics are furthermore the result of the practices and processes that sediment as well as reconfigure coloniality. Placed at the intersection of global migrations and coloniality, the status trajectories of Spaniards in Rio de Janeiro are multiple and not internally coherent. The modes of subordination and hierarchization manifest in various ways, globally and locally, as the discussion of precarity and whiteness has shown. In the case of Spaniards, the characteristics of global European migrations and the colonial modes of subordination and hierarchization have been both challenged and re-affirmed. The status trajectories of Spanish newcomers have thus revealed the effects of precarity and vulnerability as well as of white privilege and superior status. Consequently, an understanding of the postcolonial reconfigurations of local social relations in the societies where renewed Spanish emigrants have gone post 2008 has added new insights into both European mobility in general and renewed Spanish emigration during the past decade. Rendered through whiteness and precarity, Europeanness appears as a fundamentally unsettled category (Stoler, 2010).

The renewed outpouring of mainly young Spaniards following the 2008 crisis has happened within the context of a collapsed promise of growth and prosperity in their country of origin. Arrived in Rio de Janeiro, Spaniards lived ambiguous experiences which were reflected in at least four narrative strands on precarity, always in tension with claims to privilege. My interlocutors’ preference not to label their migration endeavors and the foregrounding of the existing or desired individual freedom to make autonomous mobility choices occasionally still became refracted in the direct acknowledgement of economic precarity in Spain and during migration. The critique of European austerity measures and neoliberalism can be understood as proxy debates that helped to disguise for whom the crisis in Spain had influenced mobility decisions.
Precarity or vulnerability were more readily debated regarding my interlocutors’ local experiences in Rio de Janeiro. Many struggled in one or several ways, regarding legal immigration and residency, housing, access to desired urban spaces and social classes, as well as due to the poor employment conditions encountered. Precarious legal as well as low social and economic statuses became defining features of my interlocutors’ actual status trajectories. Spaniards could be left hustling in one or the other way. Such hustling has most clearly indexed the glocal processes of contested power relations in which colonial configurations favoring European origin and whiteness were challenged.

The unsettling of European origin and whiteness was only ever partial. In contemporary Rio de Janeiro, the history of whitening ideologies and the linked Brazilian inferiority complex benefited Spaniards, whether they liked it or not. Although many openly critiqued such racist hierarchization and distanced themselves from it, their whiteness became actualized in the habitual fact of their Europeanness re-produced in the very process of such critique (Ahmed, 2007). My interlocutors often joined a largely white Brazilian elite in their pessimism regarding Brazil’s current situation. While certain white Brazilians made the nonwhite Brazilians responsible for the present predicament, my interlocutors instead debased Brazil or Rio de Janeiro as a whole, actualizing the colonial matrix of power between Europe and Brazil (Machado, 2002; Mignolo, 2011).

Although unconditional European whiteness was destabilized through precarious employment and housing conditions, as well as restricted access to legal residency, it was frequently reaffirmed, proving the solidity of coloniality in its habitual effects. While colonial orders were partially broken up, they become recomposed along the way independent of, or at least parallel to, actual legal and economic precarity. The discordant ways in which the urban lives of Spanish in Rio de Janeiro unfolded were due to the several competing forces of global migration and coloniality that currently re-configure the global and local power hierarchies at work in renewed European outmigration.

Notes
1. I use precarity to speak of the political and social processes that denote social positionalities of insecurity, vulnerability, and hierarchization (cf. Han (2018); Puar (2012); Thieme (2018)).
2. http://www.antena3.com/programas/en-tierra-hostil/programas/programa-6-rio-de-janeiro/brasil-pais-mas-residentes-espanoles-ilegales-mundo_2015030400341.html (17/04/2016)
3. All names are changed to guarantee the anonymity of my interlocutors.
4. http://noticias.uol.com.br/internacional/ultimas-noticias/2012/04/02/brasil-inicia-programa-que-vai-aumentar-restricao-a-spanhais-no-pais-relembre-principais-casos.htm (17/04/2016)

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