TRAVERSING THE CITY:
THE MAKING OF INDIGENOUS SPATIALITIES
WITHIN AND BEYOND BUENOS AIRES

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the mobile and multi-sited spatiality produced by an indigenous group living in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In particular, I analyze the places that are created by Toba people through movements connecting and disconnecting multiple locations within the city and beyond it, particularly in the Gran Chaco region in the north of the country. My analysis begins by describing an indigenous barrio (neighbourhood) that a group of Toba people created in Greater Buenos Aires in 1995. This dissertation subsequently examines the trajectories that took these people from different villages in the Chaco to other villages and urban barrios in and outside the Chaco, and, finally, to the villas (shantytowns) in Buenos Aires. In addition to these past movements, which I traced through people’s memories, I follow the relations and patterns of mobility that take people from the Barrio Toba to the city centre and middle class barrios, and the ways they connect these places with the Chaco. I conclude this dissertation by considering how all these places are brought together as part of complex networks and forms of interconnection that I analyze as subaltern assemblages.
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Introduction

On May 20, 2010, four days before the massive celebration of Argentina’s bicentennial of its revolution against Spanish colonialism, I was standing in a central intersection in downtown Buenos Aires a few blocks away from the presidential palace and the meeting point for many demonstrations. I was waiting to participate in what was expected to be a historical event. For the first time since the 1940s, when a march identified as the Malón de la Paz (peaceful raid) reached Buenos Aires, there would be a rally of Indigenous People in the capital of the country. A massive contingent of indigenous representatives from different provinces and latitudes was arriving that day. ¹ The capital of a country that has long presented itself as “white”, composed only of a European-descent population, would experience an irruption of Indigenous People also claiming to be part of the nation. The event had been widely announced in the media alongside some internal disputes among indigenous organizations working to take control of the event.

That day, an unprecedented number of social organizations based in Buenos Aires and the Greater Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (the city’s mostly working-class and poor periphery) had gathered to welcome the arrival of Indigenous People. The local supporters were planning to meet the Indigenous People along the route as they walked from the buses parked in a nearby highway through downtown Buenos Aires to the Plaza de Mayo, where there would be an official celebration. Inside the presidential house, the president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, would hold another ceremony and would receive the indigenous leaders.

This event sought to make Indigenous People present in the celebration of the bicentennial of the nation’s creation, and to remind the government that they were nations pre-existing the

¹ The Malón de la Paz was a march organized by Indigenous People from the North west of the country that marched by foot to Capital to ask president Peron to intercede and get their lands back that had been expropriated by
Argentinian state. They wanted to make clear that this date was not a celebration for them as it marked the historic start of a new wave of state violence and land expropriation. They also wanted to make clear they were “still alive” and part of Argentina, challenging the dominant historical narratives that claimed that indigenous people had disappeared. Their presence also challenged the hegemonic view claiming that Argentina was ethnically and racially homogeneous, and composed largely of descendants of European immigrants.

However, the event was not only confrontational. The march had been supported by the government itself which had included it as part of bicentennial celebrations, and had funded the travel of hundreds of Indigenous People and their leaders from different parts of the country. Incorporating Indigenous People in the bicentenary anniversary was part of a larger effort by Cristina de Kirchner’s Peronist presidency to redefine Argentinean national identity as a multiethnic entity. This new narrative brought Argentina closer to the rest of Latin America as part of other alliances with the “new left” governments ruling much of the continent. Cristina de Kirchner had been particularly careful to use this anniversary as a re-foundational moment where “the people” would be redefined as culturally plural and racially diverse. The bicentennial celebrations thus included in their program and historical narratives a number of formerly invisible minorities such as Afro argentines, Asian-argenitnes, and Indigenous Peoples (Adamovsky 2012a; Ko 2013).

As I stood among the local supporters waiting for the arrival of the indigenous march arriving from outside the city, I looked around. I saw flags from several unions, leftist political parties, representatives of new territorial movements, and sections of the piqueteros (the movement of

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2 The generic term “negros” (black) was then becoming a significant category, obtaining a new political protagonism when some public figures positively self-identified as such and claimed to be the “true” Argentineans, in contrast to European-oriented elites. This is a topic I develop in Chapter 3.
the unemployed). I was standing with a small group of close friends, who were all Argentinean anthropologists working with Indigenous People or immigrant populations. Yet I noticed a big absence. There were no representatives of any local indigenous organizations based in Buenos Aires, and no sign of the historic AIRA, the now almost dissolved Argentinean Indigenous Association, founded in the 1970s by urban Indigenous People living in Buenos Aires. I did not see any of the new indigenous organizations located in Greater Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires province, or the NGOs working with them. I walked around, but found no sign of the several barrios of Toba people living in Buenos Aires, one of which was the site for my year and a half of fieldwork. In sum, there was nothing to identify the presence of Indigenous People from Buenos Aires. This absence thus made a clear separation between the non-indigenous local social organizations which were waiting along the route, and the protagonists of the march we were waiting for: indigenous participants coming from other parts of the country, especially the Northwest, Chaco, and Patagonia.

I knew the people in the Barrio Toba I worked in had been waiting for an invitation to attend the march. I had accompanied one of the leading figures of the barrio, Lorenzo, in a visit to the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INAI) a few days earlier. He had received a phone invitation from one of the INAI employees who was organizing a panel of elders living in Buenos Aires for the bicentennial celebrations. Yet, nobody contacted him again after that call. When we arrived at the INAI office, an employee who was also a long-time acquaintance of Lorenzo gave him the bad news. The activity had been cancelled and was now out of the program for the anniversary. He said that maybe they would reschedule it. Lorenzo explained he was waiting for a formal invitation to the barrio as a whole to participate in the indigenous march, and he asked if they would send a bus there. Because this barrio (as most other barrios
Toba) is more than two hours away from downtown Buenos Aires, and the train ticket is expensive for them, people would not be able to attend if they did not have a way to get there. The employee was evasive and said that “maybe” that would happen. That day at the INAI, we met several other indigenous leaders living in La Plata, the capital of Buenos Aires province, who were also complaining about being left out from the convoy of buses arriving from the provinces to the capital for the march.

This visit to the INAI had happened a week prior to the march, and I expected that the INAI would decide at the last minute to send buses to some of these indigenous barrios and that they would invite important Indigenous People living in the city. Yet those last minute arrangements were never made. Urban Indigenous People living in the cities of Buenos Aires and La Plata were not invited and were not part of the crowd that marched on that day.

After a long wait, we finally saw a huge group of people advancing in a very organized manner, covering the complete width of 9 de Julio Avenue. The front of the march was composed of indigenous leaders, most of them wearing colourful and “traditional” clothing, including headbands. They were holding their arms together in a strong embrace creating a solid front that advanced at the same pace. Behind them, there was a huge block of people dressed in brown wool ponchos carrying colourful indigenous flags that contrasted with the European architecture of the buildings around them. There was an air of excitement among all the groups waiting around us. Some of the Indigenous People at the front of the march started singing, unpacked erkes (musical instrument from the Andean region), flutes and bombos (drums) and started playing lively carnival songs, while some others started dancing, making their ponchos fly in harmony.

The waiting local supporters replied by banging their drums with enthusiasm. Many of the
supporters took their cellphones and cameras out and started to take pictures, others clapped, cheered, and pushed to stay close to their “indigenous brothers” (as some of the signs claimed, with no mention to “sisters”).

All of these people moving along the streets meant that the whole area was closed to traffic. The march was creating massive traffic jams downtown on a workday. Yet despite this, and in contrast to what tends to be the response to road blockades by the unemployed, this march was met with an enthusiastic welcome by porteños, the “average” middle class inhabitants of the city.

As the march advanced through Diagonal Norte, an avenue traversing the financial district of Buenos Aires, a new scene surprised us. From the windows of tall office buildings, office workers were throwing small papers in a welcoming gesture. With half of their bodies extended out of the windows, they clapped and cheered with enthusiasm. This “average office clerk” in the financial district regularly appears in the news complaining about demonstrations in downtown Buenos Aires and blaming the Piqueteros for stopping traffic, for being “lazy” and depending on government monies. That day, however, they were cheering and welcoming. Moreover, members of traditional leftist parties, many of whom have criticized the indigenous movement for creating “factions” within the pueblo (people) and the more traditional middle class parties, had showed up to express their support.

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3 Among the indigenous leaders I recognized Milagros Sala, the leader of the organization Tupac Amaru and organizer of the march. Her position was particular as she was relatively new in the indigenous movement, she was well known for being the leader of a “territorial” movement in the Northwest that had been active in developing housing projects. She managed funding from the government and was in support to the Kirchner presidencies.

4 As the indigenous group advanced there were new groups joining in: with their legitimizing presence, the mothers of Plaza de Mayo appeared marching together with the Nobel Peace Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel. There was also an unexpected presence, as I saw multiple numbers of small groups of four or five people carrying signs saying “Bienvenidos pueblos originarios” (Welcome first peoples). They looked like average porteños, dressed fashionably and using new cellphones to record the event. They were different than the usual supporters of indigenous movement who are more informally dressed. These trendier porteños were very likely the viewers of a TV show on national broadcasting network that joins progressive, left leaning journalists who make a daily review of the news and are in open support of the government.
After some time, we finally made it to the Plaza de Mayo where a small political rally was organized. From the stage, a man welcomed the Indigenous People arriving “after a long trip,” and arriving in Buenos Aires “for the first time.” Milagros Sala, the main organizer of the march, took to the stage along with journalist Sandra Russo (who worked for the public television network and as Sala’s biographer) and the ceremony officially started. When Sala took the microphone she was crying. She said, “the plaza is full of people who think and feel like us.” Then it was Russo’s turn, who read a “welcoming message” and referred to the task of “rethinking who we are as Argentinean.” Recognizing Indigenous People, she said, was “as an internal debt with ourselves, to recover our honour and dignity.” In a re-foundational tone that would recur throughout the bicentennial celebrations, she finished by saying: “We do not only welcome you to the city, we welcome you to a new country, in which you are no longer exotic, but wise.”

While I was touched by the joyful nature of this political event that finally made Indigenous People visible in a city that has long imagined itself as European, I also felt uneasy about it. The remarks by Russo about “us” (from a white urban intellectual) welcoming “them” (the colourful Indigenous Peoples coming from far away) implied that “we” were the ones deciding who could fit or not in the Argentinean nation. The “we” was explicitly “inviting” these others to join in, as a concession and not as the recognition of a right. I was also troubled by the fact that none of the Indigenous People living in Buenos Aires or La Plata were there, something that was

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5 There was a parallel meeting taking place inside the presidential house. Indigenous leaders took a petition to the president and Cristina de Kirchner welcomed them with a speech congratulating Indigenous People for “feeding the national popular identity”, and explicitly put a limit to recognition when she asked them to “to stop trying to monopolize suffering,” “people who came from Europe also suffered.” The petition indigenous leaders handed to her was likewise ambivalent emphasising a need to take care of nature and have a “plurinational” state, but ignoring serious and ongoing conflicts over land. The leaders of the march and the government were producing a specific indigeneity, one that considers Indigenous People as part of a popular sector. Yet conflictive aspects of indigeneity were explicitly washed out.
reproducing the classification that locates Indigenous People as not belonging in the city and made them visitors coming from far away rural areas of the country. Finally, during this event there was no recognition of the fact that Buenos Aires is also built on land expropriated from Indigenous People in the 1500s, when the city was founded by Spanish conquistadores (conquerors). This march thus recreated the idea that the city is a white space, that Indigenous People are intrinsically rural and come from the provinces, and that they become visible as long as they dress, sing, and dance in an “authentic” way. The authenticity of the march was implicitly defined by local and transnational imaginaries about indigeneity as something rural, colourful, and musical. This is something that has been noted by many scholars: that only if these expectations about authenticity are met, Indigenous People are recognized by the state and by non-indigenous citizens as recipients of special rights and as rightful participants in a transnational multiculturalism (Hale 2005, Muehlmann 2013, Povinelli 2002).

I begin this dissertation with a description of this march in May 2010 in order to introduce some of the themes and tensions that defined my fieldwork among urban Toba people living in the Greater Buenos Aires area. This is a city that the Argentinean elites imagined as modern, white and European, but it never was and never became this. If that indigenous march generated such strong emotions and was experienced as something novel and exotic, it was because in Buenos Aires Indigenous People are considered to be out of place (Deloria 2004). Instead, I understand the city as shaped by the meeting up of multiple trajectories, including the presence of Indigenous Peoples preceding the foundation of the city, Afro populations brought as slaves, immigrants from Latin American countries, and migrants from Asia and Middle east, among others. The dominant project of a white Argentina has attempted to both erase and divide diversity along class and racial lines. But with the creation of villas miseria (shantytowns) and
also in moments like this march, the meeting up of these diverse trajectories in space has overflown both the making of Buenos Aires as white and the segregation of non whites to the outside.

In this dissertation, I examine the spatiality an indigenous group living in the city of Buenos Aires produces. In particular, I analyze the places that are created through urban Toba movements connecting and disconnecting multiple locations within the city and beyond it, particularly in the Gran Chaco region to the north of the country. My research starts in an “indigenous” barrio that a group of Toba people created in Greater Buenos Aires in 1995, and traces the trajectories that took them from different villages in the Chaco, to other villages and urban barrios in and outside the Chaco, and, finally, to the villas (shantytowns) in Buenos Aires. In addition to these movements of the past (which I have traced through people’s memories), I follow the relations that take people from the Barrio Toba to the city centre and middle class barrios, and the ways they connect “back” to the Chaco. I finish this dissertation considering how all these places are brought together as part of complex networks.

The march for the bicentennial of Argentina’s independence was significant in a multiplicity of dimensions. It was part of the efforts to transform the way Argentinean national identity is defined, from a nation of European immigrants to a multicultural nation that includes non European “ethnic” groups. But the march also reinforced an organization of space in which Buenos Aires as a white city now accepted and welcomed a mass of dark-skinned bodies presenting themselves as indigenous. However, the white city accepted the march only as visitors and because these non-white bodies were clearly recognized as authentically indigenous. From the urban middle class perspective, this event did not question who are the locals and who are the “guests” to the city. This is clear in that the urban Indigenous People from the Toba barrio I
worked in were not invited to participate. Yet this event cannot be solely understood as a struggle over representation. The celebration of Indigenous People who travel from the provinces and their entrance in the city centre, alongside the absence of urban Indigenous People living in Buenos Aires, needs to be understood from a spatial perspective that analyzes how power relations shape the production of space in Buenos Aires.

This dissertation, in short, studies the spatiality of power. It takes as a starting point Lefebvre’s idea that the production of place is not just another social action but central in the production and reproduction of social relations and inequalities within specific social formations (1991). In my work I trace the production of a spatiality that emerges from everyday practices, relations, and forms of mobility. The arrangement of people over place, and the regulations of their movement, is a key aspect in the distinction between populations who are the “right” inhabitants of the city and the racialized “others” that are poor, imagined as coming from the outside of the city and living in the ubiquitous villas (Ratier 1971, 1972). Foucault has argued that biopower is one form of regulation through which the state determines who deserves state care, and who are those that are “outside” and can be “let to die,” (1988). Theo Goldberg has linked Foucault’s ideas with a spatial analysis to examine how urban space is racialized. He has shown that a population whose life is fostered is separated from those “let to die” who are seen as a source of contamination and a threat to the health of those whose life matters (1993). His analysis developed in relation to North American cities can be extended to the distinctions between the proper city and informal city constituted by the neighbourhoods and villas (shantytowns) in Argentina. And yet in the everyday the city “proper” and the villas are linked together in multiple ways, villas provide labour, but also a prolific cultural productivity as the music generated from the villas is dispersed throughout the city (Fischer 2014). Mobility and the
inevitable sharing of the space of the city thus makes Buenos Aires and the villas into places of encounter and results in the emergence of a conviviality that the Toba were part of.

I therefore examine how the first home of Toba people in the city, upon arriving from their homes villages in the Chaco, was the villas miseria. In these shantytowns, they were spatially “thrown together” with other subaltern groups of migrants and the unemployed working class. For this reason, the villas are seen as the generic location of the urban poor. For some time, the ethnic, political, and subjective identification of these new migrants as “Toba” was not significant for them. Yet in the 1990s a group of families decided to leave the shantytowns and created a neighbourhood in a district in the Northwest of Greater Buenos Aires that was marked as “Barrio Toba” and therefore as an indigenous place in the city. This barrio was among the first of the now over ten Barrios Toba in Buenos Aires (Cristina Messineo noted that there were eight Barrios Toba in Greater Buenos Aires in 2003, but since then at least two more were created).

In this dissertation, I examine not only the history and experiences associated with the making of this indigenous place in Buenos Aires, but also the key role played by mobility in this process. In particular, I analyze the way trajectories of mobility produce places in ways that exceed forms of regulation and the limitation of material conditions to move. I examine space as a product of the simultaneous entanglement of mobilities and trajectories (of people, ideas, and objects) that is inevitably a multiplicity, and thus cannot be restricted to a set of regulatory relations or to a set of practices of resistance. Instead, the multiplicity of space implies the constitution of new forms of relation as always happening in space (Massey 2005; Moore 2005). In this way, the main question I explore is: what type of spatiality does the movement by Toba people generate in regard to the regulations of their mobility as they connect and disconnect places? This question led me to extend my fieldwork from the Barrio Toba to the multiple other places that Toba
people interconnected through their location and patterns of mobility: the city centre, middle class barrios, the *villas*, and the different villages and towns in the province of Chaco that these people keep connections with. From these movements, the people living in the Barrio Toba have produced a subaltern spatiality that, while seeking to navigate adverse material conditions is neither an alternative to dominant spatial regulations, nor a mechanical product of relations of spatial segregation.

The dissertation explores the constitution of this urban indigenous experience through three central themes: 1) the tensions created in the making of urban and racialized indigenous subjectivities, 2) the production of places through intersecting movements and the entanglement of spatial trajectories and 3) the making of a subaltern spatiality that extends by incorporating heterogeneous elements and combining dominant relations (rather than by developing a spatial “outside” to power). I trace the trajectories of people now living in the barrio Toba through time as a point from which to examine the making of a subaltern spatiality that connects the city and the countryside, the city centre and its periphery, and dominant and subaltern practices into complex networks that undermine the hegemonic idea of Buenos Aires as a European city.

**Urban and Racialized Indigeneities**

The Barrio Toba where I worked is home to about 250 people and is one of the few places that self-identifies as “indigenous” in the urban periphery of Buenos Aires. It was created in the 1990s by people who were already living in the city for many years, but who began migrating from the Chaco in previous decades. Around 12 other Barrios Tobas exist in Greater Buenos Aires (see Messineo 2003; Messineo et al 2007; Hetch 2010), and in the periphery of the city of La Plata (Tamagno 2001). However, most Indigenous People living in Buenos Aires are spread
out across the city and live among non-Indigenous People. The Toba are thus the only indigenous group to have barrios of their own in this city.

The Toba or Qom are one the largest indigenous groups originally from the Gran Chaco region in northern Argentina. The Toba call themselves Qom, which means “people” in Toba language or Qom l’aqtaqa, but for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they have also called themselves and been known as “Toba” (which is a name of Guaraní origin that was adopted by the larger Argentinean society). While some Toba leaders have recently advocated the use of Qom as their “real” ethnic name, during my fieldwork most people referred to themselves as “Toba” and felt comfortable with the term. For this reason, I use the term “Toba” throughout this dissertation. It alludes to a multiplicity of groups that share local variations of the same language and were largely located in the central and eastern areas of the Gran Chaco at the time when the Argentinean military conquered the region between the 1880s and the 1920.

In the Chaco, most Toba people defined their indigeneity through markers such as experience of struggle for legal title to their former territories, the re-creation of communities who self-identify as Toba, speaking the Toba language, recreating cultural practices and knowledge, and re-creating relations with the forest, rivers, and lagoons by fishing, collecting fruits and fibers, and hunting (see Tola 2012 for a deep analysis of Toba production of knowledge). In Buenos Aires, however, these forms of rural socialization were no longer possible and the very meaning of Toba indigeneity was profoundly transformed. My analysis draws, in this regard, from the literature that has analyzed indigeneity not as a fixed or self-contained positioning but as open-ended, contested, and historically and spatially contingent process, in which the very meaning of what “being indigenous” is or, in this case, “Toba” varies enormously (i.e. Briones 2005; Cadena de la and Starn 2007; Gordillo and Hirsch 2010; Li 2000).
While most people I worked with self-identified as “Toba,” their experience in the villas upon arriving in Buenos Aires for the first time brought them in close contact with the urban poor, usually racialized by the middle-classes of European background as “negros” (blacks). The impact of this racialization on the Toba’s perception of themselves is the subject of chapter 2. I examine how this urban indigeneity became a force in the creation of a barrio Toba, emerging from the experience in the villas and from encounters with people from the middle class who viewed them as an “authentic Indigenous People,” especially as they recognized their rural past and habits in the Chaco as indisputable markers of indigeneity. The significance I found in these encounters was not just the development of an identity that fits in the “tribal slot,” as the Toba are always-already recognized in Buenos Aires as authentically indigenous. Rather, these encounters are part of myriad reticular and heterogeneous connections that produce their subsistence, their access to institutions, and ways of working together to solve everyday problems.

The indigeneity that people of Toba background have created in the city is thus spatially specific, different from the one created by Toba living in the Chaco, and different from the one created by other indigenous groups in Buenos Aires. Yet, this urban indigeneity has points in common with other forms of urban indigeneity in Buenos Aires and across the Americas (Briones 2007; Gordillo 2011; Lobos and Peters 2001; Ramirez 2007; Wilson and Peters 2005). All of these groups share the fundamental problem of having to legitimize their indigeneity against dominant ideas about how being “urban” and “indigenous” are contradictory terms because Indigenous People are still assumed to be premodern and rural. As in other cases, in moving to the city, the Toba were seen as part of a generic, dark-skinned urban poor. With this in mind, in the discussion about the movement away from the villas, or in the collaborations with
the middle class, I will examine indigeneity not only in the specificity of the barrio but also in
the way it becomes an extensive spatiality that connects people to other groups and other places.

Places as Entanglements, Space as Multiplicity

I analyze the spatiality of the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires and the trajectories that have created it by drawing on authors such as Doreen Massey (2005), Donald Moore (2005), Gastón Gordillo (2004), and Anna Tsing (2005) who have emphasized that places are produced through sedimented entanglements, in their tensions to other places, and through the movements traversing them. Massey defines places as a product of intersecting trajectories and encounters, and also the result of “the non-meeting ups, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions” (130: 2005). For the Toba people I worked with, the city emerged both as a place of new and unexpected encounters, for instance, with the urban poor in shantytowns and subsequently with middle-class people interested in them as “authentic Indigenous People.”

Encounters were thus moments of creative construction of places and a sphere of multiplicity, for in these encounters with other actors multiple relations unfolded at the same time. Also Tobas connected with other people’s trajectories taking place simultaneously. But if places result from trajectories and movements they also result from relations ongoing elsewhere and from other dynamics and socio-spatial arrangements. And these spatialities exist simultaneously, which implies that space is always a multiplicity, of relations, arrangements, transformations, and temporal events.

Because space is a multiplicity that is impossible to fully control or to subject, there is always an escape, and relations left out. Multiplicity is for Massey the sphere of political transformation for it is in space that multiple forms of the social unfold, at the same time creating alternative
trajectories and potentially different futures (2005: 91). Massey claims, “We understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere of therefore coexisting heterogeneity” (2005: 11). Space is a multiplicity then not just because multiple simultaneous relations shape different spatialities in one place (for example the villas as places of exclusion, as places of solidarities, and as places of mutual affectations) but also because multiple relations connect several places at the same time and may put disparate trajectories in connection to one and other. Thus, as I will illustrate, the Barrio Toba is a place that is connected to other Toba villages and places in the Chaco but also to a number of evangelical organizations in Buenos Aires through the Toba evangelical church.

My analysis of these multiple spatial connections also draws from Bruno Latour’s work on networks, associations, and assemblages. Latour views networks as chains of associations that include individuals as well as objects, and in this dissertation I examine how the connections that Toba people create through their mobility involve moving not only their own bodies but also objects such as handicrafts and packages with second-hand clothing, and coordinated through cellphone texting. Like Latour, I am interested in these non-human elements that enable movement. These translocal connections play an important role in shaping how places as part of larger heterogeneous spatialities are made.

In order to account for the spatial multiplicities and networks created by these Toba families, I also draw from authors who have highlighted the importance of the movement of people, objects, information or ideas in the making of places (Cresswell 2006; Deleuze 1992; Massey 2005; Moore 2005, Salazar and Smart 2011; Tsing 2005; Urry 2007; Urry and Sheller 2006; Virilio 1986). I understand places not as opposed to but as resulting from mobilities. By mobilities I
mean the material organization of movement and the dispositions for moving, but also the emergent lines of escape that detach and evade given forms of subordination (Deleuze 1992; Grossberg 1992; Urry 2007; Salazar and Smart 2011).6 By trajectories I mean the result of a particular movement unfolding in specific time and place, and the specific path created by a specific series of travels across space (Massey 2005). Movement, in sum, unfolds both as a result of reticular forms of power that regulated the different indigenous groups in the Chaco region as subaltern; and the movements of the Toba who internalized, escaped, and followed, these lines while also trying to escape or deflect them. When I analyze trajectories, I discuss the intensities driving movement and redirecting it. I also take into account the winding and back-and-forth lines traced by the movement of people in particular, and also of objects and information.

Subaltern Spatialities and Assemblages

I use the notion of subalternity as a category from which to understand the experience of Tobas within larger collectives that have suffered forms of spatial segregation, economic exploitation, and racialized forms of marginalization. Their experience in the city began and is still related to the villas, to other working-class barrios in the Conurbano that surround them, and consequently is part of the subaltern experience of the urban poor in Buenos Aires. The experience of encountering a multiplicity of other class-based trajectories in the city and the conviviality that emerged from these encounters justifies framing the experience of these Toba families not only through the lens of indigeneity but also that of subalternity.

The Indian subaltern collective that popularized the term defines “the subaltern” as a type of

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6 Mobilities is always paired with immobilities, (Salazar and Smart 2011) a term I do not to use given I prefer to focus on the frictions, variations in speeds of movement or impasse (Tsing 2005; Virilio 1986).
subjectivity that results from a colonial situation. The subaltern is not only politically
subordinated or economically expropriated in class terms, but is also in a position of relative
exteriority in relation to law, rights, and formal employment (Guha 1983 and 1988; Rodríguez
2001). Unlike concepts such as “working class,” “the people,” “women,” or “the poor,”
subalternity does not fix the experience of people to one process or one line of inequality alone.
On the contrary, it allows for a consideration of the conditions of subordination and the forms of
collective action that emerge from it. It is particularly relevant in post colonial contexts where
large sectors of the population have historically and systematically been left outside of what is
considered the civil society and is regulated by law. These include, for example, poor peasants
with no land, and urban populations inhabiting slums. In the 1990s, scholars working in Latin
America drew on this concept to study Latin America from a critical perspective (Rodríguez
2001; Beverly 2001). While they challenged universalizing notions such as the validity of class
for understanding peasant experiences, they focused on the generic disruptive force of subaltern
politics, by doing literary or media analysis and focusing on how the subaltern overflows any
field of formal politics (see Rodríguez 2001; Beverly 2001; Williams 2001). In my use of the
notion of subaltern, I draw from Guha’s examination of subaltern territorialities, which he
analyzes through the role of everyday forms of connection through practices such as gossip, food
sharing, kinship networks, and reciprocity between neighbours. For this reason, I write about
subaltern spatialities that are not only indigenous but also include people in the villas, neighbours
who live around the barrio Toba, schools, bus terminals, the transnational evangelical church,
among others. I turn territoriality into a question of spatialities to pivot a focus over sovereignty
into a discussion about how space is also a political means.

The positions of subalternity for the Toba living in the city are defined by factors such as their
racialization (that restricts their possibilities within and outside institutions) and criminalization, the fact that they are only able to access informal or temporary work (as construction workers, doing maintenance jobs, working as a gardener), and that they have restricted access to basic state services such as healthcare. Children have to go through an educational system that is not prepared to accommodate the fact that their first language is not Spanish. Most teenagers drop out of school. Many people in the barrio do not have a National ID cards which is a basic document for accessing to public health, applying for state economic assistance, enrolling children in school, and for voting (among other citizen rights). This dissertation examines the trajectories and the spatiality produced by this indigenous experience of subalternity, by looking at how movement is possible, what type of connection movement generates and what type of coordinated activities emerge across space. I employ the term of subalternity, in sum, as something that encompasses indigeneity yet also transcends it.7

In this dissertation, I use the notion of assemblage to further describe this subaltern spatiality because this term highlights both the heterogeneity of the connections created by social actors and the fact that the latter bring together, and assemble, relations and objects originally coming from different places. In particular, I highlight the way in which many of the connections that are constantly re-created do so along the lines of family relations that link together places defined as “Toba.” Therefore, while I want to highlight the multiplicity of lines through which assemblages, for example, distribute resources, I also emphasize that Toba locations are linked to each other. Assemblages, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), connect heterogeneity of elements. This

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7 Under a similar logic Gago analyzes the assemblage of heterogeneous regimes of labour and the spatiality over which they extend among Bolivian immigrants in Buenos Aires she finds that an inside / outside dominant economy is not enough. She claims that: “El espacio del taller textil se enlaza con la feria y con la villa. Hay en este entramado una producción de espacio específica. Una zona. Que organiza una economía que la excede, y al mismo tiempo que la sostiene como lugar excepcional.” (Gago 2014: 135)
heterogeneity includes, people, actions and the relations they produce: relations between people and things such as a built environment or a forest. According to these authors, elements are extracted from their former “function” and put into new uses within the assemblage. As we shall see, Toba people from the barrio create assemblages that distribute packages to relatives living in the Chaco, solve problems for people in one place by moving resources from other places, and in some cases create relative control over different places at the same time. Assemblages, thus, produce a new activity that is not contained in one element alone but emerges from the multiple connections between different places.

Therefore, assemblage allows us to think, on the one hand, about the contingent and changing associations of people and space in their translocal connections. On the other hand, it also allows us to think of space not only as a result of relations of subjection shaped by forms of governmentality (that regulate relations between people, and between people and things), but also by putting elements from those relations into unexpected new functions. Assemblages, finally, allow us to understand the mobilities of people and objects and news and ideas under a broader perspective. The assemblages Toba people create bring together places, mobility, and spatial multiplicities with the making of indigenous subjectivities. He concept of assemblage thus allows us to think about the forms of regulation that shape them as subjects and the unpredictable encounters and affective transformations that produce unexpected variations and transformations.

**Methodology and Fieldwork**

Because of my interest in the multiplicity of spatial relations that people weave through mobility, my fieldwork was highly mobile and involved a multiplicity of places. My research extended
over 18 months between early March of 2009 and late August of 2010. Most of my fieldwork took place in the Barrio Toba in the Sauces district, which is a pseudonym I use to protect the confidentiality of the dynamics I analyze, and is located to the Northwest of Greater Buenos Aires. While I lived downtown, I visited the barrio several times a week. I also walked with people to do groceries, and took the bus, train, and subway with them as they moved through the city. I commuted with people from the barrio to downtown Buenos Aires, went with them to government offices in the city, and attended the workshops they delivered in middle-class schools. I also accompanied people to musical performances for non-indigenous audiences.

Additionally, I followed some of the non-indigenous activists working with the barrio, I observed the work of one NGO in and outside the barrio, and I participated in the activities of a self-organized group of university students. I interviewed government employees from different levels who were working with the barrio, including workers from the municipality and employees at the INAI, who gave me an overview of the relationship with and their perspective about the barrio and the ways indigenous legislation was being implemented. These trajectories took me to the offices of government institutions and NGOs, and to the homes of middle-class people who were “helping” the barrio.
I also did fieldwork in several places outside of Buenos Aires where some of the Toba people I worked with came from and where they were travelling to and from. During my travels, I visited two Toba barrios in the city of Rosario to attend a wedding. In the Chaco, all of my travels took me to the central area of the province of Chaco around the city of Castelli: a town that has some of the oldest Toba urban barrios in the area, and which since the 1940s became the meeting place for Indigenous People hired to work on cotton farms. I also visited the small town of Espinillo and the town of Bermejito, which has become a regional tourist attraction because of its proximity to the beaches of the Bermejito river. I also visited a rural farm in the area of Bermejito and did fieldwork in the Toba barrio in the city of Saenz Peña to attend a religious meeting that attracted many families from Buenos Aires.

This fieldwork in rural areas involved walking through trails in the bush, biking, and crossing a river on a boat. These trajectories in my fieldwork were not straight, effortless, abstract lines.
through which objects and people “flowed”; but rather movements of bodies that in some cases involved navigating rugged terrain, such as the roughness of dirt trails and crossing rivers with no bridges. Movement in all cases implied advancing against the frictions of natural and social terrain, and, thus, implied effort. Connections, in short, imply movement. I made short and long travels alongside people I met during fieldwork in order to record how difficult and pleasurable it was to move, what people talked about and reflected on as we moved, and how people found their way as we moved (Ingold 2011).

![Biking towards the river in the rural area around Bermejito. Photo by the author.](image)

Figure 2: Biking towards the river in the rural area around Bermejito. Photo by the author.

Finally, I also visited one of the villas in Buenos Aires where some families lived prior to forming the Barrio Toba. Specifically, I visited a young woman who decided to stay there when the barrio was created. Yet, revealing that spatial trajectories may disconnect people from previous locations, I had to be very persistent to be able to visit this place, and only in the last months of my fieldwork I was able to visit Fuerte Apache: a well-known and negatively perceived villa in Buenos Aires.
The multisited nature of this project emerged from the fact that people’s actions in one place were always taking me to others, and not only because this group has moved away from the place where they were born. In sum, my attempt was to reassemble the social relations shaping people’s experience of space in Buenos Aires and beyond, and to map, rather than to recreate, their experience linking the Chaco and this barrio.

The type of indigeneity the Toba have created in the city is thus specific, different from the one created by Tobas living in the Chaco, and different from the one created by other indigenous groups in Buenos Aires. And, yet, this urban indigeneity has points in common with other forms of urban indigeneity in Buenos Aires and also across the Americas that have only recently begun to be discussed (Briones 2007; Cadena de la 2000; Gordillo 2011; Lawrence 2004; Lobos and Peters 2001; Ramirez 2007). All of these groups share the fundamental problem of having to legitimize their indigeneity against dominant ideas that “urban” and “indigenous” are contradictory terms because indigenous are still linked with the premodern and the rural. As in other cases, because of moving to the city, the Toba were no longer seen by others as indigenous and rather were seen as part of the larger collective of racialized urban poor (see Cadena de la 2000).

Before engaging in this research I had undertaken work with Toba people in both urban and rural areas in the Chaco region, particularly in the province of Formosa. In the Chaco some of the people I worked with frequently spoke about the barrios Toba in Greater Buenos Aires and I was very intrigued by their descriptions. Because of my interest in the social production of space, the statements of Tobas in Formosa claiming that these barrios “were just like the ones in Chaco” puzzled me. I was also interested in following the translocal spatiality that Toba people created
in these connections. Further, the Toba, unlike other indigenous groups from the Chaco, had been able to create barrios in the cities of Rosario, Santa Fe, La Plata, and Buenos Aires, which are outside of the Chaco region. All other Indigenous People living in Buenos Aires lived scattered amid non-indigenous neighbours and did not build their own barrios.

My initial research proposal planned to focus only on the Barrio Toba in Sauces and to trace the movements connecting them to other barrios Tobas and rural villages. Early in my work I found I needed to understand the location in Buenos Aires and their experience there in much more detail than I had planned. For instance, the life in the villas was at the same time silenced but also appeared as a central aspect shaping the experiences of the families I met in terms of friendships, access to work, as well as the tensions around being racialized in the city space. These experiences in the villas, the fact that people did not visit the Chaco “just” to reconnect with a past way of life but also to create complex forms of collaboration, and the centrality of relations with people from the middle class forced me to include these relations to understand the spatiality they create.

While I conducted interviews that were highly enlightening about people’s experiences, in my attempts to understand what people care about and the specific perspectives they had it soon became clear that participant observation and travelling with them would be crucial parts of my fieldwork. Interviews, in this regard, often elicited short and vague responses. For instance, people replied to my questions about comparing “life in the city” and “life in the villages in the Chaco” with very short statements, for instance that they missed the “quiet” of the Chaco. Only by moving with people between different places, talking as we moved, and spending hours sitting down talking about different topics was I able to reconstruct how people experienced different places, what they enjoyed and missed and what they regretted. After an initial set of
interviews about the histories of migration I reoriented all my interviews and just asked people to narrate their life experiences to me. In some cases those narratives started with their grandparents’ stories and in others with the arrival to Buenos Aires when people were already adults. In all cases, these more informal conversations gave me a much better idea about their priorities, their spatial experiences, the way they had experienced different socio-economical, political, and historical processes. These stories hardly followed a linear chronology, but were always spatialized as people remembered very clearly where a particular event had happened.

My fieldwork also involved collaborating with people of the barrio and doing activities there. For instance, I organized a workshop with youth and helped a Toba man to organize a language workshop for the general public at the University of Buenos Aires. I did several of these activities with anthropologists, linguists and ethnohistorians, as it became more productive to work together rather than as isolated and parallel researchers. I found that working with other people made more sense for the people in the barrio too, for they felt less worried about my safety, and less responsible for constantly “entertaining” me when I was travelling with them. Working with these colleagues generally located me in collectives that linked me to academic genealogies, and thus there was never a lone project were I detached myself from my previous setting to immerse myself in a new social world. My relations with other Toba people in Formosa also gave me an entry point. Therefore, instead of making a self-reflection about my own individual position in the field, I chose to locate myself within larger collective subjectivities as always already part of the situations I analyze.

As a middle class Argentinean, as well as a North American-based anthropologist, I share with most of my colleagues in both settings an interest in working with Indigenous People in their everyday and political struggles. This included helping Toba people out with everyday
procedures such as filling paperwork with them, going with them to a doctor’s appointment, and working with them to denounce police abuse. In this dissertation, I do not discuss at length topics such as these people’s systematic exclusion from state services, land dispossession and the state repression of struggles for the land. Instead, I will consider how these processes shape everyday spatialities and everyday spatial practices.

**Structure of the Chapters**

In chapter 1, “Making a Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires: Space and the Politics of Recognition,” I present the Toba neighbourhood in Buenos Aires and the spatial trajectories that constitute it. I explore why the neighbourhood is produced by its inhabitants as a more suitable place to live than elsewhere. I describe: a) the location of the barrio and its main social features and spatial layout b) the activities of the families composing the barrio, and c) the chronology of the creation of the neighbourhood. I also discuss my general take on space as the result of trajectories in friction with one and other.

In chapter 2, “Ending up in Buenos Aires: Mobilities around the Chaco and the Trajectories to the City,” I analyze the migration of the Toba from the Chaco to Buenos Aires as a complex and non-linear series of travels shaped by gendered forms of the mobility. I follow the trajectories that took people to Buenos Aires and propose some “typologies” of this experience: men looking for a partner and “strong” women sent to expand their family’s networks. In particular, I argue that these movements are profoundly affective and marked by emotionally-charged personal experiences, and argue that rather than a planned migration people describe their movement to the city as a set of conjunctural forces and circumstances that made them “end up” in Buenos Aires.
In chapter 3, “The Villas: The Spatiality of Race in Buenos Aires”, I turn to the Toba experience in the shantytowns. As they settled in the villas the Toba families lived next to the racialized collective of migrants, historically categorized by middle-class residents as “villeros” (shanty town dwellers), and “negros” (black). The chapter discusses: a) the Toba’s experience in the shantytowns, which they described as unbearable but also exciting because of their connections with Peronism and “viller social movement”), b) the rejection by some Toba of the idea of being “villeros” and c) the experience of young people who, in contrast, decided to stay in the villas. This chapter considers the tensions created by the spatial racialization of Toba bodies in Buenos Aires.

Chapter 4, “Meet the Indians: Middle Class Humanitarianism,” considers one of the main features of the neighbourhood today: the constant visits by people from the urban middle-class interested in “getting to know the indigenous culture,” in helping them to move away from poverty, and “in solidarity” with their struggles. The chapter explores the significance of the barrio as a place of encounters, the cultural productivity of these encounters, as well as the way this place is exoticized by urban Argentines who are attracted to it in search of “real Toba Indians.”

In chapter 5, “Subaltern Assemblages,” I explore the networks that Toba families create through their movements connecting multiple places. I focus on: a) the circulation of handicrafts and donations, b) the spatial connections people make through the Toba church, and c) the expansions of Toba families in place. I analyze these networks as assemblages of people, places, and objects that generate new activities through those spatial and material connections.

After the indigenous march for Argentina’s bicentennial in May 2010, I asked the people in
the barrio if they considered going there and participating. They replied that, aside from the fact that they had not been invited, they had been too busy to go. Many of them said they had to wake up early the next day to do a workshop on “Toba culture” or send their children to school. In other words, it was not simply that they were excluded from highly visible political events such as the march, but they were constrained by the type of everyday relations and commitments that connected the barrio to other places in the city and kept them busy. The entanglement of relations that creates the barrio as a distinct place is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 1: Making a Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires: Space and the Politics of Recognition

To the Barrio Toba: Movement and Space

One Saturday morning during the winter of 2009 I was on my way to visit a Barrio Toba located to the Northwest of the Greater Buenos Aires Area (also known as Conurbano) for the first time. This barrio is an unusual place in Buenos Aires, an indigenous location in a city that is regarded as void of Indigenous People. Up until that day all of my encounters with indigenous Toba families had been in the Chaco region, where their “traditional territories” are located. 8 Miguel, a man in his sixties who I met in a performance in downtown Buenos Aires where he was playing the nviwe (Toba violin), had invited me to visit the barrio, introduce me to some families, and show me around. He gave me precise directions: take the subway to the train station, take the train to the district of Sauces, 9 get off and take the bus to the barrio, a total of 2 and a half hours.

I start this chapter by describing my first trip from downtown Buenos Aires or the Capital, where I lived during my fieldwork, to the Barrio Toba in the Greater Buenos Aires (the periphery of the city) where I focused most of my ethnographic work. From now on when I refer to the Barrio or Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, unless specified otherwise, I mean this barrio in the Sauces district where I undertook most of my work. On my first trip I transversed the city and transitioned into the suburbs. It was therefore a trip across the relations that made those places different: an affluent and middle class city centre, a periphery that grows poorer with distance from the centre, and with exclusive gated communities. This trip was the first moment of

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8 “Traditional” territories is a relative concept given their historical locations is a complex result of seasonal displacement, interethnic conflicts and ongoing waves of colonization and agroindustry expansion. For a historical spatial analysis of the central Chaco area see Salamanca 2015.
9 I use a pseudonym for the district in order to protect the confidentiality of people I worked with.
locating the barrio within the city and the Conurbano, and it directs me to the central question in this chapter: how was this barrio created as an indigenous location in the city of Buenos Aires? As I start to unravel what produces the barrio as a place, I discuss the perspective on space that I develop in the rest of this work.

To get to the barrio for the first time, a trip I often repeated during my fieldwork, I took the train at Retiro’s central station. When the train started moving, we quickly moved through the city of Buenos Aires, while vendors took turns selling their products walking down the aisle of the carriage. The train crossed the General Paz Highway 20 minutes later. This Highway divides Buenos Aires from the ring-shaped districts in the province of Buenos Aires that surround the city. Together Buenos Aires city or the Capital and the Conurbano make up an extended, uninterrupted urban space with a population of 13 million people: a third of the total population of the country (INDEC 2011). This makes the urban mass of Buenos Aires the second biggest city in South America after Sao Paulo.

Unlike in many North American cities, in Buenos Aires suburbs are not suburbia. Except for some clusters of middle class neighbourhoods and affluent gated communities, the Conurbano is mostly a space for the working class and the poor. The Conurbano is also a place of great diversity that grew out of several waves of internal and international migration starting in the 1940s, including that of self-identified Indigenous People from 12 different indigenous groups. According to one survey 14,500 Toba people live in Buenos Aires City and Greater Buenos Aires. Together the Conurbano and Buenos Aires city host 248,500 self identified Indigenous

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10 While a highway divides the two jurisdictions, the city extends without radical division, creating one of the biggest urban conglomerates in South America. There are of course jurisdictional distinctions in Buenos Aires city that impact on infrastructure, funding, and state services.
People that constitute roughly 2% of the total population (Indec 2005\textsuperscript{11}).

**Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires Area**

![Map of Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires Area](image)

*Figure 3: Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires Area. Map data © 2015 Google*

As the train advanced into the suburbs I watched the city landscape transition from apartment buildings to barrios of single houses. Out of the window I could see some middle class neighbourhoods: they had good infrastructure, brick houses with nice yards, and paved streets. Later the houses became smaller and the streets were sometimes unpaved. As the train advanced, some places in between stations looked more like shantytowns with self-made houses and no visible services. For example, I could see large garbage dumps by the railroad resulting from the lack of garbage collection systems. These informal settlements were more frequent as the landscape became more rural, some plots were empty, others had cattle, and others were sports clubs. As I reached the train station before the last on the line, behind tall hedges I could see glimpses of gated communities with large houses and manicured gardens. I got off at this station.

\textsuperscript{11} The National Institute of Statistics undertook the survey *Encuesta Complementaria de Pueblos Indígenas* – ECPI in 2002. It was the first time indigenous population was measured by the Nation state (INDEC 2005).
This train line then ends in the small centre of the district that in this dissertation I call Sauces, about 40 km from downtown Buenos Aires. During the 1990s and through tax exception policies, this district created a massive industrial complex that attracted its own wave of labour migration. But because the industries only employ highly-specialized workers, most national and international migrants did not find the jobs they expected. As a consequence, the district has high unemployment rates and, as a social worker in the municipality explained to me, many unskilled migrants end up working as service employees in the gated communities. In the 1980s this district begun attracting the elite and upper middle classes from downtown Buenos Aires to *barrios privados* (gated communities), and *countries* (named in English) both of which have fences around them, private security, and promise a “country lifestyle”: i.e. life in a safe, peaceful community closer to nature, and removed from a “class promiscuous” city (see Svampa 2001). In addition to all of the amenities of a gated community, *countries* also have expansive sports infrastructure, and many of them were originally sports clubs.

The irony is that even though the train line ends in the downtown area of the Sauces district, most of the passengers were working-class people. The middle and upper classes prefer to travel by car on the highway or to take a private door-to-door shuttle. They consider the train to be dangerous and slow. Travel to and from Sauces therefore recreates class and racial separation, as different social classes have unequal access to speed and comfort as they travel. This is another dimension of the spatial divisions within the district which is organized around the coexistence of areas of poverty and others of affluence in sharp separation and tense proximity.

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12 By “colonizing” the suburbs the gated communities created great tensions with their surroundings. Poor and working class neighbourhoods start just outside gated communities’ fences and have differential access to services. Separation has been a never-ending obsession of these gated communities that continuously reinforce security, build taller fences, and make access harder (Svampa 2001).

13 While the number is under debate it is estimated that around 3 million people travel from the province to the city to work.
After a 90-minute trip, I got off the train and found the bus that would take me to the Barrio Toba, located in the poorest area of Sauces district.

The bus drove through an area of open plots: some were fields with grazing cows; others had groups of white houses, which were the district’s housing projects. We then followed a dirt road and reached an area of red brick houses that looked self-made. Other houses were made with leftover materials. We reached a place where brick houses followed the same design. This was the barrio Toba: the result of a land donation from the Catholic Church and a national housing fund. When the driver told me to get off, the only visible marker of this being a unique space (if any) was the community center. It was the only big building amid the smaller houses. A mural showed a dark-skinned indigenous woman with bare breasts, modeling clay, and a dark-skinned indigenous man, with bare chest, throwing an arrow. On top of the image the name “Los Tobas” clarified any doubt as to the identity of the neighbourhood. In the context of vast diversity that shapes the Conurbano, Barrio Toba is certainly a small place with around 250 people. However, the barrio is significant because it was among the first indigenous neighbourhoods created in Buenos Aires in the 1990s. There have been several national newspaper articles about this barrio, and an important amount of research and multiple government programs are undertaken in it.

This short trip illustrates the type of spatial production I am analyzing in this work. The production of differentiated places in the city, for example the city centre and periphery, and the attribution of groups of people to those places, is what Lefebvre calls “representations of space,” produced and projected by those in powerful positions such as urban planners and private owners of land (1991). It is also what Foucault would describe as a form of power that classifies people and “fixes” them in place (1982, 1991). Yet, regulation over space is not enough to produce places. Lefebvre stresses that spatial practice and people’s perceptions of place escape dominant
forms of spatiality and also produce space. Foucault further stresses how power does not just delimit places and locate different populations in them, but also creates material arrangements of things and technologies of regulation and self regulation so people come to want to act as they are expected, what he calls a governmental power. The desire of the middle class for a more natural life in the gated communities but also the self fashioning of Tobas as authentic Indigenous People (a topic I develop later) can be regarded as part of the entangled forms of governmental power shaping people’s practices and, I add, shaping places.

The Conurbano is indeed a result of the spatial planning of quiet middle class neighbourhoods, and a multiplicity of policies and regulations (such as a restriction of access to rent in downtown) that historically redirected migrants arriving in Buenos Aires in the twentieth century to the borders of the city, and into informal settlements (see Auyero 2014). The hegemonic media (roughly composed of three main newspapers and five TV channels) and the white middle class Buenos Aires citizenry located downtown, think about the Conurbano as generically a place of the urban poor, and also racialize this area as the location of non white others. It makes sense for the barrio to be in this area of the Conurbano as the “last ring” of neighbourhoods in a semi-rural area, because this matches with the perception of Tobas as non white and non urban. Yet this semi-rural ring is not as stigmatized as the established villas or shantytowns are. What is unique is that this barrio is one of the only distinctly “indigenous barrios” in the Conurbano. The barrio is thus a place different from the city centre yet also different from the generic Conurbano.

Doreen Massey argues that embodied movements, and the encounters that result from them, are key to place making. Building on Lefebvre, Massey suggests that movement and the management of movement are both an attribute of power relations and the result of social
practices that exceed it. If places are made through movement they are always already connected to other places, and not only through classifications, but through the material movement of bodies through space. According to Massey, then, space is a multiplicity of encounters in an ever-changing flow of spatio-temporal events: “If space is a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space.” (2005: 130). I prefer to use the terms trajectories (another concept she uses) and mobilities, rather than “stories”, as the unfolding experiences in space that come together in particular locations are actual movements of bodies (people, objects) and ideas. Places, then, are collections of encounters, and cannot be detached from the trajectories that connect them to other locations. The barrio, as I will describe, is the result of the encounter of trajectories of people who met in the Buenos Aires shantytowns and in schools and fairs and started working together. But the barrio is also continually recreated through everyday movements, such as the one I just described from the Capital to the Barrio Toba. My trajectory from the downtown to the Barrio Toba was to meet families living there and to learn about their urban experience.

Massey argues that encounters are not free associations. Instead, different bodies have unequal possibilities for being placed, projecting, for shaping places, and of directing the movement of people and resources towards or through them. They have unequal possibilities for affecting places and leaving a trace. Deleuze goes a step further and argues that contemporary power is about access and speed, which also includes the capacity to move through space and to access places where certain encounters and resources can be accessed (Deleuze 1992, Grossberg 1992). These unequal and spatialized relations are what Massey calls power geometries. Thus, a commute on the train is also a movement that recreates the location of the barrio within larger power geometries of the city of Buenos Aires. Getting to the barrio on a train takes a long time,
which makes it a distant place from the Capital. Yet compared to other parts of the Conurbano, going to the barrio is a safe and smooth commute. The barrio’s location within Buenos Aires’ power geometries is of a tense proximity to \textit{and} separation from the Capital. Many shantytowns are much closer to the city centre and thus are a more convenient location for anyone looking for a job there. Because of the distance, very few people from the barrio work daily in the Capital. Yet the barrio is also relatively accessible from the Capital. For people going by car the trip is even more convenient: the same highways that connect the gated communities of Sauces with the Capital can be used to get to the barrio in less than an hour. This is why middle-class people from the Capital see the barrio as relatively close to them: instead of traveling to the Chaco they can visit an indigenous location after a short drive. Also, when people in the barrio work in collaboration with these groups, the Capital becomes very close because they get rides. The barrio is close to the Capital when relations with people from the middle class are fluid. For the middle class who visit the barrio, its location is “far enough” to be indigenous and “accessible enough” to be visited. For the people in the barrio the location is distant from government offices, jobs and any possibility of making the Capital into a familiar place.

In sum, the barrio is in distant proximity to the Capital and in close separation to the rest of the Conurbano. This location is the result of everyday forms of movement, and the encounter of trajectories in the past that shaped the place of the barrio as an unusual place within Buenos Aires’ power geometries.
A Stroll Through the Barrio: Places as Entanglements

My first two hours in the barrio were spent drinking *mate*\(^{14}\) and chatting with Miguel and his adult son, Leandro, at their house. The conversation revolved around how their life has improved after moving away from the “violent *villas*.” Our discussion was interrupted when a child dropped by to ask for a donation to buy a casket for his recently deceased father. “A tragedy, the man overdosed and left five young children. But they are from outside the barrio,” Leandro clarified after the child left with some coins in his hand. This interruption pointed to a central tension in the barrio. Markers of suffering and despair punctuated the alleged peacefulness and quietness of the area that Miguel and Leandro had been highlighting in our conversation.

Miguel used the interruption to say it was time to go for a walk. We walked outside his house along a dirt road with small houses in a row, and arrived at the open field with big buildings

\[^{14}\text{Mate is a popular drink in Argentina; it is a kind of tea drunk in a pot through a straw that filters out the leaves. Drinking mate is a social activity done during visiting.}\]
where the bus had dropped me off. Our first stop was the communal area, and the first thing I could see was a plot of overgrown grass and half-built walls. “This is an abandoned construction site for the Iglesia Unida Toba,” he said. Miguel explained that one of the buildings in the common area is a dining-room. Because the doors were closed, I looked through the window: there was a restaurant-size kitchen and a big empty room. Miguel explained that the chairs and tables are kept in the storeroom because all of the furniture was stolen once before. The room remains closed on a daily basis, and is only used for weekly services of the Toba Evangelical church, the Iglesia Unida, that has its abandoned construction site beside it. The room is also used for special events organized in collaboration with middle class groups, such as music festivals. Miguel, however, did not mention the more regular users of the space that were right there: a group of teenagers who were sitting on a cement platform outside of the building listening to reggaeton music and hanging out. The dining room was built by a church NGO that operated a soup-kitchen there for several years. It continued until the priest, the head of the organization, went to jail in the early 2000s and the soup-kitchen lost all funding.\(^\text{15}\) The cement platform was a more recent contribution from a group of people from the Capital who thought that the barrio needed a permanent outside stage for community events.

To the right of this building was the Community Centre, which was also closed that day. It was visibly older than the dining building, and built at the same time as the houses in the barrio. I later became familiar with this place, which has a central salon, three rooms, a small kitchen, and public washrooms. The Community Centre is open every day on weekdays because an adult secondary school operates in one of the rooms and it is also where I conducted a computer

\(^{15}\) The priest and head of the organization helping vulnerable children, had several homes and soup kitchens. He was found guilty of molesting children involved with his organization, and was sent to jail. The foundation quickly dissolved after that.
workshop with children and youth during part of my fieldwork. In another room of the Centre there is a Library created by an indigenist NGO, open weekly whenever the librarian, a self-motivated volunteer, visits the barrio. Equipment has also been stolen here and the rooms have been kept locked since. I saw a pile of sand in the middle of the main room, and Miguel explained that the room was being used as storage for construction materials. A Foundation was going to build an additional room in all the private houses. I asked about the mural outside the Community Centre, which I had seen upon arrival in the barrio. A group of non-indigenous students and teachers from a high school had visited the barrio and offered to paint the images of a Toba man and women. They made the design and painted it themselves. Apart from the semi-naked characters, I noticed a sun and a carved stone. None of these have a direct connection to the Toba but are rather generically intelligible as “Indigenous” for people from the city. Responding to the sexualization of the semi-nude Indians depicted, someone had graffiti-painted a penis on top of the male figure. Some of the youth I worked with later took a close-up photograph of this detail and when we saw the picture on the screen we all laughed about it.

Thinking about places as collections of trajectories pushes us to more carefully analyze how the convergence of trajectories unfolds in time. The notion of entanglement, and the figure of the knot in a piece of fabric, points to the multidimensional aspect of encounters in space and the fact that connections are made even when trajectories converge in different times (Ingold 2011, Moore 2005). New trajectories can get folded into old ones and old trajectories may come to life when they meet other trajectories in unexpected ways. What Miguel was showing in the barrio and the common area is a good example of the spatial productivity of entanglements producing place. From our first stop it was clear that the idea of a common area for common use had not worked as expected, but also it was not the result of only one plan. Rather, the common area
resulted from superimposed encounters of families in the barrio with different groups of the middle class who approached them to collaborate. The entanglement is thus not only referring to the superimposition and re-inscription of relations producing space (the school donating the land and architect designing a building, another NGO using a main meeting room as a storage place) but also to the specific disagreements that bring them together, such as the half finished church or the mural being painted with the consent of some people, while young people prefer to ridicule it.

In the common area there were also ten shacks housing some of the barrio’s young adults. One young woman living there would later tell me that no one considered where the new generations of Toba people would live and that it was quite unthoughtful of both adults and NGOs who had planned the barrio. She was particularly angry that one NGO would rather enlarge existing houses than help youth build brick houses. Youth who had children had started to occupy the common areas and also plots outside the barrio. These shacks therefore showed the tensions around the use of the common space. While the NGO and adults in the barrio had projected the place of the barrio by dividing private homes from an area for community activities, they had disregarded the needs and movements of youth, who had pushed to become independent and built precarious houses in available plots that were not formally assigned to them.

Miguel also clarified that in the early 2000s they used all of the common spaces more frequently, when the families “were more united” and organized activities together. But that unity had faded away with specific tensions around, for example, how donated second hand

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16 While some youth have been slowly buying bricks to make solid houses, others live in unfinished and poorly built houses. One of them summarized to me: “My bed gets wet with every rain.”
clothes should be distributed. This is why, he said, families “preferred to work all by themselves” now. This was an explanation many people repeated throughout my fieldwork: that after a period of unity, the barrio became more fragmented.

The meeting up of trajectories of families with people of the middle class and NGOs had generated disjointed collaborations through which groups got together around different interests and expectations and all had rather different ideas about what would result from working together. This is what Ana Tsing calls “frictions of collaboration.” Tsing claims: “There is no reason to assume that collaborators share common goals. In transnational collaborations, overlapping but discrepant forms of cosmopolitanism may inform contributors, allowing them to converse--but across difference” (2005:13). While in our case, collaborations were not transnational, conversations were across class and cultural differences. I could see the spatial productivity of these frictions of collaboration: between the desires of the NGOs and “groups that help” who think of the barrio as a unified group of Indigenous People, and the changing needs of families. Frictions were visible in the enormous energy put into building a common infrastructure and in their decay, for the common areas were only partially used and the buildings were in a state of deterioration. Frictions were also noticeable between Toba adults and the youth who did not participate in these collaborations, and who instead hang out listening to music, and who had built their own houses in the common areas as no other sector of the barrio was planned for them. Finally, there were frictions between groups coming to the barrio to help; while some wanted to have a community centre because of the “cultural richness” of the group, while others built a dining room to satisfy basic food needs for them. This place was therefore the result of multiple, fraught encounters of trajectories entangled together and in friction with each other.

Miguel took me to a house on the other side of the communal area, where a man in his late
seventies named Lorenzo was drinking mate under a tree. Lorenzo was the first person in the barrio to arrive to the city in the 1950s and he was a central figure in the creation of the barrio. He was also one of the three people in the barrio with keys to the Community Centre. I was planning to volunteer in the barrio and Miguel had suggested I make arrangements with Lorenzo to get access to the Community Centre. Andrea and Carlos, the secretary and president of the Comisión Vecinal had the other keys. We talked with Lorenzo for half an hour and he began to tell us the history of how he came to Buenos Aires. Unfortunately, we had to interrupt him to meet other people. I said that I would come back soon to listen to those stories (some of which are the core of the following chapters). We walked down the street and stopped at a house with a yard and several children playing there. Andrea and Rogelio came out of the house, and apologized because they could not invite us to sit down. They were busy making handicrafts for a big order for a shop in Sauces that was due in the next few days. I told them about my intention to do research and volunteer and they suggested I teach children how to use the computers that had been donated and were unused in the library. Even though they had just met me, I was surprised that they were encouraging me to start working soon.

From the conversations with Lorenzo and Andrea I realized that both of them were experienced in receiving visitors and probably held this role in the barrio. In a few minutes both of them had given me an overview of the barrio and had given me all the options to start working very soon. Their houses were not just “private homes” but were entry points to the barrio, where interested people could get oriented into their practice. In this welcome they made sure to plan my next visits so that my first experience there was smooth. My intention to do research and volunteer as part of it was received without any friction; only later would I see the tensions and misunderstandings of collaboration.
Our last stop was the house of Fernando, the preacher at the Toba Evangelical church, the *Iglesia Unida*, and the second church to be created in the barrio that has no building of its own. This is an evangelical church resulting from the presence of North American Pentecostal missionaries in the province of Chaco beginning in the 1940s. The first Iglesia Unida was created in the 1950s in Saenz Peña in Chaco province. Toba men, who had been trained and recognized as preachers by North American Pentecostal missionaries, created the church and became its leaders. The church is a Toba appropriation of Pentecostalism, where elements of shamanism are combined with the Pentecostal emphasis on a direct contact with God (see Miller 1979). The presence of this church in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires therefore signalled the spatial expansiveness of eclectic religious practices that came together and institutionalized in the Chaco. Fernando’s house was a bit larger than others, and had a large cement patio. As soon as we sat down, instead of talking about his church Fernando started telling us about the problems the *Comisión Vecinal*, the civil association that manages the barrio had in the last years. From now on I will call it the *comisión*. Later he asked me if I could help him by printing some certificates of attendance for their next church encounter. He handed me a sample certificate as we said good bye.

When we were returning to Miguel's house we walked past a bigger house, from where one could hear religious Christian song. Miguel explained, “this is Ivan’s church, the first church created in the barrio. It is evangelical but from another denomination, it is not part of the Iglesia Unida and it is not Toba. Simon, a Toba man and Ivan’s father, created it in the *villa*. He was married to a Guaraní woman, and made an evangelical church for everybody in the *villas* to participate, while it was connected to other Toba Churches it was not an official part of the Unida. When the families moved to the barrio Simon moved the church here, and he built a new
church on his own plot of land. When he died, his son Ivan took over as preacher.” Miguel then added: “Because we wanted to have a Unida church in the barrio we created another one. You can go to Ivan’s church, but I do not participate in it.” I noticed that Ivan’s church was rather small (it was around one-fourth the size of the community center). However, unlike the deserted common areas, Ivan’s church was the liveliest place I saw during our stroll. People on the patio smiled and waved a hello to us.

Later I learned that both Fernando’s and Ivan’s churches are active and gather a large number of people. They both have people from outside the barrio participating, but while Fernando’s church is attended by mostly Toba people, Ivan’s church has members coming from neighbouring barrios and even from Fuerte Apache, the villa where the church was founded. These churches are the most “independent” organizations in the barrio. By independent I mean that while they follow Christian teachings and receive funding from other evangelical institutions, these churches have an autonomous organization under Toba leadership, and have their own aims, programs, and connections. Therefore, they are a key political and social organization connecting Toba villages and barrios. In my fieldwork, I attended Ivan’s services more often and I became close to a group of young women who attended the church regularly. I also attended Fernando’s Unida service one time and I realized that this was also a lively and well-attended organization. However, it was less organized. Unida services would often be cancelled and rescheduled, and there were ongoing tensions around the use of the building, because the president of the barrio’s comisión had the power to schedule last minute activities there, forcing the service to be postponed. These tensions over the use of buildings gave me a good introduction into the tensions around leadership and competition between families in the barrio. That is probably why Fernando’s first remarks were a criticism directed towards the
comisión. On that stroll I could see that Fernando’s Unida church had not been as effective in procuring its own building as Ivan’s church had. Through asking about the use of buildings I could learn about some of the tensions around disputed and disjoint leadership in the barrio.

As we were finishing our stroll through the barrio I asked Miguel about the general layout of the place. He explained that his house is located on a street along the eastern edge of the barrio, and that across that street there is an open field with grazing cattle (later I met a 12 year old boy who takes care of those cows). To the west, the only paved street draws a line between the barrio and the catholic school beside it. This is the school that donated the lands for the creation of the barrio, and which several of the children in the barrio attend. The northern edge of the barrio is also bordered by a street that hosts Ivan’s church. The houses on the other side of this street belong to another barrio inhabited by non-Indigenous People. Spatially this division is hard to identify. The block of common areas establishes the southern edge of the barrio, defined by the soccer court and the community centre. In the same direction and beyond the barrio a big plot of land was becoming populated with new houses from new neighbours and a few youth. About 200 meters south of the barrio, a paved road with heavy traffic connects Sauces’ district center with the head of another district to the west. This road is another way to get to the barrio, as there were several buses driving on it, yet Miguel said it was unsafe and that I should try to avoid it.

When I asked Miguel about their neighbours in the other barrios, he explained they come “from everywhere” and he does not know most of them. He is only close to the few families that attend the Unida church (I noted this was in contradiction to the earlier claims that the Unida was solely attended by Toba people).

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17 One of the Non-Governmental Organizations working in the barrio pays their tuition.
18 When I started to take the bus with people from the barrio I began using this bus stop.
In delineating the barrio, Miguel was defining this place through its spatial limits and clarifying which spatially continuous sectors were not part of the Barrio Toba. By explaining how to get to the barrio and what places to avoid he was presenting the outside of the barrio as a potentially dangerous place for me. This layout became much less neat and clear-cut when I later visited the “casas precarias,” the precarious homes, or shacks of Toba youths who were living on the limits and outside the barrio; some of them were married to people who did not self-identify as indigenous. I later became close to a group of women in this ethnically heterogeneous group of younger people. On this stroll, therefore, Miguel was actualizing the disconnection of relations that produce the barrio as a different place from its surroundings, as a specific place in the Conurbano. When Miguel pointed out that barrio Toba was different from the other small neighbourhoods around it, he was actively erasing some of its relations to other places.

In her critique of Bruno Latour, Marilyn Strathern (1996) argues that in order to create certain connections in a network others have to be specifically and actively cut and left outside. She gives the example of scientific discovery where whole teams and predecessors are left outside the recognized authors of one scientific paper demonstrating the discovery. In a very different context from that analyzed by Strathern, when Miguel clarified that the child collecting money for the casket was from outside the barrio; he was disengaging from his neighbour with whom he later recognized he had an ongoing relation. He was also omitting the Toba youth living in these adjacent barrios and married to their neighbours. To make and present the barrio as an indigenous place it was necessary to create it as a distinct place: different from the shantytowns where they used to live and different from the barrios around them. It was necessary to clearly separate certain blocks from all others, which were also built on lands donated by the church yet had no legal recognition of being an indigenous community and had no NGO
assistance to build their houses. This was a point of tension with neighbours and municipal authorities. More significantly this disconnection had to be constantly recreated because the spatial limits of the barrio and ongoing relations with neighbours blurred the limits of the barrio as a distinct place.

In a short stroll, therefore, I got a clear overview of some of the defining social relations of the barrio as an indigenous barrio that is both close and distant to the Capital, and that is within the Conurbano yet different from it. I also got an overview of some of the analytical lines I would trace later in my fieldwork: the histories of arrival in Buenos Aires from the Chaco; life in the villas miseria; the collaborations with middle class people; and the active connections they keep with the Chaco. Furthermore, on this stroll I was quickly and effectively integrated into the barrio myself, for my volunteer work was immediately accepted and almost organized for me, and I left with a task to help Fernando with one of the Unida’s activities. From then on, people I met were satisfied with my brief introduction of my research interests, before moving on to talk about what worried them. I formally negotiated my entrance to the field several weeks later.

When I met the president of the comisión and he explained to me that they hardly ever met. Thus I had no chance to formally present my project in a meeting and request permission. In a very brief conversation I presented my project to him and he gave me formal oral permission to work in the barrio. In this sense, my research is the result of yet another trajectory connecting the city to the barrio, and also making it.19

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19 People in the barrio did not care too much about the focus of my research as long as I went there. When I discussed about the possibility of staying overnight in the barrio I found that they were not comfortable about it as they are very pressed with space.
Making an Indigenous Barrio in the Capital: Spatialized Indigenous Politics

While the Barrio Toba is a new place in the city, it was not the first place where families lived upon arrival in the city. Most families first arrived to different villas miseria, where they lived for many years. Talking about their life in the “villas” (as they are colloquially called) was widely avoided in everyday conversations with me, and people preferred to elaborate at length about their life in the Chaco. When people narrated the history of the creation of the barrio these contrasts between the latter and the shantytowns were made explicit. The villas were remembered as places they needed to get away from, because they were violent, noisy, unbearable, whereas the making of the barrio had allowed them a sort of “return” to the Chaco: that is, experiencing peaceful nights and living in proximity to open green fields. People in the barrio often remember the Chaco as a place “where you are free to move around: go to the bush, visit your relatives, do what you want”, as Mathias, a man in his forties told me. He lived in a rural village in the province of Chaco before arriving in Buenos Aires and he was still constantly missing the Chaco and wishing he could return. Many people, including children who had been to the Chaco on holidays highlighted the abundance of food in the Chaco, and the beauty and peace of the bush, recalling the space with a glow on their faces.

In contrast, the villas were described as enclosed, overcrowded places where they got lost. Mathias explained, “in the villas it seems it is daytime all the time: bright electric lights, people are awake, there is noise all the time. I couldn’t sleep”. He described this sense of estrangement based on the different rhythms and the sensorial shock the city provoked in him. From the barrio the Chaco was remembered as rural and peaceful, the villas as urban and violent. In sum, in this tension between Chaco and villas, the barrio Toba is described as a “return” to some positive spatial features of the Chaco: as a place with green open spaces, quiet nights, with children
playing outside, and yards where people can cook with an open fire. The barrio, in its semi rural location within the Conurbano is described as the “proper” place for them in the city. This perception therefore had an important role in shaping the barrio into what it is.

As noted by Lefebvre (1991), perceptions of space are not abstract images but are inseparable from the actions that shape places. In this case, people’s negative perceptions of the villas and their nostalgia for the Chaco were some of the factors that made families leave the villas and create the barrio. But while the making of Barrio Toba allowed a temporary escape from the villas it also inserted families into new constraints and new forms of subordination within the city. The creation of the barrio located the families under a different government jurisdiction while it disconnected them from all the previous relations they had established in the villas.

**Land Negotiation in the City**

When different adults narrated to me how the barrio was created, they all highlighted the same points: a need to get out of the villas, the experience of creating a handicraft co-op, and meeting people from two NGOs and members of the catholic church who helped them create a new place. I invoke land negotiation and not land claim because the lands of the barrio were negotiated with a religious organization rather than demanded from the state. There were also no activist activities involved as in the case of land claims where groups might rely on legal processes, demonstrations and land occupation.

Lorenzo explained that when he was laid off from his work in the port during the end of the last military dictatorship in the 1980s, he decided to start producing handicrafts for a living, as people in barrios in the Chaco do. In the early 1990s, Lorenzo received an invitation to give a talk in a middle class school in the Capital. He enjoyed how engaged the children and teachers
were with his stories about the Chaco and in addition he sold many handicrafts. After this first talk several other schools contacted him and asked him to give other talks. He invited other Toba families living in his same villas to join him in this activity; among them were Carlos and his wife Antonia. Carlos was a young man who had recently arrived from the Chaco. These workshops were the starting point for the relations that allowed for the creation of the barrio. The workshops were moments in which they displayed their indigeneity, and being perceived as indigenous allowed them to turn encounters with people of the middle class into opportunities for productive collaborations.

The Toba started meeting people from the middle class in Buenos Aires especially by selling handicrafts at fairs or door to door. People of the middle class have worked with the Toba even before the creation of the barrio and were key actors in helping families to create the barrio as such. Yet they are not a stable or homogeneous group. Rather they are people who over the years have been interested in helping the Toba in the city, and thus got in touch with them, started visiting and collaborating, and then later tend to stop their visits. While they are very different from each other, they have either a humanitarian approach in helping the Toba or have an activist approach in helping their struggle. They include, among others, schoolteachers and school administrators, students, professionals, people organized around catholic parishes, as well as a few formal NGOs (this is a topic I develop at length in Chapter 4).

Going back to the creation of the barrio from the villas, Carlos further explained how they met other Toba families in the villas and started working together to do workshops about Toba culture. While he already knew Raul and his family, Carlos met some other Toba families when he went to a parents’ meeting at his daughter's school in the villas. He introduced himself as “Toba,” which provoked a big surprise among the other parents since, in his words, “nobody in
the villas expected there were Indians living there." In that meeting, he got in touch with other Toba families. It is worth noting that when he initially met the other parents, they perceived him as an ordinary inhabitant of the shantytown. Only by enunciating “I am Toba” a few parents reacted by self identifying and approached him afterwards and said, “We are Toba too.” This indicates that no physical markers made these Toba people stand out amid other people living in poverty in the villas, not even to another Toba person. Lorenzo, Carlos and these families started working together to organize the workshops and produce handicrafts. Later, Julio and his wife joined them from another villa. Together they decided to create a cooperative for handicraft production and to organize talks about “Toba culture” at schools. With the assistance of people of the middle class, they did the paperwork to become a legal cooperative.

They set up a shop at the villas where Lorenzo lived, but after a year the co-op failed as a commercial enterprise and was dismantled. However, the families continued with the workshops, further consolidating their positionality as Toba people in the city. The cooperative also gave them experience working together and with the support of people from the middle class. This experience was thus an initial moment in the articulation of a shared Toba identity in the city that would allow them to negotiate the barrio in these terms.

The possibility of recreating knowledge and cultural practices marked as Toba is related to the fact that “the Toba,” along with other Chaco indigenous groups, tend to be regarded as “the most indigenous” of all indigenous groups in Argentina. This exoticization has attracted a long tradition of research, especially anthropological, but also missionary work (see Gordillo 2004). When Carlos stood in front of a school classroom and told stories about his life in the Chaco, about how he hunted in the forest, worked in the cotton fields, and witnessed his father’s shamanic power, nobody questioned whether or not he was an authentic indigenous person.
When delivering a workshop for those in the classroom, Lorenzo, Carlos and Antonia were undeniably Indigenous People and this became the core of their collaborative relation with NGOs and with groups of the middle class. Perceptions about their authenticity were produced in this encounter and are the link that has kept people working together long-term.

In the early 1990s, the teachers at one of the workshops in a catholic school were particularly moved by Carlos and Antonia’s account about the difficulties of living in the villas. The teachers contacted the bishop of the district, and asked him if the church had lands in Buenos Aires that could be donated to these Toba families. The bishop got involved and identified the lands of one catholic school, currently beside the barrio, as suitable for donation. When the negotiations started, a catholic NGO, which I call “Christians for Indigenous People,” joined in to help Carlos and Lorenzo to make the legal arrangements. Julio provided the connection with another NGO, which I call “Pachamama”, that offered support to build homes. Both NGOs self-identified as indigenist, and thus are part of a political organization of non Indigenous People who advocate for furthering rights and reparatory measures for Indigenous People (for Brazil see Ramos 1998).

In this case both NGOs had been created and integrated by people from the white middle class, in many cases professionals, priests and nuns (in the case of the catholic NGO). Pachamama wrote a proposal with the families and asked the national government for funds for a social housing project that they would administer. They provided the technical requirement of hiring an architect who would be in charge of obtaining the permits and approvals for the housing project. In other words, several lines and actors come together in the creation of the Barrio Toba: a catholic school connected to the catholic church, two NGOs who provided assistance and technical support, and another catholic school that donated the land. Middle class people, indigenous activists, and artists who had helped with the handicrafts cooperative joined them too.
The neighbourhood emerged from this joint but tense double leadership resulting from of Julio’s and Carlos collaborations, and Lorenzo as the elder’s who is always involved in important decisions. During most of the history of the commission Julio and Carlos alternated holding the presidency.

The land titling process was fast. The catholic NGO helped with the paperwork to register the families as an indigenous community in the national registry and in the legal process of land donation. In 1995, the bishop’s office identified a catholic school to make the donation and the school decided what part to give away: around 2 hectares of land, where the nuns used to have a farm. The land was legally divided and donated to an indigenous association that Carlos, Julio and Lorenzo created to receive and administer the land and that is now called the barrio’s comisión. The day the land title was granted, the press was there, filming and taking photographs of the signing of documents. Shortly thereafter, in 1996, the first families moved to the barrio, living in temporary shacks while they built the houses with the support of the NGO Pachamama. Each family also mobilized the help of relatives from the Chaco who came to work. Some of these people, such as Miguel, ended up staying in the barrio and building their own houses on plots still available. All the families that moved in had either been part of the handicrafts cooperative linking families from the two villas, or were their relatives.20

Massey argues that “the horizontality of space is a product of a multitude of histories whose resonances are still there” (2005: 118). In the case of the Barrio Toba there are traces of the histories of relations and displacements in the Chaco and in the villas elsewhere in Buenos Aires, as the barrio itself emerged from the villas. Some of the traces of the villas are relations that

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20 While most houses were given to families of more than four people, there is one house occupied by a single man. There is also a single mother who lives just with her youngest daughter.
connect people beyond the barrio. For example, several of the men still work in occupations they
developed in the villas, and some married neighbours from there and socialize with relatives who
still live there. More significantly, some young adults decided to stay in the villas and not move
to the barrio. But the most significant connections that were legally recognized in the creation of
an indigenous association are the ones linking the barrio and its people to the Chaco. And these
relations separate the Barrio Toba from the rest of the villas. The Chaco, remembered as a place
of “freedom” and an idealized rural life became the main source in the recognition of these
families’ authenticity as “Toba.” The barrio was therefore a place where the traces of the villas
were erased and where the connections to the Chaco were emphasized. The Chaco, as the source
of their indigeneity, became a condition for the existence of the barrio. Families legally “needed”
to have lived in the Chaco to obtain the lands in the Conurbano and create the barrio. In the next
section I describe the legal recognition of the families as indigenous that allowed for their
registry under the status of indigenous association based in the city and that allowed the donation
of lands to take place. The state grants this legal status only to groups that the national agency
recognizes as an indigenous community. The spatial experience of having lived in the Chaco was
paradoxically constitutive of the legal recognition of the families as urban indigenous.

**Authentic Indigenous in the City: Uncontested Recognition**

The creation of the barrio as one of the first indigenous settlements in the city, was one action
that even if only partially, challenged long-held notions of Buenos Aires as a “white city.” The
government’s recognition of an indigenous group in the city and the granting of indigenous
status to the association managing the land both implied a legal recognition of the families as
indigenous and the land as belonging to the indigenous community. In sum it implied the
recognition of the existence of Indigenous People in Buenos Aires. It recognized an indigenous right to have a specific place for themselves in the city and to legally own land in it. This recognition is in contrast to the villas, which continue to be informal settlements and even when many villas have achieved land titles they continue to be linked with illegality (a topic I develop in Chapter 3). The recognition is also unusual in the field of indigenous politics. Even when the legislation is open to granting lands that are not their “traditional” ones as part of historical reparation measures, the tendency has been that groups have to prove a previous occupation in order to make a successful land claim (see Carrasco 2000; Briones 2005).\footnote{National legislation opens up the possibility of having land claims outside the “traditional territories” when they define land reparation as the handing back of traditional lands or other lands that “can guarantee cultural survival”. This clarification has allowed land claims in urban areas, and in regions where indigenous populations moved later (Carrasco 2000). Therefore, it allows for a partial recognition of displaced indigeneity.} Granting land in Buenos Aires to a group of Toba Indigenous People originally from the Chaco region was therefore an action that reshaped the organization of difference within the city space, even if partially. It is not surprising then that the Barrio’s land negotiation attracted numerous indigenous activists from other indigenous nations living in the city, and that the titling generated a lot of expectations among indigenous organizations. It was recognized as a moment in which possibilities for indigeneity in the city were changing, as Manuel, a Mapuche activist living in Buenos Aires explicitly told me. He explained that with the creation of the barrio other indigenous groups living in the city also started to hope for land. However, the creation of the barrio did not generate the wave of indigenous recognition in Buenos Aires that urban Indigenous People had wished for. The lack of recognition for others can be related, as Manuel himself suggested, to the difficulties other Indigenous People in the city have to be recognized as such, while the Toba’s authenticity is unquestioned.

All the groups that converged to help the families leave the villas for a new barrio recognized
them as Toba, as descendants of the populations that inhabited what is today the Argentinean territory before Spanish colonization. They further recognized them as keeping pre-colonial habits and knowledge alive and unchanged. As I said earlier, in Buenos Aires the Toba along with the other major indigenous groups in the Chaco (Pilagá and Wichí) are usually seen as indisputably indigenous. Since the period of state formation in early twentieth century to the present, they have been considered the paramount “other”: hunter-gatherers who have recreated shamanic conceptions of the body and nature, who were the last to be colonized by the Argentinean state, and who speak their native languages as a first language, even in urban areas. In the early twentieth century, the attribution of authenticity to their alterity was manifest in the fact that groups from the Chaco were toured around in human exhibits that displayed them as “live savages” from the remote Chaco (see, for example, Martínez 2012). Gordillo further shows how Chaco groups became the paramount object of Argentinean anthropology and an axis around which the discipline developed (2008). In Buenos Aires’ common sense and media the Chaco Indigenous People continue to be portrayed as true and unquestioned both in romanticized images of them as hunters and gatherers and as victims of modernity and party politics (see, Gómez et al 2007).

This unquestioned recognition did not imply an opening up of indigenous recognition in the city or smooth access to collective rights. Rather, it had two restrictive outcomes. Because these Toba families could meet the dominant criteria of authenticity, their recognition also defined the conditions of potential exclusion for other groups, which in contrast to the Toba could be considered “not authentic enough.” These criteria of authenticity have distinguished the Toba from other indigenous groups who have lost their language, have assimilated to the life in cities and towns since Spanish colonial times, and whose religious practices were systematically
repressed. The Toba have been distinguished as even more authentic than indigenous groups in Patagonia who were colonized in the same period as the groups from the Chaco but underwent an even more radical process of state sponsored social dismemberment. Groups from Patagonia also had to confront a history of being labeled “not really Argentinean” by government authorities and anthropologists (see Perez 2011; Lazzari and Lenton 2002), while the Tobas “Argentineaness” was not so debated.

In spite of commonly held assumptions, Toba “traditional life” in the Chaco has not been a resilient recreation of habits and knowledge. Rather it results from complex colonial processes in the Chaco. In the 19th century, national military forces advanced over Chaco groups’ lands and reduced them to mission stations and state reservations. In these institutions Toba were disciplined for agricultural labour and subjected to policies directly attempting to erase their cultural specificity and identity. Subordination also included extreme forms of violence such as mass killings of Chaco groups, which continued until the middle of the twentieth century. The perceived authenticity of the Toba, therefore, is not a form of difference that “survived” modernization, but rather was shaped in violent forms of subordination and ongoing dispossessions of indigenous lands.

Unlike other indigenous groups, many Toba were able to regroup in the reservations and mission stations, and to occupy unused public lands in small sections of their previous territories. They were employed as a group to work in the emergent cotton and sugar agro-industries. This allowed them to continue speaking their language and to recreate practices such as fishing, gathering fruits, and hunting in the bush when they were not working on cotton and sugar

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22 Multiple other indigenous groups have had colonization trajectories that make it harder or even impossible to be recognized as such. The recognition and lack of recognition are tightly connected processes, and yet until recently non-recognition was not the object of academic research. This tendency has changed with recent studies of non-recognition across the Americas see for example Muehlmann (2013), and Lawrence (2004).
plantations. They were also able to recreate shamanic knowledge and forms of healing within the Pentecostalist religious service. These characteristics of Tobas, which were seen as problematic before the 1990s because they prevented their integration as “modern citizens”, became in that decade positive traits of their authenticity. For example, while speaking the Toba language or *Qom l’aqtaqa* as a first language was seen as an impediment to full integration into Argentinean society, it later became a sign of their true indigeneity (Muehlmann [2013] makes a comparable point in regards to the Cucapa in Northern Mexico).

The criteria of authenticity that state agencies held were also produced within global discussions about what indigeneity is and is not, especially materialized in transnational organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank’s adoption of general policies of consultation with Indigenous People involved in any of their development programs and funding. Because of Argentina’s growing dependency on agencies such as this one for financing its debt in the 1990s, the national government became involved in the discussions of which indigenous groups would be recognized and consulted and which would not. The criteria of these agencies were based on reified notions of a traditional culture, traditional organization, and traditional language. The criteria of authenticity were therefore shaped by local histories of indigenous and state relations and by translocal forms of government. Charles Hale calls the emergent recognition of ethnic and racialized minorities as agents of their own development “neoliberal multiculturalism.” Thereby joining together two terms that previously researchers had assumed to be in opposition (Hale 2002, 2005). Multiculturalism was initially celebrated as a democratizing move that would allow minorities to represent their interests in the face of government and corporative abuses, as for example putting a limit to the use of indigenous land for big resource extraction developments. Thus, multiculturalism was initially conceived of as a
limit to neoliberal processes of massive privatization of public resources and commodification of previous state services. Yet, Hale shows how this operated in Latin America by turning Indigenous People into subjects and responsible for their structurally derived limitations (and also linked with Focault’s notion of governmentality I presented earlier). Thus, instead of recognizing the processes of land encroachment and the limited possibilities of subsistence Indigenous People have, they were made into managers of the natural resources in their lands and solely blamed if, for example, they become involved in resource extraction.

Indigenous groups were thus made accountable for the self-management of “their problems”, while protecting corporate interests (Hale 2002). The limit to participation has been when indigenous and other minorities make claims that threaten big economic interests, and, in turn, any “failure.” For example, failures in intercultural education programs sponsored by these agencies, have been blamed on indigenous groups instead of recognizing the structural inequalities that limit the possibilities of indigenous peasants’ participation in the formal educational systems. In Latin America, the multiculturalist approach to government was expected to stop potential indigenous conflicts over land and resources.

The fact that the 1990s was both the period when the barrio was created and a moment in which Argentinean government institutions were undergoing a neoliberal transformation was not a coincidence. As part of the requirements to have Argentina’s financial debt renegotiated, international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank forced Argentinean institutions to shrink their budgets and reach, and transfer welfare functions to civil society. A multiculturalist recognition promoting indigenous group’s “participation” in affairs affecting them became part of this transfer of state functions. The creation of the INAI, the Argentinean National Institute of Indigenous Affairs resulted from the recognition of Indigenous People in the
national and provincial constitutions (see Briones 1998; Carrasco 2000). The entanglements of trajectories and relations that created the barrio also include the development of multiculturalist policies in the national state agencies, one of which granted recognition to the barrio.

When the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs recognized the barrio, it therefore recreated local and transnational criteria of authenticity that privileged the experience of authentic Indigenous People over other groups whose recognition was more contested, either because of processes of cultural transformation, group fragmentation, or urbanization. The criteria that defined the Toba’ experience as authentic therefore also created the exclusion of other indigenous groups regarded as inauthentic or not indigenous enough.\textsuperscript{23} In Buenos Aires many shantytown dwellers also self-identify as indigenous or as having indigenous ancestry. However, even when they may be recognized as such by others and even counted as such in the surveys of the National Census and Statistics Institute, no villas have been able to obtain a land title of its lands because its population (or part of it) is indigenous. Likewise, as I mentioned other indigenous groups live scattered around the city and have not created their own barrios.

Furthermore, the double edge of recognition is that while it opens a recognition of previously denied rights it also demands very specific characteristics and thus presents limitations to any novel form of cultural production, sociality and form of identification to the recognized groups (Povinelli 2002:16-17). Once indigenous groups are recognized as “legitimate,” they are not only separated from those who are not, but also restricted in their possibilities. This happened to the families creating the barrio. To be recognized as indigenous, adults in the barrio had to continue to display their indigeneity, making constant references to the Chaco and erasing their experience in the villas. Meanwhile, the Toba youth who were born in the city and participated in forms of

\textsuperscript{23} Further studies on authenticity outside Argentina see Raibmon 2005; Li 2007; and Muehlmann 2013.
suburban youth socialization have not been able to acquire plots of land and became a less
desirable object of NGOs’ attention. The criteria of recognition demands that Indigenous People
keep their cultural difference unchanged to meet the dominant expectations about how
Indigenous People should be. Once Toba families achieved recognition, they found themselves
inhabiting the tension described by Povinelli (2002: 6) as the founding principle of neoliberal
multiculturalism, where subaltern groups are forced to identify with “the impossible object of an
authentic self identity.” This includes a “traditional”, premodern version of themselves (see also
Cadena de la and Starn 2007).

In sum, in Buenos Aires the criteria of authenticity turned the historical specificity of the
Toba experience into an expression of “real” indigeneity. The making of the Barrio Toba was the
product of the Toba’s assumed authentic indigeneity in the eyes of non-indigenous actors along
with the Toba efforts and their coming together as one group of handicraft makers when they had
been previously disconnected families. Recognizing some cultural practices as indigenous was
also a way of selecting what type of indigeneity is possible in Buenos Aires: a group from
“outside” the city, that speaks their language, have fished and gathered fruits for subsistence, and
have shamanic conceptions of the world combined with other forms of knowledge (such as
Pentecostalism).

With this analysis I am not trying to deny the relevance of Toba’s recreation of cultural
knowledge and practices and the recreation of an identity as a form of connection with other
Toba people from the same general area, in the city. Confronted with the experiences of
colonization and its violence, Indigenous People have recreated their specificity not as part of an
essence but both in regards to new post colonial positionings and in regard to a specificity that is
valued as significant. Cultural practices are thus neither essences nor pure political strategies but
part of habits that become significant, practices that are recreated and recombined in other relations, such as Evangelism and forms of knowledge used in new situations. Indigenous experience thus emerges from forms of recreating practices and ways of knowing, habits and forms of relating, caring, and feeling that people find significant and are able to recreate in certain conditions. I will focus on these creative forms of reshaping an everyday life in the rest of this dissertation, yet in this section I want to specify the conditions of possibility that enabled the formation of a Toba neighbourhood. I will also address the question of why a new place was necessary, and why a specific area within the villas was not created, for example. On the other hand, the recreation of Tobas identity in a Chaco city has been an object of my analysis (Vivaldi 2007, 2011) and specifically for the province of Buenos Aires, has been deeply analyzed by Tamagno (2001) in her examination of one Barrio Toba in La Plata.

In what follows, I describe some of the ways in which Toba families weaved the project of a new place. I explore how this political process was the result not only of discursive forms of articulating new meaning to being Toba in the city but rather of very specific encounters of people in specific places.

**Legally Indigenous**

The first turning point in the making of the Barrio Toba was when middle class groups from Buenos Aires met Lorenzo and other Toba families in the villas who were producing handicrafts for a living and began inviting them to deliver workshops at schools. Soon some families from the middle class helped the Toba families to create a cooperative to centralize and share the work of producing handicrafts and delivering cultural workshops. The cooperative in the villas then created and consolidated their “cultural work.” Creating a barrio required that this recognition
become a legal category granted by a state agency, and they needed to obtain a personería jurídica, a legal status as an indigenous group that could formally receive a land donation, manage it and administer resources. In this legal domain, the Toba’s authenticity was also unquestioned. With the indication that these families were originally from the central Chaco, that they spoke the Toba language, and had a culture to preserve, the National Agency of Indigenous Affairs unproblematically recognized them as an indigenous community. Lorenzo and Julio further explained that they considered organizing around other legal categories, such as a cooperative or a sociedad de fomento, the legal construct for any neighbourhood association. “However, in the end it was best to be an indigenous community,” Lorenzo told me. He later explained that this way the land could not be sold and that they could apply for projects as an indigenous community.

In this case, obtaining legal status and creating the barrio went hand in hand as they only applied for legal status when the donation of land became a concrete possibility. The families and NGOs decided to make the claim to the National Agency of Indigenous Affairs (INAI) rather than to the province of Buenos Aires. They used the national registry of indigenous communities because the provincial one was not yet created but also because they had easier access to the INAI with its office in Capital. Once they received legal status the land donation

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24 The registries of communities were created in the 1990s to implement indigenous legislation developed nationally and provincially. In some contexts, national legislation overlaps with provincial ones creating tensions around recognition (see Briones 2005 for examples of this). In other cases, communities may use the jurisdictions strategically. For example, if a group is denied provincial recognition—sometimes as part of provincial governments’ way of preventing groups to advance in land claims— a group may apply for the national registry.

25 Later, the legislation of the province of Buenos Aires recognized the “existence” of Indigenous People in its territory but does not recognize the “pre-existence” of indigenous groups in it. It therefore does not recognize the province is on land that was previously indigenous. This legislation has discouraged the emergence of an indigenous movement in the province of Buenos Aires, as indigenous groups had to prove belonging to another province in order to be recognized. The limits of recognition in the provincial legislation is only one more symptom of the idea that the province of Buenos Aires and the city are European settler places and Indigenous People are migrants, newcomers to the area. This tendency has slowly started to shift.
materialized.

The legal status made the families into an indigenous community, and as such, they had to create a commission that would manage the barrio’s lands and the families as a group with a common interest. This legal entity creates an organizational structure very similar to a civil association, the difference being that as an indigenous community they cannot sell or mortgage the land that they may own. Legal status also allowed the barrio’s comisión to apply for government projects, including the housing project. Once the barrio was created the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs was able to partner with them to help develop an educational project, which channelled international funds for “cultural revitalization.”

However, this legal status also implied a complex series of legal responsibilities. The comisión authorities have to be re-elected every year, hold regular meetings, and keep meeting and accounting books updated. These requirements hold for any legal society yet it was a novelty for many of the families that have not been in charge of legal duties like these before. Authorities in the comisión are held accountable for the administration and need to make budget reports every year (Carrasco and Briones 1996). This administrative work is very challenging for any group who does not get assistance from a lawyer and an accountant, and while the barrio did have this help they nonetheless experienced difficulties. When I did my fieldwork, the barrio’s comisión was behind with the paperwork, and in addition it had a government sanction because one of the past presidents poorly administered the resources for an education project. The comisión was not allowed to administer any project or submit any applications until this was resolved. Thus, the barrio had to work with other NGOs who applied and administered projects

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26 Not allowing any indigenous organizations to sell their land is a provision intended to prevent any future loss of the land. But this also restricts the possibility of applying for bank loans to initiate productive projects (Carrasco and Briones 1996).
on their behalf, which restricted their independence. This showed how the administration of special rights could drastically restrict the exercise of these rights. While everyone in the barrio knew who formed part of the comisión and what position they held, during my fieldwork the comisión never held a meeting. The commission was kept as a formal organization with little power, especially since it could not apply or administer any project. During my fieldwork they were never able to clear up the problem that caused the sanction.

Historically, the presidents of the comisión have been either Carlos or Julio, who have alternated in the position. The neighbourhood has been divided since its origin into roughly two groups of families with each group related through kinship to one of the leaders. The creation of the barrio and its comisión has therefore generated a field of politics similar to other Toba barrios where leaders compete to represent the community while kinship and church alliances continue to act as superimposed on and sometimes in tension with forms of political organization. The big difference with other Toba barrios is that political brokers are almost non-existent here given the barrio is not significant as a source of voters. The comisión and its members are not constantly involved with municipal or provincial party politics as in the Chaco, in the crowded villas, and in the rest of the Greater Buenos Aires Area. Because of the absence of punteros, or political brokers, the barrio is also an exception to the politics that surround them (for political brokerage and politics of state in Greater Buenos Aires see Auyero 2001 and 2012).

The Toba families’ request for legal status as Indigenous People was not a planned strategy in a propitious moment of neoliberal recognition, but rather a relation emerging from the encounter of group trajectories. Yet the fact that this encounter took place during a moment in

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27 The two preachers worked as alternative leaders too, creating associations overlapping with the alliances around the commission’s leaders.
which these policies were being developed was significant. Obtaining legal status implied not only creating a new barrio in the Conurbano but also creating a new position in the city and a new relationship with the state. The legal status obtained to administer lands was thus a form of recognition but also a concession: it allowed the Toba to be “saved” from the villas, but only because they met certain criteria. Attaining legal status was also a moment of social and spatial separation where a group of Toba families was singled out from other urban poor to create a unique place. For the families moving to the barrio, recognition implied a change in their everyday habits as many of them became both the hosts and administrators of middle class people’s multiple visits to get to know the Toba (a topic developed in Chapter 4).

While I share the deconstructivist projects of problematizing any idea of immutable cultural essence, especially as presented by the work of Spivak (1988), I think it is problematic to deconstruct cultural forms of production by colonized groups and reduce them to strategic political products. In other words, indigeneity is not reducible to a cultural construction that is purely fabricated, or a form of strategic essentialism enacted with political purposes only (Briones 1994, Raibmon 2005, Tsing 2007). Asking about the indisputability of the Toba’s indigeneity in Buenos Aires is to consider how they were able to connect with other actors in ways that other people living in shantytowns could not, and to problematize the conditions of those relations rather than to deconstruct their content. In the city, Toba families recreate forms of knowledge and cultural practices, including for example a perspective over relations with non-humans, and notions of health and illness, that are not a political strategy and rather a form of knowledge about the world and ways of relating to one and other.
Indigeneity as Labour

Making handicrafts is one of the central activities of the adults in the barrio who made the land claim. Only a few men have full-time jobs, either hired by the state municipality or in the private sector, as for example gardeners or maintenance employees. Most of the employed men work in construction under short contracts. Construction companies working throughout Greater Buenos Aires and downtown Buenos Aires hire them. Others have sporadic jobs as maintenance or cleaning staff in the district’s industrial complex. Women for the most part have no formal employment, although a few have worked as maids. Some women also beg for second hand clothes in the city and resell them to neighbours. In contrast to the Chaco where most families receive subsidies, only a few families in the barrio receive state assistance. Some have pensions and others receive benefits from the federal government such as the asignación universal por hijo, the universal child benefit, which pays a fixed amount of money per child to unemployed families. Because most people are registered as still living in the Chaco they are not eligible for Buenos Aires’ provincial programs. A few people receive subsidies from the government of Chaco through relatives or political patrons living there.28

More than half of the adult men and women produce handicrafts and do “cultural work” delivering workshops, giving talks, or, less frequently, playing Toba music in schools and festivals in downtown Buenos Aires. Many families work in the production of large quantities of handicrafts and sell them to shops, at markets and at fairs. The handicrafts made in Barrio Toba are animal figurines and necklaces made out of clay bought in stores, which are subsequently painted. This style of craft is also popular among urban Tobas in the city of Rosario but does not

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28 While families were not in a nutritional emergency, they do not eat as much as they want nor whatever they want. I saw most families have only one meal a day, consisting of a big stew with rice or pasta and vegetables and whenever they get some cash they spend it on meat first. This is similar to the situation in the Chaco.
exist in the Chaco (where crafts are usually made out of chaguar fiber and wood), revealing that this “traditional” practice is a product of an urban experience. Some families who have good contacts at shops and develop workshops at schools involve all of their members in the production of clay handicrafts. More importantly, the production of handicrafts peaks around Columbus Day (October 12), when numerous schools request Toba workshops. Around that time, people in Barrio Toba receive multiple invitations to participate in events at schools, markets and fairs to promote “Toba culture.” While they do not always get paid for these workshops and talks, they often get donations of clothes and food or are allowed to sell handicrafts at the event.

Therefore, the presence of Barrio Toba and perceptions of their authenticity as Indigenous People allows many families to generate an income. This is what other authors have called “playing Indian,” a practice through which Indigenous People themselves highlight the colonial terms of an indigenous authenticity. Playing Indian is thus a practice that fulfills the expectations of the dominant society as one of the only options available (see Raibmon 2005:11). This is not only a strategy of income generation, but also (as I argue in chapter 4) a way of establishing connections to the city and avoiding social and spatial exclusion. Again, with this I do not mean that Tobas are only strategically tailoring their indigeneity to the demands of recognition. Rather, in order for them to make a living out of experiences they value and habits they were not willing to leave aside they did need to align with the expectations set for them. In the same way as Raibmon discusses it, “playing Indian,” is not a cynical auto-orientalist representation of self but is rather the fashioning of a self presentation that needs to incorporate dominant meanings to be intelligible and even visible. If the Toba did not play Indian it would have been almost impossible for the middle class to notice them and have the will to buy their products, hire their
workshops and help them. In this sense I refer to playing Indian as this very specific performance of indigeneity in the encounter with the urban middle class, an encounter which became so significant during the creation of the barrio (for further discussions on authenticity see for example Conklin 1997; Muehlemann 2013).

Most people in the barrio agree that they have not been working as a community during the last few years. As Miguel explained in our tour around the barrio, “all families are working individually” because selling handicrafts and doing workshops created strong tensions around the distribution of stipends and items donated to the barrio. Many people explained to me that after experiencing repetitive conflicts, families just split up to work by themselves. Splitting up made sense from an economic and organizational perspective. Yet this contradicted the idealized images, held by groups of the middle class, of what an “indigenous community” is supposed to look like, as a place in which anything obtained is shared in equal terms. This expectation was reflected in the fact that people I worked with felt they had to explain to me why they did not work together. However, this expectation of sharing and cooperation does not consider the basic dynamics of market economy families were involved in. As I will further develop in Chapter 4 these expectations of the middle class are relevant because when they are not met, people in the middle class tend to get disappointed and distance themselves. The constant distancing of people from the middle class and the constant arrival of new groups shapes a cyclical temporality of these relations, in which Tobas too become tiered and disillusioned. The fact that Tobas do not meet middle class expectations thus define the intensity of relations and also the temporality of their dissolution.

The “cultural work” of promoting “Toba culture” ultimately implies differences in access to
the city and to forms of mobility. Those who are more active as cultural workers are usually older men and women who grew up in the Chaco but who have more experience and orientation in the city than the rest. The people who are very active also get rides in cars and may travel to the capital on the highway with people from the middle class. Some people move very easily in the city: they know and can evaluate different ways to reach a place. The rest of the people rely heavily on the train and cannot follow routes different from the ones they already know. The possibilities opened up for families to navigate the city centre as Indigenous People are thus not equal to all, and men are the ones that tend to be in charge of creating the connections to do school workshops.

Furthermore, because youth in the barrio were not born in the Chaco, and they do not have histories about an “indigenous life” there, being a cultural worker is not an option for them. For now, they accompany their parents but are not able to take over the activities. The limit to the reproduction of authenticity is the urban Toba youth who may not be seen as indigenous enough to lead a workshop, narrate stories about the Chaco, or sell handicrafts. While youth can learn some of these stories form their parents they cannot narrate in first person some experiences that constitute their parents’ authenticity, such as hunting, for example. If youth talk about cultural practices in the barrio in Buenos Aires they are not perceived as truly indigenous because these practices were not developed in the Chaco.

In my stroll through the barrio that first day I observed some of the tensions generated around the criteria of authenticity and the legal recognition of the barrio materialized in space and creating trajectories. The ambivalent belongings of youth who live either in shacks or have been

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29 When cultural workers have to take big amounts of handicrafts or bring back donations they need to take taxis. Some time families ask groups of the middle class with cars to give them rides.
pushed outside the barrio were symptoms of these spatial relations. The trajectories that shape
the barrio thus confirm a point made by Massey: “You can't hold places still. What you can do is
meet up with others, catch up with where another's history has got to now, but where that now is
itself constituted by nothing more than -precisely- that meeting-up (again)” (2005:125) In this
case the creation of the barrio has not constituted one community as some people expected (a
topic I develop in Chapter 4). The creation of the barrio with a given layout and a given spatial
limits has not held the place of the barrio still, as the youth, for example, have created new places
within the barrio, have unfolded new uses of this place and have also stretched the barrio to
points outside that land when they move elsewhere to have their own home.

An Indigenous Barrio in the Conurbano: (Dis)connecting Locations

This chapter is a starting point in tracing the multiple relations that assemble the barrio and the
trajectories that transverse it. If the creation of Barrio Toba was an action of adults (with NGO
support) that allowed them to get out of the villas, the multiple relations they established with the
government and other NGOs and support groups were not planned encounters. Nevertheless,
these encounters have shaped the barrio to be what it is today. The use (and lack of use) of the
Community Centre and dining room, the presence of two churches, the competition between
families to attract and work with groups of the middle class, and the tensions between adults and
youth are some of the frictions between the trajectories that meet in the barrio.

Despite these tensions, the barrio is experienced by many of its inhabitants as a place of
indigeneity that has somehow reconnected them to the Chaco. As a man in his forties said while
speaking at a school, “Getting the land for the barrio was like going back to the Chaco”. He
explained that they now have relatively large plots of land with gardens and green fields around
them, and that they can see the sky and let the children play outside. I would add that this place also implied living in a delimited "Toba" location, like they do in the Chaco.

Manuel, the Mapuche activist who accompanied the land negotiation of the barrio connected this to the fact that the Toba are seen as the most “indigenous” of all groups. He said, “You know there is one thing about the barrio. The Toba are the most Indian of all of us in the eyes of the rest of the society: they all speak the language, know how to hunt, and have lived in rural villages. That is what society wants to see.” The Toba in the barrio are therefore positioned among the “most indigenous” of all the urban Indigenous People, and attracted more interest and more assistance than other groups. Unlike any other indigenous group, they now have several Toba barrios in the suburbs of the national capital.

But in this new indigenous place, youth are in an ambiguous situation, for many of them spent their childhood in Buenos Aires’ villas. They are therefore not recognized as fully “indigenous” as they lack a rural experience and habits. These youths like reggaeton and hip hop music and hanging out with their friends, and thus are part of suburban youth cultural production. While these youths were recognized as indigenous children when the barrio was created none of the adults involved considered what would happen when these children grew up. They were not part of the initial plans for the barrio and cannot access the status of the adults who own a plot of land and a brick house, even when they feel part of the barrio and have worked to be independent by building their own precarious houses in or around the barrio. They do not access the same amount of help and are not invited to do cultural work at schools because they lack the “Chaco rural experience” to legitimize it. In addition, they no longer qualify as “indigenous children,” a category of interest to some of the organizations. A lot of them are closer to other neighbours in the surrounding barrios, such as the ones Miguel was distinguishing
the barrio Toba from during our stroll.

In this sense, the trajectories that produce the barrio need to be traced back to their multiple points of origin: the trajectories bringing people from the Chaco to the villas and the ones that allowed people to move out of the villas. There are also trajectories moving forward, opened up when the barrio was created: the ones that link the barrio to the people of the middle class living in downtown Buenos Aires who “come to the barrio to help” and the trajectories that connect families to other Toba barrio and rural areas in the Chaco.

But trajectories can both connect or be a means of active disconnection. The barrio was connected to the Chaco and actively disconnected from its surroundings and from the villas. In this way, power geometries are forces attempting to stabilize the work of connection and the hierarchies between places and are always only partially successful, always falling short due to the emergence of chance encounters and unpredictable connections.

In sum, the Barrio Toba shows that movements are also part of networks, relations of people, places, and objects that assemble in space and act together (Latour 2005). The barrio as a place is not an enclosed object but a site that attracts, connects, slows down and redirects trajectories of people, objects, and ideas. However, this is not just a “node” of one network, but rather a site of intersection of several trajectories and of coexistence of networks that sometimes connect to each other and sometimes do not. It is a place defined not only by what it contains but also by how it entangles trajectories and mobilities (Moore 2005); and how it disengages from other places. Movement not only transverses and destabilizes places but also assembles one place to others, and may create planned disconnections.

As I took the train back to the Capital that night after my first visit to the barrio, I jotted several questions and worried that my research plan was already starting to change. Could I
reconstruct the migration histories of all of the families? Would anyone take me to the *villas*?

Could I follow the gardeners working in gated communities? Would I be able to attend the school workshops and meet all NGOS? How many NGOs are there? Would I be able to travel with families to the Chaco, and to the Toba barrios in Rosario or Santa Fe? (Nobody talked about traveling today!) These were only some of the possible paths that I wondered about that day. As I continued my fieldwork, I left some of these lines unexplored (for instance, the gardeners who work in gated communities) and I chose to follow others. If the Barrio Toba is a complicated entanglement of trajectories and mobilities, the description of the barrio presented in this chapter is necessarily incomplete. In the chapters that follow, this description will be made more complex but even at the end it will be an ever-incomplete tracing of associations. How people ended up in Buenos Aires is what I analyze next.
Chapter 2: “Ending up in Buenos Aires”: Affective Mobilities

Winding and Entangled Trajectories to Buenos Aires

“I never thought I would end up living in Buenos Aires”, was one of the first things Martin said about how he came to the city. He is a man in his sixties who owns a house in Barrio Toba in Castelli, in the province of Chaco, where he used to live, and still considers moving back to that house. In Castelli he has siblings and many relatives he misses, and there he would be able to live close to the place where he was born. The only reason he remains in Buenos Aires is that his only son and his family moved there to live with him years earlier, and he enjoys living with them. Martin lived in many places before moving to Buenos Aires, he was born in a small village north of Castelli, where his uncle planted cotton and hunted. He later moved to Castelli, and traveled back and forth to cotton plantations where he worked during the harvest, returning to Castelli in the off-season when he would study the Bible. After the breakup of his first marriage, he moved to the city of Rosario where an uncle was living. There he met his second wife and lived with her for almost a decade, but they could not have any children and eventually they split up. He moved back to Castelli after this second breakup, and lived there for many years. If it were not for a phone call from his nephew, requesting help to build his house in Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, and a subsequent offer of a plot of land for himself, he would still be living in Castelli.

While many people remember the time they spent imagining Buenos Aires while living in the Chaco, and how they dreamed of knowing the city, they also remember how unlikely this seemed to them. Most of them had not seriously sought to visit or move to Buenos Aires, and describe their move as a combination of chance events. “Ending up in Buenos Aires” meant that travel there was unplanned, and that living in the Barrio Toba had become a final stop in many
previous back and forth movements. Even among those who had always wanted to live in the city, their arrival in Buenos Aires was a result of specific experiences and their determination enabling them to get to this longed-for destination. Most people had been born in rural villages and had moved back and forth between several locations, had lived in other Toba barrios in towns or cities in the Chaco region such as Bermejito, Castelli or Resistencia, and only later had “tried their luck” in Buenos Aires. These trajectories were winding, repetitive and backtracking, and each turn was quite unpredictable.

However, “circumstance” was not one of the first explanations people gave me when I asked why they had moved to Buenos Aires. Initially, people told me they moved because of the economic and political reasons I expected them to name, and they simplified their trajectories in their narratives, describing a move from a place in the Chaco to Buenos Aires. They wanted to “get better jobs and salaries”, during a time of high labor demand in Buenos Aires in the 1960s and 1970s, and also to escape conditions of labor exploitation in the Chaco. They identified economic constraints in the Chaco: the “lack of work”, created by the technological transformations in the cotton industry that expelled Indigenous People from the labor force in the late 1970s; the “decline in the price of cotton” they grew, in a time when it became impossible for small farmers to maintain small scale agricultural activities. Some also said they “lived on a farm that was not big enough to support all of their family members,” a product of the ongoing process of agricultural expansion and expropriation of indigenous land over the century. Other people told me that they moved to Buenos Aires “to send children to school”, because of the difficulties that Indigenous People in the Chaco have in accessing basic state services. These answers located Toba trajectories within larger sociopolitical processes: people moved to escape the well-documented land expropriation, labor exploitation, and political subordination in the
Chaco region.\textsuperscript{30} 

While these were strong forces that pushed people who are now in the Barrio Toba to move out of the Chaco, they are not enough to fully explain their trajectories. Many people enthusiastically said they were very mobile in their youth, traveling to nearby villages for fun, or joining a trip organized by an evangelical church just to explore a new place. I had observed this in Toba villages and urban barrios in the Chaco before. Many people connected coming to Buenos Aires to these prior experiences of mobility, they had traveled to unknown places before, and described themselves as strong and adventurous. People also explained that coming to Buenos Aires emerged from affectively intense moments that pushed them to go far away from a bad situation, or in search of new options. Feeling angry or optimistic, breaking up with a partner or having a desire to explore, triggered many of their trips.

In this chapter, I analyze the forms of mobility and affective modulations that shaped the trajectories of people who are now in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires. I focus on the ways of moving that conditioned and allowed people to travel, and the specific trajectories that led people to the city. Mobilities result both from power relations and dispositions for movement, that make and allow people to travel in certain moments and certain ways. I conceive of trajectories as specific histories of movement, of people, objects or ideas.\textsuperscript{31} Trajectories are therefore, irreversible. They are “the history, change, movement of things themselves” that produce space as they unfold (Massey 2005:12); they meet and transverse other trajectories as they unfold and entangle with them in place. In my analysis, I consider three levels of interactions that have shaped individual trajectories: In the first section, I consider the economic and political processes

\textsuperscript{30} For in-depth analysis of these processes see Iñigo Carrera (2010) and Salamanca (2015).

\textsuperscript{31} In this chapter I follow only people (and not objects or communications).
in the Chaco that conditioned people’s movements to Buenos Aires. In the second, I consider the forms of intense mobility experienced by young Indigenous People in the Chaco, and the gendered dispositions that shaped different capacities to travel to Buenos Aires. In the third section, I follow the trajectories of people before “ending up” in Buenos Aires, and bring together the entanglement of conditionings, dispositions, and affective intensities that triggered and gave friction to their movements. In tracing these trajectories, I found some unusual commonalities among people who ended up in Buenos Aires, as for example many of the men connected their movement out of the Chaco to having been orphans at a young age.

These three dimensions of trajectories do not neatly contain each other. Rather, they are entangled relations that simultaneously pull people in different directions. Donald Moore calls this process “entanglements of power”, in his ethnography about land struggles in Zimbabwe (2005). Entanglement implies recognizing the different scales and competing agents exercising power relations, but also the intertwining of different forms of power that may operate at the same time. I understand trajectories toward Buenos Aires as a response to power relations that cannot be reduced to a “pure escape” from relations of domination. Subverting one form of power (i.e. escaping labor exploitation) implies getting caught in others (i.e. becoming objects of state assistance in Buenos Aires). Entanglements thus complicate the notion of governmentality. While governmentality recognizes the multiplicity of forms of power and their reticulation in the multiple dimensions of the everyday and its operation in multiple scales, it does not offer a way to understand the superposed and sometimes contradictory forms of regulation.32 Furthermore,

32 Foucault’s power triad distinguishes between sovereign power, or the power to grant or take life exercised over a group occupying a delimited territory; disciplinarian power, or the regulation of the body’s activity in order to maximize specific forms of productivity; and governmental power, or the regulation of relations between people and things, and people with themselves, so that people and populations willingly act according to set expectations (Foucault, 1988).
these entanglements of power relations were modulated by affective variations in people’s experience. Specific encounters changed people’s capacities within these entanglements and pushed trajectories into particular spatial directions.

By suggesting that trajectories were also shaped by affect, I am not suggesting that arriving in Buenos Aires was an emotional response to a personal crisis. Rather, affect refers to collective variations in people’s capacities to act that result from encounters between two or more bodies – whether of individuals, objects or conjunctions of both (Spinoza 1996; Deleuze 1978, 1988). As the capacity to act is not outside power relations, neither can affect be; thus, attending to affect does not remove us from a consideration of power relations, but allows us to look more deeply into their consequences. People who came to Buenos Aires responded to affective variations at specific points in time, and within these variations new potentialities for action emerged. Not all of the Toba people undergoing land displacement in the Chaco ended up in Buenos Aires, and situations of labour exploitation that one person experienced all his life become intolerable in one moment and not at another. Tracing the affective variations in people’s trajectories ending up in Buenos Aires is a way to unpack why people decided to go to Buenos Aires at one particular moment and circumstance, and how they were able to do so. By engaging with affect, I, therefore, want to explore what type of intensive variations triggered movement; what capacities that movement enabled; and what capacities a person had to have to travel far enough to arrive in Buenos Aires. I also use affect to examine what influenced people once they arrived in Buenos Aires, as their motivation to live downtown was redirected toward

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33 While there has been a proliferation of works on affect, there is not a homogenous use of the concept (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). I follow the genealogy of Deleuze who takes the notion of affect from Spinoza. My work therefore takes insights from researchers drawing on and extending this genealogy such as the work of Mazzarella (2009) within Anthropology, and Grossberg 1992, Massumi 2002, and Beasley Murray 2010 within political theory. I have chosen this line because of the emphasis on affect as a collective and a political force rather than a patterned psychological experience.
living in the **villas**. Affect thus not only generates a form of escape but may reinforce relations of subordination, as, for example, the desire to live in a big city directed some people toward even more precarious living conditions as urban poor.

Being angry or hopeful is never an individual feeling. As I will discuss, Lorenzo was frustrated from working too hard on a sugar plantation in the Chaco. But this frustration became thick and intolerable when he was denied work on that plantation. He was angrier at having been denied work than at having been exploited. This anger made him look for options and consult his union, which helped him organize a claim against the company and seek medical treatment in Buenos Aires. Lorenzo’s anger towards plantation managers was not a manifestation of his individual psyche responding to pressure, but of the social relations of labour exploitation of which he was a part. Affective intensity defined the moment when he decided to stop accepting the plantation’s conditions, or, rather, his unemployment, and move away to make a claim of a national government that might help him. While this is an individual trajectory, it is part of the larger process of people detaching from rural work and moving to the city. Affect helps to explore the pull and push factors at work in the specific experiences of Toba families now living in the Barrio Toba where I worked.

Further, when people moved they encountered other trajectories, and created new associations, which opened new possible lines of movement. Thus, trajectories were never straight lines but winding mobilities. Arriving in Buenos Aires was, therefore, only one possibility among many. “Ending up” is a phrase that condenses this experimental nature of movements to Buenos Aires and echoes Doreen Massey’s (2005) notion of being “thrown together” in place. Encounters that made people move did not follow an articulation around class, gender, ethnicity or specific historical processes, but rather were entangled combinations...
of forces in which specific variations such as “being strong” mattered. I now turn to the political and economic conditions that shaped people’s trajectories.

The Colonization of the Chaco: Regulating Indigenous Mobilities

The families in the Barrio Toba moved to Buenos Aires as part of their search for ways to partially escape the conditions of subalternity, poverty and dispossession that result from ongoing forms of colonization by the local state and agribusiness in the Chaco region. Before military conquest, from 1880 to the 1920s (Iñigo Carrera 1982), the different indigenous groups living in the Chaco region had complete control over their territory and were relatively free to move. Warfare between different groups, the repeated attempts by Spanish and later Argentinean armies to invade the territory, seasonal availability of natural resources, and the incorporation of horses and the development of cattle trade were some factors broadly organizing the mobilities of indigenous groups before Colonization (Palermo 1986; Nacuzzi 2007).

Colonization was not a single moment of violent occupation by the Argentinean state as a monolithic institution, but a multiplicity of efforts and contradictory projects. Colonization was the violent intersection of trajectories of different indigenous groups first with the Argentinean army, and later on in the twentieth century with the provincial police, local government authorities, missionaries, plantation owners and poor criollo farmers (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage with rural background and low socioeconomic status).35

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34 Indigenous populations in the Chaco are now recognized as ethnic groups organized into six linguistic families: Mataco-Mataguayo, Guaycuru, Maskoi, Zamuco, Lule-Vilela, and Tupi-Guarani. This does not reflect the complex and fragmented multiplicity that existed prior to colonization (see Braunstein and Miller 1999).

35 It is important to note connections between the creation of political power and economic power in the Chaco, and the relationship of both to indigenous mobilities. Given the national government distributed lands to the elite families and military personnel who participated in Chaco’s colonization, those people also became responsible for policing where indigenous groups would be placed as workers and during their “free” time.
During conquest, mobility was an indigenous military strategy and a way to escape the army’s violence. Indigenous groups used the bush to hide from the army, where they could survive for months (Cordeu and Siffredi 1971). Military occupation eroded the economic autonomy of indigenous groups. The army denied them access to rivers and previous hunting territories, while land was parceled and distributed among big landowners and occupied by poor criollo peasants moving from Salta, and by European immigrants. Toba people I met in the Chaco explained this process as the end of their experience of freedom: “Freedom ended when the army occupied the region and plantation owners divided the land with fences,” Martin told me, echoing statements I had heard in the Chaco, too. In the eastern Chaco, Indigenous People were forced to gather in mission stations and reducciones (“state reservations”) that lumped together different groups. Some were able to remain outside these state institutions in “free” areas in between new ranches, especially to the centre west of the Chaco (Miller 1979; Wright 2008). Families who are now in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires came from different villages and towns in the central Chaco region, each of which is inhabited by previously unrelated groups. The biggest reservation in the area was Napalpi, but many of the people I worked with grew up in the semi-free fiscal farmlands around the cities of Castelli, Pampa del Indio and Bermejito.

The main purpose of missions and reservations was to discipline Indigenous People into wage labour. In this period, trips to the bush away from mission stations and reservations were a form of escape from the discipline of these institutions (see Gordillo 2004). Not surprisingly, these movements to the bush appear in people’s collective memory as moments of “freedom”, while going to work on plantations was described as something that made them weak. Indeed, people

36 For specific histories of land (dis)placement in areas of central Chaco see, for example, Salamanca (2015) and Tola, Medrano and Cardin (2013).
in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires remember the heat strokes and exhaustion they suffered at the plantations. Nonetheless, many groups in the central areas of the province of Chaco, around Castelli remained outside of the orbit of mission stations and reservations, occupying less productive public lands, living on subsistence activities and seasonal work on cotton farms.

In the central Chaco region, the use of land and indigenous labour was organized in the twentieth century by different economic cycles. Forestry exploitation, the industrial production of tannin, and sugar production were the initial activities, followed in the 1930s by the rise of cotton as the main cash crop in the region (Iñigo Carrera 1983). Both cotton and sugar production relied heavily on the cheap labour of Indigenous People and poor criollo farmers to produce the “extraordinary revenues” celebrated by national and provincial governments (Gonzales 1890).37 People in the barrio often recall their past experiences working on the cotton and sugar harvests in the Chaco.

The ingenio (sugar plantation and processing factory) Las Palmas was the first agribusiness organizing space for capitalist production in this region.38 Owned by British investors and subsidized by the national government, the ingenio provided the first access to electricity anywhere in the province, built a port, and created the town Las Palmas for the company (Mariotti 2010). Las Palmas employed thousands of Indigenous People as seasonal workers during the harvest. Production declined in the 1970s, and Indigenous People were expelled as workers (Mariotti 2010; Tamagno 2001). Lorenzo, who now lives in the Barrio Toba in Buenos

37 The territory was initially a “national territory” under Federal control. In the 1940s, two provinces were formed: Chaco and Formosa. In the 1940s reservation and mission numbers declined and Indigenous People were regarded as “incorporated”.

38 Las Palmas was established in 1887 as the first and main industrial unit of the province. It was founded with British capital. In 1914, it employed 3,000 temporary workers of which it is estimated that 70% was indigenous (Mariotti et al. 2010). The ingenio went bankrupt in the 1970s and was bought by the state. In 1994 it sold its last properties. The National Institute of Indigenous Affairs handed a portion of the lands to the indigenous communities in the area (Tamagno 2001).
Aires, grew up in different indigenous villages in the spatial interstices of the plantation, and most of his relatives worked there, many of them permanently. In the 1930s, cotton became the main economic activity of the region, when the national government promoted it by subsidizing companies and distributing lands previously occupied by indigenous groups (Mari 2009; Iñigo Carrera 2010). Some indigenous groups, among them the relatives of Antonia and Carlos (two people who now live in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires), were able to organize as small cotton farmers on their own lands. However, they could not maintain the production for long, when in the 1970s commercialization became harder for small producers, they had to seek employment as workers on the plantation (Iñigo Carrera 1982).

Castelli is the biggest town in the central area of Chaco province, and was an organizing node for the cotton industry. Many people now in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires used to work in the cotton harvest. At harvest time, indigenous families traveled from different villages to Castelli, to meet contractors who hired them as seasonal workers and took them in trucks to work on their farms, sometimes located hundreds of kilometers away. At the end of the harvest, indigenous workers returned to Castelli to buy supplies with their salaries before returning to their villages. The rest of the year, the Toba lived in villages, fishing, hunting, gathering, and engaging in subsistence agriculture (Iñigo Carrera 2008). While only the men were formally employed on cotton farms, they needed the help of their whole family to meet the daily picking objectives set by the farm owners. Children and women worked in the fields alongside men, but were not paid. Many of the people who I met in the barrio gave me detailed accounts of cotton picking as adults, and as children accompanying their fathers.

The mobility of indigenous families as workers was initially highly regulated by missionaries, reserve administrators, plantation owners and provincial authorities. A 1924 massacre in the state
reservation of Napalpi, south of Castelli, exemplifies some of the ongoing tensions that existed around the control of indigenous mobility in the Central Chaco region. A conflict emerged when local authorities denied indigenous workers permission to travel to work on the harvest in the neighbouring province of Salta, where they could get better salaries. When indigenous workers gathered in the reservation of Napalpi and their discontent took religious overtones, criollo and white settlers in the nearby towns feared a rebellion. One morning, municipal police and armed civilians surrounded the reservation and killed 400 Indigenous People in a few hours (Cordeu and Siffredi 1979; Salamanca 2010).

This event suggests the regulation of indigenous movement was a crucial source of conflict. Indigenous people were not free workers, moving where capital paid the most; they were a source of cheap labour whose mobility was closely regulated by local authorities. Landowners and the police acted together, and did not hesitate to use violence to control a potential disruption of this regulation. The reservation quickly shifted from the exercise of disciplinarian power to that of sovereign power. The massacre was not the action of a monolithic state; rather, civilians and local authorities performed it, and later the national government backed them up by sending troops to hunt down the survivors. While this was an extreme confrontation, everyday forms of violence continue to this day. Criollos and local officials often justify the killing of Indigenous People by police as a side effect of police interventions over land conflicts. People in the barrio have memories of this kind of violence, from which they say they escaped, using phrases such as “I left the villages because I did not want to be bothered anymore.” “Bothered” often refers to, for example, violent encounters with criollos in the bush, who shot at them because of tensions over land. However, these memories are blurred in the main accounts about life in the city, because, as I noted, there is a tendency to remember the Chaco with idealized nostalgia.
 Nonetheless, these memories quickly emerged when people gave more detailed accounts of their life experiences.

People in the barrio also have memories of the arrival of missionaries in the 1950s. John Lagar was a North American evangelical preacher who came to the area to convert Indigenous People. He trained indigenous preachers who, in turn, created a Toba evangelical church, the *Iglesia Unida*, which quickly spread to most rural villages and urban barrios in the central and eastern Chaco region and influenced all aspects of community life (Miller 1979, Wright 2003). By becoming evangelicals, people internalized a new morality such as new gender divisions, as I will discuss below, but also incorporated previous habits into the service, such as shamanic conceptions of the body’s health and illness (Wright 2008). Since its creation, the Unida, along with other evangelical churches has become one of the main institutions that connect villages and barrios, bringing people together to participate in collective events or to study the Bible. Many men in the barrio learned to read and write by joining a church and learning to read the Bible, rather than through the formal educational system. Learning the Bible is both a way to access literacy and to become a more active member of the church. It is also, for men, a way to potentially become a preacher, which is a form of leadership that transcends the administration of a particular church.

In the 1970s and 1980s, seasonal work in the region shrank abruptly, *ingenio* Las Palmas went bankrupt, and the demand for labour at the cotton harvest declined because of technological transformations. The tasks the Toba used to perform were no longer necessary, because the use of herbicides replaced manual weeding and the harvest became mechanized (Mari 2009; Iñigo Carrera 2008). This generated an almost complete expulsion of Indigenous People as workers. In villages, families intensified survival practices by fishing, hunting and gathering in the patches of...
missionary groups and church-related NGOs linked to liberation theology (such as Endepa-Equipo Nacional de Pastoral Aborigen and Incupo-Instituto de Culturas Populares) began to support land claims. In the 1970s and 1980s, many groups successfully recovered lands in a time when there was no indigenous legislation at the provincial or national levels, becoming a vanguard in Argentina’s indigenous political movement (Carrasco 2000). Belgian missionaries worked in an area called *Interfluvio* (“interfluvial”), north of Castelli, and helped obtain the titling of 140,000 hectares in the 1980s for local indigenous villages, and what became one of the largest indigenous lands in the country (Carrasco and Briones 1996). Many of the families in the barrio grew up in this area, and some are sons and daughters of leaders who organized this land claim. However, the possibilities for making these lands productive were very restricted without access to credit. The processes of land titling did not stop an economic crisis from unfolding and many people, especially the young, moved to towns and cities to find work.

During this period, mobility from rural areas to the towns of Bermejito, Castelli or the city of Resistencia became more frequent, as people moved in search of sporadic jobs, to sell handicrafts and to study the Bible. As a result, people created more stable settlements in the cities. Toba settlements also emerged outside of the Chaco, especially in the 1970s in the cities of Rosario, Santa Fe and La Plata (Tamagno 2001; Vazquez 2000). In this period, people living in urban settlements also organized land claims, many of them successful. Provincial governments in Formosa and Chaco handed out land titles and turned peri-urban settlements into

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39 I traveled to this area with a family from the barrio. I describe this trip in Chapter 5.
40 Since 1950, poor rural populations have also been forced out of their lands and into urban margins (Ratier 1971).
formal Toba barrios in the 1970s and 1980s. While this was a significant recognition, it also allowed governments to “fix” Indigenous People in urban areas and away from rural lands, thus allowing ongoing expansions of the agricultural frontier. In the 1980s, a foundation managed by a military medical doctor doing humanitarian work during a tuberculosis outbreak among Toba people in the area of Castelli, contributed to the creation of the first Barrio Toba in Castelli. The foundation bought and donated the lands that were informally occupied by Toba families, most of them patients and their relatives. In the 1990s, outside the Chaco there were other cases of municipal, provincial or national agencies helping create urban Toba barrios. In most of these barrios, people made a living from state assistance, sporadic jobs, and selling handicrafts (see Iñigo Carrera 2008). When possible, people continued to gather resources in the peri-urban bush (Vivaldi 2007).

The experience of working with the Unida church and NGOs in making land claims shaped a new identification by many Tobas as “Indigenous People,” the term later adopted in provincial and national legislations (Carrasco 2000). In these interactions, the Toba became subjects of development practices and the welfare state, a form of relation that would intensify in the 1990s. This created a political space to articulate claims as indigenous groups, but restricted other forms of political action. To be recognized under the legal designation of “indigenous community”, a group had to prove that they shared a common history and culture. As discussed, these dynamics were part of the history of the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires.

In sum, the history of Tobas’ spatial mobilities in the central Chaco was the result of an entangling of processes of economic and political subordination, and the attempts by Indigenous

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41 The provinces of Formosa and Chaco were among the first in the country to have indigenous legislation in the 1980s before the constitutional change in the 1990s. The “historic reparation” that law mandated was implemented specifically by land titling for indigenous occupation (Carrasco 2000).
People in the Chaco region to counter them. Toba groups avoided discipline and confinement by spatially escaping to the bush and moving to empty public lands. To escape labour exploitation on farms and ranches, they searched for jobs in towns. Assistance from missionaries and NGOs, together with their own demands and activism, allowed indigenous groups to recover part of their lands but also made them more dependent on state assistance, especially in the urban barrios. All these movements opened new possibilities, recovering portions of their former lands allowed indigenous groups to fish, hunt and gather in their own territories. They created their own evangelical church, and settlements in the towns and cities that became formal barrios whose lands were recognized.

These entanglements of experiences shaped the trajectories of people who are now in Buenos Aires. In the Chaco, everyone experienced labour exploitation and unemployment, limited access to state services, and complex relationships of patronage. For example, Carlos mentioned that he had to move when his father’s cotton farm became unproductive. Sofía came to the city to take a job as a domestic worker, employment obtained through acquaintances at an NGO with whom she worked closely. While these economic and political processes were part of what pushed and enabled people to move to Buenos Aires, they were not the only ones. Some people explained they were able to come to the city because they had traveled intensively when they were young. They were experienced, and thus had the capacity to start over, far away from all that was known to them.

“Looking for a place to be”: Youth Mobilities

I now turn to a second kind of relations, entangled with the previous one, further generating possibilities for people to “end up” in Buenos Aires: the dispositions and affective modulations
of young people’s movements. By “young,” I mean the period of life that starts when teens are considered old enough to travel on their own, usually around twelve years of age, and ends when they marry and have their first children, which is when they are considered adults. In different Toba villages and barrios, I observed that many young people moved intensively and frequently. When I asked about it, adults said that traveling is part of growing up, and that this movement may increase and expand the possibilities available to youth. Parents are often active in helping young people to make short or longer trips, and may encourage the mobility of their daughters or sons so that they get valuable experience or contribute to the family’s well-being. Families and acquaintances, however, also watch over young people’s movement, especially that of young women, as they are considered in danger of being sexually assaulted. People in a group may spread gossip about women’s mobility if they consider that their movement is excessive, or worry if they think that the only purpose of that movement is “partying.”

Figure 5: A Toba Man in Castelli, where he lived as a young adult. Photo by the author.

Toba people I met in different locations highlighted their experiences of travel in their youth. Some young people were mobile by visiting nearby villages, but others moved longer distances to travel from a rural village to a town or city. The duration of trips I observed was also variable;
people traveled for one day or lived elsewhere for over a year. Girls and boys over twelve usually traveled by themselves, moving, for example, to a different village to attend high school, get a job, or help a sick relative. Youths were also among the most enthusiastic participants in church-organized trips, some of which took them to cities outside of the Chaco for several days. Youths could decide (and were allowed by their parents) to move in with a relative and stay there as long as they wanted, if they had a fight with one parent or were feeling restless. These mobilities shaped by age were an important aspect of the life histories of the people in the barrio where I worked. In most cases, people said these experiences gave them the conditions and skills they would later need to travel far away and settle in a new place.

Young people’s movements were often described as actions through which they are “buscando un lugar para estar” (“looking for a place to be”). People explained they wanted to live somewhere different from their own villages, and mobility was the key to such a possibility. Throughout my work I observed that young people were allowed to try “looking for a place” several times if they need to, to move back and forth, and to make last minute decisions. I saw a young woman move to a town with her aunt to attend high school, but later quit and return home because she did not feel comfortable there. A young man from a village in Chaco attending a teachers’ meeting in Buenos Aires decided at the last minute not to take the bus back home, traveling instead to the Toba barrio in the city of Resistencia with new friends, also indigenous teachers. In none of these cases did people express concerns about the youth’s decisions. The trajectories of young people tend to be quite unpredictable, and this unpredictability is considered a normal part of “being young.” In short, adults do not stop young people from moving, and do not usually force them to come back home.

Some men explained that in their youth they traveled to find work, in some cases to contribute
to the finances of their families, and in others to become fully independent of their parents. Martin was born in a village in the area of Espinillo, and, after becoming an orphan, he was raised by his uncle. He moved out of his uncle’s house when he was 16, because he needed to “valerme por mi mismo” (support myself). He explained that he wanted to ease his uncle’s burden of feeding so many children, so he went to Castelli to become a seasonal worker picking cotton. After the harvest was over, he never came back. He worked in the cotton harvest on different farms for several seasons, and when the harvest was over he stayed in the town. He learned how to read and write and studied the Bible in the local Unida church. Martin’s move was thus related to finding work and gaining independence, but his move was not planned in advance. Martin explained that, one day “I knew I had to go”, and so he left for the cotton harvest knowing he would not come back. Traveling allowed him to find a place for himself, be economically independent, get involved in the church and access education. It was, therefore, not difficult for him when, three decades later, he unexpectedly moved to Buenos Aires to build a house for his nephew, and “ended up” staying there.

Other men remembered their youth as a time of general unrest. Julio, a man in his early fifties who arrived in Buenos Aires in the 1980s explained that when he was 13, “there was nothing wrong with my family but I needed to go, just anywhere”. This is synthesized in the phrase “no me hallo”, “I do not find myself”, which describes the experience of feeling uncomfortable or not at ease in a particular place. This can be linked to boredom, or having no possibilities of moving forward in life, but it may also indicate a generic sense of unease. Julio first moved to live with an uncle in a village close by, but soon felt he had to move again and farther away. He traveled north to the province of Formosa, where he had no acquaintances or relatives. He arrived at a Pilagá village where he became friends with other youths and decided to stay there.
(Pilagá is an ethnic group related to the Tobas). He got day jobs on nearby farms, stayed with some of his new friends’ families, and learned the Pilagá language.

Julio’s trajectory shows that it is generally accepted that the youths’ travel may follow no other reason than a “need to move;” and people who experience such intense eagerness to move find in travel the possibility of appeasing the feeling of being out of place. Julio’s unease persisted even when he had moved out of his village and moved in with his uncle, and so he traveled again. Only when he was far away in a different province and living in the village of other Indigenous People did he stop moving around. The disposition to move is thus one of the transformations associated with “growing up.” In Julio’s and other people’s experience, growing up implied this need to explore other places and live elsewhere for some time. While unease implies discontent, this need of young people to move is not considered something negative, because it may lead to becoming a stronger and more experienced person. Julio’s travel to Formosa not only solved his feeling of uneasiness, but the new relations he created there enhanced his capacities of action: he became economically independent at an early age, was able to learn a new language, and created a home with people who initially were strangers. He was visibly proud of this experience, and he emphasized that he never felt homesick. These skills were some of the reasons why, years later, he did not hesitate to move to Buenos Aires, even though he knew no one in the city. While Julio’s travel was unusual in that he moved to a place where he had no connections at all, many people who are now in the barrio had made similar exploratory trips, and had also emerged from them feeling more experienced in travel. People I interviewed, especially men, brag about knowing places and having acquaintances “everywhere.” Even the extreme form of unplanned mobility known as “la joda”, party life, is accepted if later on the young person goes back to a “right path”.

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La joda is a term I heard in every Toba village and barrio I visited. People who “party” spend the day hanging out with friends, drinking alcohol and smoking; they go to parties and dance clubs in the nearby towns and “hook up” with different people, often criollos/as. Some young people travel explicitly to engage in la joda with youths of other Toba villages or barrios. Parents worry when their children live la joda, but do not punish them. As Noelia, who had a son in la joda, told me, “You can’t lock them up.” Parents encourage them to “get out of that life” and go to church, because people “en el evangelio” (who are evangelicals) stop smoking, drinking and partying. Evangelicals redirect themselves onto a “good path,” which is literally seen as a good and well-behaved form of mobility: staying at home, working, going to church, and traveling only for religious encounters. The transition from being in la joda to becoming a Christian is a recurrent topic at religious services. People who quit la joda are also regarded as experienced individuals who “saw a lot of the world”, but then had the moral strength to get back onto a respectable path. In other words, la joda can be a source of intense mobility among the youth, and this was central to the travel trajectories of some people living in the barrio.

Related to the sexuality implied in la joda, a few men admitted that another reason to move was to find a girlfriend. I had not considered this dimension in relation to mobility, and so Leandro surprised me when he explained to me the frequency of Toba travel:

In the villages where I was born all families are related, and all women are your cousins. They may be your second cousins, third cousins, but they are relatives. Many men don’t mind, and they may marry one of his cousins. But others look for someone they are not related to, so they travel. They go with the church or look for a job somewhere else. They expect to meet a girl.

“Finding a place to be” gained for me new implications with this explanation. Travel was not just about economic independence and personal exploration, but also about the desire to find a partner, another dimension of becoming an adult. In the barrio, and in my travels to the Chaco, I
observed that young people often have boyfriends and girlfriends elsewhere, and it is, therefore, common for them to be constantly moving back and forth between their home villages and that of their lovers. Young people described falling in love as an intense, irrational need to be with or “meet” another person, and moving to be closer to them was a part of this intense affection. Adults expressed that, when a youth likes a boy or girl, “you can’t stop them from wanting to meet them”, showing that they regard constant mobility as part of the very experience of falling in love. When young people find a place to settle with their partners, they usually say “ya me quedé” (then I settled), and then find a job or form a family. The place where one “settles down” may be a nearby town, a faraway city, or the same village where one grew up. When young adults find their place, or especially after having children, their mobility usually slows down. Men may still travel sporadically, but it is harder for women to leave their children and domestic responsibilities behind.

During informal conversations with young women, many gave me similar descriptions of their past movement. While they did not travel alone for employment as seasonal workers on farms, many had still moved by themselves at a young age. Sofia left her home in a village to go to the city of Resistencia because she wanted to get involved in church youth groups there. Andrea traveled back and forth intensively to go to school. Other women moved out of their parents house because of a fight with a family member, or because they had fallen in love with a man. In their stories, they described a different way of organizing their travels that was gender-specific.

Elisa is a woman I met in a peri-urban barrio in Formosa, who told me that when she was

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42 See Gómez (2011) and Tola (2007).
43 The women were not employed in the cotton field or the sugar plantation by themselves as the men were. They did not travel by themselves to participate in the harvest as young men do.
young she lived in a rural village in Laguna Blanca. Elisa visited her cousins in a nearby rural village most weekends. When she was a teenager, Elisa’s parents encouraged her to move to the city of Formosa to attend high school. In the city, she lived with acquaintances from the church, and, in exchange, she helped with household duties. Right after high school, when Elisa was single and had no children, she got a job as a nursing assistant. She soon saved money and bought a motorcycle. With the motorcycle, she was able to travel to her cousin’s villages very easily. Later, she told me that she had a boyfriend in the villages and that is why she traveled so much. However, unlike Martin and Julio, Elisa traveled to a specific place: her cousins’ villages. Even when she was very independent and in control of her mobility, she was not involved in the adventurous, random, and relatively spontaneous way of traveling that defined the experiences of young men, who may start a trip with no plan, and go to places where they know nobody.

I observed that women usually traveled to places where they had relatives, or with an institution organizing their trip (such as the church or an NGO). In contrast to men saying “I needed to go”, women always explained their travels with regard to a particular goal: to attend high school, take care of a relative, attend a teacher training session. Women’s travels are thus more organized, and tend to have a particular destination and sense of purpose. Mobility enables women, as is the case among men, to establish new connections, learn, and be recognized as experienced. But, unlike men, the movements of women are an object of closer attention and scrutiny. If women do not follow an organized travel trajectory, they are considered to “travel too much,” to be irresponsible, and are the subjects of criticism by both men and women, potentially creating problems with their relatives and husbands.
Cecilia is an aboriginal teachers’ assistant in her early twenties,44 with two young children and living in a Toba barrio in Formosa Province. She traveled very frequently to attend aboriginal teachers’ meetings. When Cecilia went to Buenos Aires for a teachers’ workshop, she emailed me a few days earlier to tell me when she was arriving. She stayed with me, attended the workshop, and returned home four days later. Cecilia was among the most mobile women I met, traveling since before she had had her children, as part of her involvement in a provincial aboriginal teachers’ organization. In spite of how carefully she planned all of her travels, neighbours and in-laws gossiped that when she traveled she was meeting other men. When I met her in Buenos Aires, her husband had just left her. A few months later, I visited her in the Chaco, and she told me there was also gossip about her being “a bad mother” and leaving her responsibilities behind. She was angry and frustrated, and told me she was not willing to stop attending teacher’s meetings to get her husband back.

Gossip is a form of social regulation that may attempt to slow down or stop movement. People link women’s movement with the development of what is considered an “excessive sexuality”, which goes against being a “respectable woman” (see Gómez 2011).45 This is a category influenced by the Unida church, and condemns women who have sex with many men while being unmarried, or who “cheat” on their husbands. A woman who is not “respectable” is not only criticized in terms of her sexuality, but also as a mother. A “respectable” woman is assumed to stay at home and have all household duties under control. Even when her travels

44 *Auxiliar Docente Aborigen* (in Chaco province) or *Maestro de Modalidad Aborigen* (in Formosa) refers to aboriginal teacher’s assistants. This figure was created as part of national multicultural education policies. Aboriginal Assistants are trained and employed in provinces with a high percentage of indigenous residents, such as Chaco and Formosa, but not in Buenos Aires. While they are not allowed to teach, they are expected to translate and tutor indigenous students.

45 My points about women’s movement coincide with the analysis of Mariana Gómez, who has worked in rural villages in the west of Formosa Province. She analyses the regulation of women’s movement to the bush as a control over their sexuality (2011). My work does not specifically focus on sexuality but shares similar insights about mobility.
were well-organized, Cecilia’s mobility generated suspicion, and her neighbors and in-laws, male and female, tried to regulate her mobility by insisting that she stay at home.

Thus, while women have relative freedom to move and can engage in intense travels when they are young (as the cases of Andrea, Elisa or Cecilia show), their mobility has to be well planned, and has to slow down when they become mothers. This observation certainly echoes feminist discussions around women’s mobility. Initial feminist approaches considered the control over women’s movement outside the household and into the “public” space as a universal form of regulation across societies (Rich 1980; Rosaldo 1974). In this scheme, feminists regarded mobility as a form of emancipating transgression. In the examples analyzed above, mobility may open up spaces and new possibilities for women, but it also may be directed by others, as when parents insist their daughters move to study, or to help a relative in need. This problematizes any dichotomous understanding of private versus public space and mobile versus immobile women. Women who travel may be under scrutiny, but are also valued as experienced. For women, then, mobility represents an ambiguous and contradictory experience. It may allow them to study, have a job, and gain leadership roles in their communities (as I will analyze later). Feminist authors have pointed out these complexities as an expression of the ways gender relations are embedded in broader fields of tensions that make it impossible to describe an action such as women’s mobility under one universalizing logic. To do so is to disregard the complex relations that enable and affect them (Abu-Lughod 1993, Massey 1994). Prior dispositions to move, and experiences of their movements’ regulation, were manifested in women’s trajectories to Buenos Aires. Only previously mobile women arrived in Buenos Aires by themselves, or were the ones initiating the travel of their family.

In sum, I observed a disposition in young people to move, and youth mobility is regarded as
part of the process of becoming adults. These mobilities are modulated by intense affects, related to feelings of uneasiness, romantic experiences, or attempts to earn independence. The trajectories of people that “ended up in Buenos Aires” built on these previous experiences of travel and expanded them. In most cases, the people who ended up in the barrio were not the most disadvantaged, but, rather, people with the capacities to access and manage themselves in long-distance travel. In many cases, the people who came to Buenos Aires first were men who later brought their families to the city. Many of the women came as partners, following their husbands’ initiatives, and only for a few of the families were women responsible for the move. In the next section, I examine the complete trajectories of four people who now live in the barrio, and who generated their families’ move to Buenos Aires.

**Unusual Trajectories**

Moving to Buenos Aires was almost never a unilinear process. People went back and forth between locations, and lived in the Chaco region and outside it (as for example the city of Rosario) before they moved to a barrio (Spennelman 2006). Trajectories bring together the three levels of interaction I am analyzing – economic conditioning, dispositions to move, and the affective modulation of movement – which entangled with each other and triggered travels, shaped turns, and expanded mobilities. Arriving in Buenos Aires was the result of a shared longing to see the big city, but only in a few cases that became a reality. The Toba barrios in Rosario would have been for many people an easier destination. Toba barrios in Rosario were created in the 1960s, and currently include the biggest concentration of urban Tobas, and of Tobas outside the Chaco. According to some indigenous leaders’ estimations, close to 20,000
Toba live in Rosario neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{46} But movement to Buenos Aires was not only the result of a longing to go there, or of large scale economic transformations, but also of unusual needs to move, take risks, and access more possibilities that emerged from specifically intense situations.

In this regard, by affective modulation I am not referring to the personal dimension of the trajectories. Rather, I highlight the way that political and economic dynamics, and group dispositions for movement come to vary in intensity and, in doing so, generate travels, orient them and modulate their speed and spatial reach. With the concept of “affective modulation”, I try to explore the following questions: When did a situation in the Chaco become so unbearable that people moved? How were people able to move? How did people come to move elsewhere even if they did not want to?

The first type of trajectory I analyze is that of the women who were recognized as 	extit{mujeres fuertes} (“strong women”), who were encouraged to move to help their families living elsewhere. These women had the capacity to develop new links in a new place, and thus were asked to move. This is in contrast to the second type of trajectory, of men who had been key figures in the land negotiation of the barrio and organized their life histories around having been 	extit{huерfanitos} (“little orphans”). I was surprised when Carlos presented himself as an orphan, even when his father had died when he was eighteen years old. Men who depict themselves as orphans explain that they grew up “with no guidance”, meaning they were intensely mobile and had no fixed home in the Chaco. A third type of trajectory, highlighted by both men and women, involved breaking up with a partner, described as a moment when people needed to create distance and go elsewhere. Finally, many adult men moved out of the Chaco because of mandatory military service (abolished in 1994), which they identified as a moment that changed their capacities and

\textsuperscript{46} This is an estimated number.
also their desire to move to far away places, making them better prepared to go to Buenos Aires. These four types of experiences are affective variations, and involve moments that changed people’s capacities to act, transforming their associations in one place and making them move elsewhere. This is a typology not of trajectories, but of affective variations, and thus many people had been simultaneously affected by several of them. In the next section, I analyze in detail four trajectories that were modulated by these variations.

**Mujeres Fuertes**

“Strong women” is a category that is used to refer to women who have a leadership role, are experienced, and are perceived to be brave. In the rural areas they are called guapas: women who know how to find their way in the bush; are skilful in obtaining resources; and know how to use a machete, climb trees, gather fruits and collect fibres. They are also brave women who confront the dangers of the bush. Younger women, in contrast, become strong by accessing education, getting jobs as health assistants or aboriginal teachers, and working with NGOs. Women who have leadership roles and organize community activities, such as running a soup kitchen, are also regarded as “strong women”. Some strong women have all of these capacities at the same time. In the barrio, a few of them were primarily responsible for making their whole family move to Buenos Aires. Some of these women, such as Andrea, are daughters of political leaders in the Chaco and had previous experience traveling.

Andrea was born in the mid-1970s, in a village in the “interfluvial” area of the province of Chaco, an extensive area between the Bermejo and Bermejito Rivers which at the time was

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47 For a longer characterization of the “mujeres guapas”, see Gómez (2011). The opposite of being strong is to be flojo/a, a category used for both men and women and closely related to a physical state of having neither strength nor ánimo, energy, initiative or will.
informally occupied by indigenous groups and a minority of criollo farmers. It was also one of the last areas of indigenous armed resistance during the military conquest of the Chaco, and thus is a central place in the collective memory of many indigenous groups. As a child, Andrea used to travel with her father, who was an important political leader, her mother and her siblings to visit relatives and other leaders in the villages of the area. They also went to work in the cotton harvest with their father several times. In her travels she got to know different villages, learned about political organizing and became “strong” as a result of these experiences.

When Andrea finished primary school, she attended the high school created by Belgian missionaries and located a few kilometers from her family farm: a boarding school for rural indigenous children. Andrea lived in the school for several weeks, and then went home to help with farm duties. Through this education, she met other Toba people, interacted with school professors and foreign missionaries, and got a high school diploma. When she finished high school, Andrea was fluent in Spanish, had strong reading and writing skills, and knew how to interact with institutions. Attending high school, therefore, prepared her for life in an urban setting. When she graduated, Andrea had her first child, and, because she did not stay with the baby’s father, she lived with her parents, who helped her raise the baby. Soon, she met her current husband and had two more children.

In the 1990s, indigenous leaders, including Andrea’s father, obtained legal title to 140,000 hectares of land in the area between the Bermejito and the Bermejo rivers in the Chaco. With the assistance of Belgium missionaries, they created the indigenous Land Association, which coordinated communities and administered the land (see Carrasco and Briones 1996). Andrea’s father helped her get a plot of land in the area, and she settled there with her husband and three of her eventually nine children. Andrea lived there for a few years, raising cattle and taking care
of her farm. When her older children were still small, her father asked her to move to Buenos Aires to help her sister who was living in a *villa miseria* (shantytown). He stressed that she would have more possibilities to move forward in her education there. Her father considered that she was more able to move than any of her other siblings, and her experience implied that she had a responsibility to go to Buenos Aires and help her sister.

In her early twenties, Andrea moved to Buenos Aires and lived in the shantytown with her sister for a year. But her husband did not find a job. She had no chance to study, and they both disliked the *villas*, so they moved back to the village in the Chaco. Andrea remembers that they were happy living on her farm and tending cattle. However, her sister became involved in the group doing the land negotiations for the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, and, two years after their return to the Chaco, she offered to put Andrea on the list of families requesting a house. Andrea and her husband did not want to move again, but her father insisted on the importance of having a house in Buenos Aires, and her sister told her the barrio would be very different from the shantytown. Together, her father and sister managed to convince her to move. Andrea agreed with the aim of “*juntar certificados*”, getting as many education certificates as she could by taking courses and attending training programs. She also expected to have her children attend high school in Buenos Aires, and even possibly access tertiary education. Since she moved, Andrea has been actively involved in the barrio’s *comisión*, producing and selling handicrafts, and working with NGOs and the middle-class people who approach the barrio “to help.”

Andrea was responsible for her family’s move to Buenos Aires. She did not passively accompany her husband, but was rather herself the person with travel experience, who decided to

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48 For Andrea’s generation, social mobility for the Toba meant getting a high school certificate as a health care or teaching assistant, and getting a job as such. Andrea hoped that more learning opportunities could lead her toward a stable job.
move and made the effort to settle in the city. Andrea, however, was also under a lot of pressure to move. Being a “strong woman” with unusual travel experience, holding a high-school diploma and possessing the knowledge of how to interact with state institutions and NGOs, Andrea was made responsible for her extended family. She was expected to contribute in a different way than her siblings, some of whom had no formal education and stayed on the farm. Her father and sister were able to affect Andrea to use her capacities in a specific way, to be a “pioneer” with her sister in the move to Buenos Aires and help organize families in the newly created barrio.

Andrea’s settlement in Buenos Aires further transformed her extended family’s capacities for mobility as a whole, because the family now would have two houses where they could stay while in Buenos Aires. After Andrea moved, she and her sister hosted relatives, and connected people from Buenos Aires to the Chaco. However, Andrea, who is now in her late thirties, did not give up her desire to live back on a farm in the Chaco, and she periodically reminds her father that she wants to go back.

A few other strong women in the barrio also moved to Buenos Aires as part of the collective need of their families. As I discussed earlier, women’s movements were usually organized and planned, and followed a specific request to move “for the good of the family.” This is understood as an expansion of the families’ capacity to act, it is useful to have a family member who can run errands in the city, host family members from the Chaco, or be an intermediary with groups of the middle class who donate second hand clothes donations. Andrea and her sister were thus actively in touch with their family in the Chaco, texting back and forth and talking on the phone several times a week, in order to coordinate these forms of connectivity.

Kinship relations are actualized in complex ways, yet there is a tendency among groups now
characterized as Tobas for the maternal side to be stronger when people are adults. 49 Women can be expected to keep a more active connection with their parents once they have their own families. Having “strong women” in the family, therefore, can make a huge contribution to the overall well-being of the family. More than fifteen years after they had moved to Buenos Aires, Andrea and her sister had created a strong extension of their family there, sending resources, receiving and commercializing handicrafts, and connecting people by creating translocal assemblages, a theme I develop further in Chapter 5.

Orphans

In contrast to the spatial expansion of kin relations created by “strong women,” many of the men who first arrived in the city explained that they went because they were orphans, and so their affective kinship relations with their families had been severed. As orphans, they had no significant kinship relations in the Chaco, had nothing to lose if they moved far away, and thus took the chance to explore their options by leaving the Chaco. Being orphans had shaped these men’s entire lives and made them more mobile in their youth, having no nuclear family pulling them together. During my fieldwork, I was surprised by the number of men now in their late forties or older who emphasized this experience of being orphaned, which initially seemed to me unrelated to travelling. I will illustrate this by focusing on Lorenzo’s trajectory.

Sitting under a tree outside his house in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, Lorenzo narrated his life to me in a series of interviews that were non-linear in chronology, going back and forth following one topic at a time. When Lorenzo recalled events he seemed to be reliving them, making gestures as if the landscape he was referring to were there in front of him. He also made

49 For an in-depth and recent study of Toba kinship and its role in the making of personhood, see Tola (2007).
comments from his current perspective, reflecting, for example, on his work as a child, and his later realization that it was labour exploitation and a form of abuse. Lorenzo further made legal and religious references, connecting one event to another in unexpected ways. His sense of having been lost most of his life, with no family support, no guidance and no love until he met his last wife, was a recurrent theme. Lorenzo narrated his life starting from the moment his father died and then went back to contrast how well he was cared for when his father was still alive.

Lorenzo was born in the area of Las Palmas in the 1920s, near the Ingenio Las Palmas. He started traveling when he was eight years old, after his father died. His father was a strong leader who exerted influence over several Toba groups in the central Chaco as a policeman, political leader, and *mayordomo* (foreman) who supervised workers at the plantation. When Lorenzo’s father died, the family abandoned their house and spread out into different *villages*. Lorenzo’s mother sent him to a nearby village to live with his uncle, who worked for the sugar plantation as well. In Lorenzo’s memory, at that moment he became an orphan: he had no home of his own, no guidance in life, and no family support. This status shaped the rest of his life. Living with his uncle, Lorenzo did not attend school regularly because no one cared about his education. He quit school before completing his primary education, hung out in the train station with criollo children, and took the train as a bum with them.

When Lorenzo was eleven he started working with his uncle on the Las Palmas sugar plantation, where they ploughed the land with oxen. He also worked during the harvest cutting cane and so was employed for half of the year, yet he made almost no money, just enough to buy clothes. When he was eighteen, Lorenzo had a girlfriend, and they had a baby girl. But the baby got sick and died, and the trauma of the death made them split up. Alone again, Lorenzo took an offer from the Unida to go to Resistencia and study the Bible. He stayed there for a short time,
and then he moved back to work for the plantation. In remembering these trajectories, he said it was very hard for him to confront both the death of his daughter and the fact that he had no family support. He said he missed having his father around to guide him, especially in such difficult moments. At the time of our interviews, Lorenzo was in his seventies and still lamented that if he had had a bit more guidance his whole life would have been completely different, and that he would not have needed to wander so much.

During one harvest, Lorenzo met Roberto, a Toba man working at the plantation for a few months who told him about Buenos Aires. Roberto was living and working in the city, and told Lorenzo how much work one could get there. He left Lorenzo his address and insisted that he go and work there himself. Lorenzo kept on working on the plantation, but after some time he started to feel a pain in the chest. He asked the sugar company to treat him, but the company doctor told him he was healthy. He took time off and rested for a few months. When harvest time came, he asked for a job, but the mayordomo of the area said there was no work that season. He knew they were hiring many people for the harvest, and they were denying work explicitly to him. This was probably because the administration did not want to recognize any work-related injury he might have, and so they did not want to have him as an employee again. Lorenzo felt betrayed and angry after so many years of hard work.

It was this experience, rather than the labour exploitation itself, that Lorenzo found most upsetting. He also felt particularly abused because his father used to be the mayordomo of the area, and he would have never denied him work. This was the situation that triggered Lorenzo’s first trip to Buenos Aires, when he decided to use the address that Roberto had written down on a small piece of paper. With union’s support, Lorenzo prepared a folder with his medical record, got a train ticket, and left for Buenos Aires. Lorenzo’s trajectory was in this way marked by
intensely affective transformations: the death of his father, the breakup of his family, the death of his first child and the breakup with his partner, and losing his job at the plantation. In his memories, he linked all of these events and his subsequent trip to Buenos Aires to the experience of being an orphan with no parental guidance.

Going to Buenos Aires with nothing other than the address of an acquaintance written down on a piece of paper was a bold move. Nobody else in Lorenzo’s circle of relatives or acquaintances had moved that far away. His travel to Buenos Aires was modulated by these intense affects. One was his intense anger at the plantation administration, not because of the unpaid work he did as a child or the low wages he received, but rather because he was left unemployed. This anger was based on a sense of betrayal, and triggered his involvement with the union even if only to try to solve his individual situation. Lorenzo’s anger added to his sense of being alone in the Chaco, with no one supporting him and nothing to lose if he moved far away.

Other men also remembered their mobility as shaped by their experiences of being orphans. They explained that they had more freedom to move far away because they had no strong personal attachments in the Chaco. They were also proud of having confronted many difficulties, and becoming stronger than the average person because of this. Most of these men also had had moments of intense mobility when they were young, and they had managed to support themselves at a young age. When they moved to Buenos Aires, there was no Toba Unida church to help them settle, or any organized groups of Toba families. Thus, it was a sense of homelessness among some orphan men that opened up the option of moving farther than usual, of making a leap that was not as safe as moving to the well-established settlements in Rosario, for example. These male orphans and the “strong women” were, therefore, the pioneers in the expansion of Toba networks into Buenos Aires. Later, they helped others to settle in the city.
Breakups

Another trajectory from the Chaco to Buenos Aires involves people who move to the city to escape from a breakup, and so to move away from intense personal confrontations with their former partners and families. These moves were acts of affective and spatial disconnection. Sofía was born in the late 1980s, in a rural village in the Chaco in the area of Espinillo. When she was a child, her father was very active producing and selling handicrafts. He sold his crafts in the city of Resistencia, and periodically went to fairs in cities outside of the province. As a child Sofía went with him whenever she could, and on those trips she learned how to travel to cities, manage the business, and interact with criollos and white people. When her parents split up, Sofía was a teenager. Instead of staying on her maternal family’s farm, she moved with her father to the Toba barrio in Resistencia and attended high school there. Her father was involved in the barrio’s commission, and, although he was not a formal leader, he was always participating in collective events. In Resistencia, Sofía started to work with an NGO coordinating youth groups, and in this role she traveled several times to meetings in cities such as Rosario, Santa Fe, Formosa and towns in the Chaco.

When I met her, Sofía had just arrived in Buenos Aires from Resistencia. She explained she came to Buenos Aires to take a job offer as a live-in maid in a middle-class home because her father insisted and supported her in doing so. However, what made Sophia decide to move to Buenos Aires was a recent breakup with her partner, with whom she had a child. A non-Toba friend Sofía had met in a youth encounter, who was also working in the house, had contacted her to offer her the job. Sofía did not want to take the job, because it meant she would have to separate from her child, but she finally decided to move to be far from her former partner and start over. She sent her child to live with her mother in the village where she grew up near
Espinillo, and let her father help organize the trip. He contacted Leandro, a distant relative of his living in the Barrio Toba, and made the arrangements for her to stay at his place for her first days in the city. Because of her previous experience of travel, Sofia did not find it hard to move around in Buenos Aires, and never got lost, for instance, as many other people did.

Sofía’s travel was thus related to several factors that I have been discussing so far: job opportunities, personal strength, and support and pressure from her father. However, she also had strong motivations to stay in the Chaco: her child, and her position as a youth organizer, a role she could not easily recreate in Buenos Aires. Therefore, what ended up triggering her move was the breakup, and her need to be far from her former partner. People say that former partners can get resentful, become aggressive (and even try to cause harm through sorcery), and get jealous if a woman (or man) meets a new partner. Accordingly, Sofía took an option she would not have considered otherwise, and decided to move far from Resistencia.

This was a common pattern. In many life histories, people described how after a breakup they had moved as far away as possible: from a village to a nearby town, to a bigger city, or to visit relatives in another province. In their accounts, people explained how they actively searched for any possibility to move away and create some distance, because remaining in touch with a former partner could result in tension. Thus, some people ended up in Buenos Aires because they needed to dissipate a conflict, interrupt intense relations in the Chaco, and start over. Importantly, only those people with connections and experience were able to move away after a breakup. In this case, travel was a way of actively disconnecting from intense relations in the Chaco.

**Colimbas**

Among men, an important factor that made them move to Buenos Aires was the military draft, a
major state institution that made enlisted men move across the country. After their military
service, some men decided not to go back home. When I recorded men’s life histories, the draft
came up time and again. Colimba is the popularized informal name given to any man who was
enrolled in Argentina’s system of military service system that existed until 1996. It is a term that
compresses the words “corre, limpia, barre” (“Run, clean, sweep”), which alludes to the actions
associated with the draft. Military Service (MS) was mandatory until 1996, when it became
voluntary (Garaño 2012). Each year, all men who were seventeen years old and Argentinean
citizens had their National ID numbers placed into a raffle, which selected the men required to
do a year (or more) of service. During service men first received their military training, and then
they were distributed across Argentina’s three armed forces (Army, Navy and Air Force), and
throughout the country to perform the lowest-ranked tasks in each military unit. I had expected
that military service would be a particularly traumatic experience for Toba men, because most
Toba people have memories of the violent military conquest of the Chaco by the army in the
early twentieth century transmitted to them by parents and grandparents. And, yet, most of the
men I talked to remembered it as a positive personal experience, which they separated from the
state violence that once engulfed the Chaco. The colimba was a recurrent theme in the
trajectories of several men ending up in Buenos Aires, and was remembered as an experience
that gave them valuable skills, and generated in them the desire to travel and visit new places.

50 Colimba is the name given to the military draft and as a nickname for the men who were doing it.
51 Being a colimba was recognized as a very hard, even traumatic experience for many men, especially during the
dictatorship years (1976-1983) when colimbas had to participate in or try to avoid participating in the “dirty war”
including confrontations with armed leftist movements, the illegal kidnapping, torturing and killing of civilians.
Further in 1982, thousands of colimbas were forced to fight in the Falklands War with the United Kingdom.
Undertrained and underequipped, thousands of Argentina’s casualties were colimbas. Nowadays, colimba is
generational marker; the last men to be drafted were in the class of 1976; the last colimbas are now reaching their
forties.
Julio’s trajectory, whose initial travels at a young age I described above, was further expanded during the colimba in the early 1980s. As the colimba distributed them across the country, many men were based in distant places. Julio was first stationed in the city of Corrientes and then sent to a naval base in northern Patagonia, where he learned to work on ships and was trained in parachuting. While he had been highly mobile at a young age and had lived in a Pilagá village, it was only in the colimba that he started to desire to move to Buenos Aires. One of his friends had worked in the city, and told Julio that he should go. Buenos Aires was full of jobs, he told him. Julio decided he would travel as soon as the colimba was over. He indeed went to Buenos Aires, even though he had lost touch with his friend and had no connections there. During the service, as they bonded with men from throughout the country, men of all backgrounds and places of origin got to learn about places they had never heard about. Julio remembered that, during the colimba, they had spent a lot of time making imaginary plans to visit each other’s hometowns. Thus, the military was an experience that gave men the opportunity to expand their mobilities to previously unimagined places.

Julio further explained that, in the service, Toba men had a good reputation. The physical training and the tasks assigned to them, he said, were relatively easy to perform for Toba men. After all, they were used to hunting in the bush with rifles, and they had been exploited on plantations, so they were strong and could bear physically exhausting work. Toba men were used to very few hours of sleep, working with no interruption, and having one meal a day. They were also very good at finding their way in the bush, sleeping on the ground and shooting with a rifle. Therefore, they were praised by instructors and recognized as skilled soldiers. Their embodied skills and strength unexpectedly became a form of capital in the specific context of the military.
This praise contrasts with the scorn and discrimination indigenous men faced in other settings, such as schools and hospitals, where they were treated as incapable, stupid and childlike. It also contrasts with their experience as workers on sugar plantations, where Indigenous People from the Chaco were regarded as the least skilled workers (Gordillo 2004).

Military service also allowed indigenous men to learn new skills. Only in the colimba did Julio learn to read and write. There was a school for adults where, in his words, they “patiently explained everything.” He also learned to do advanced construction work, plumbing, and electricity. Because of this learning experience, Julio explained, “It came the time when I finished my time, they wanted to send me home, but I asked if I could stay. I wanted to learn more, and I had opportunities.” For Julio, military service gave him skills that were useful later in life, and would help him stay in Buenos Aires.

Julio also learned more personal skills to, in his words, “hacerse respetar por los demas” (be respected by others), especially after he was initially bullied by other conscripts. He explained:

I had to learn to gain respect. At the beginning, other men treated me as if I was stupid. One time, other men stole my socks. I showed up at a uniform inspection without the socks, and I got a detention from the officers. But then I started copying what the other men did to me. Me avivé (I became aware), thus I stole somebody’s socks to replace the ones I had lost. I said I always had them with me. I learned to be suspicious of everyone. I became more aggressive. Then, they respected me; I never missed my socks or anything again.

When Julio was no longer the target of bullying, he made friends with several non-indigenous men, with whom he bonded on relatively equal terms. Julio and other Toba men gained greater social capacities, learning new forms of dominant masculine behaviour and so, paradoxically,

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52 I am thinking in the terms set by Marcel Mauss (1973) in his notion of “techniques of the body”, forms of training the body imparting specific capacities. Mauss is stressing something more basic than Bourdieu (1977): rather than recreating a socially-structured disposition for acting and with all its social implications, it was the trained body and his capacities of tracing, running, and shooting, among others that became a source of status. Under the stressful conditions of military training, Toba’s trained bodies had capacities others did not.
receiving a sense of respect and freedom they did not experience in any other state institution. Adopting the habits that define dominant forms of masculinity, enabled Julio to know what to expect in his relations with non-Toba men and to have a better time in the colimba and beyond. “Hacerse respetar” was an important skill to deal with coworkers in a construction site, for example. Later in life, Julio became a political leader, and he explicitly says it was during the colimba that he learned to be avivado, becoming aware in the specific sense of becoming suspicious of others trying to trick him; tricking others if necessary; and being aggressive in his negotiations. Julio emphasized that, after the colimba, he was never treated as a fool again.

In sum, the military was a state institution that efficiently enhanced Toba men’s capacities to move. After the service Julio wanted to go to Buenos Aires, knowing he could move there and find work in construction. He also was not afraid of interacting with other men, finding his way and settling in the city. After the colimba, Toba men were able to move farther than other men, and this explains why many of the first men to arrive in the city, and who later created the barrio, had served in the military.

“Ending up”: Open-ended Trajectories to Buenos Aires

The four types of trajectories examined in this chapter show that people “ended up” in Buenos Aires because of particular historical conditionings, specific dispositions for movement during their youth, and forms of affective variations strongly shaped by gender. To understand how people ended up in Buenos Aires, it was thus necessary to go beyond the specific trip to the city and trace their complete trajectories, their personal “histories of change”, and their potentialities and conditions. In interviews and informal conversations, people made a point of explaining the intricacies and complexities of their trajectories to the city.
In all four types of trajectory, people explained their move as the result of a moment of intensity in their relations in the Chaco, an affective intensity that transformed a request, a conflict, a sense of disorientation and anger, among other factors, into mobility. Movements to Buenos Aires, therefore, were oriented by affective experiences, transformations in the capacities of individual and collective bodies (i.e. families) that created the “need to move.” This “need” is inseparable from broader social, geographic, and historical conditions, but indicates further an affective intensity, the sense of being compelled to move away from where they were and travel to Buenos Aires. Despite the diversity of trajectories described in this chapter, what they each have in common is the presence of an affective intensity that motivated them, as well as an emphasis on the importance of knowing how to move and travel. In tracing these trajectories, I found that most people coming to Buenos Aires had had previous experiences of intense travel, and such experiences were described as necessary to survive in the city. At present, moving to Buenos Aires is easier because newcomers may count on finding many established Toba barrios, and, therefore, on a pre-established network of connections and points of reference. Yet, decades ago, Buenos Aires was an uncommon destination for Indigenous People living in rural areas in the Chaco. In their memories, people stressed the unusualness of their decisions, moving to shantytowns that struck them as alien places where they had no connections. This made many of the people now in the barrio “pioneers” in arriving and staying in the city where they had to “arreglarse”, figure things out by themselves, get to know people, connect with unknown institutions such as local schools, and find a place to live. The relative success of their efforts to settle down in the city is explained as the outcome of physical and moral grit, embodied in the “strong women” and in the colimbas.

Affect profoundly shaped these experiences of mobility, and created back-and-forth
movements when people were young. Emphasis on the experience of being an orphan illustrates the salience of this affective dimension. And these affectively-intense personal circumstances are articulated as the source of valuable experience, measured in the capacity to travel by oneself; to make new friends and build positive associations that allow individuals, for example, to rent a place in the *villas*; or to be respected by others. Each movement opened new capacities and new potential connections, and the chain of those chance encounters made people “end up” in Buenos Aires. In sum, affect helps us understand why and how people moved within the Chaco, how mobility changed people’s capacities, and what types of situations triggered and oriented people towards Buenos Aires.

In this chapter, I have offered an alternative approach to understanding mobility as neither the result of political economic relations alone, the product of cultural practices specific to the Toba as an indigenous group, nor the consequence of purely individual choices. Instead, I have traced mobilities in their bodily and affective materiality, as embodied actions executed within and against entangled relations of power and domination, operating at different scales. The concept of entanglement brings together the simultaneity of relations that shape forms of movement, while the idea of a “trajectory” allows for an understanding of the spatiality and the history of the variations that take place within these entangled relations.

Tracing the trajectories that made people “end up” in Buenos Aires has forced me to consider regularities in their forms of mobility, and to follow the specific modulations shaping those movements. “Ending up in Buenos Aires” resulted from the intersection of different power relations operating at different scales, conjunctural encounters that were affectively intense and transformed people’s capacities for action, and the efforts to act within those conditionings. People went from village to village because they could not stay on their family farm, as there
was not enough land or work, and because they had met a lover elsewhere, or because they had had an emotionally intense breakup. Entanglement means that not one form of relationship alone can explain people’s trajectories to Buenos Aires, since several relations are always operating together. Entanglement also refers to the longitudinal dimension of travel; people had previous histories of moving back and forth, and the relations that made them travel to Buenos Aires were superimposed on those previous movements.

Focusing on these mobilities helps to unpack the trajectories of people in the barrio. Mobilities that resulted from economic processes (such as rural poverty, unemployment, or labour exploitation) certainly explain the existence of a generic spatial orientation of movements, starting in rural villages and directing people toward towns and cities. Economic crisis and land expropriations have historically been two very strong and concrete forces that pushed people away from rural areas. People also moved away from everyday forms of violence from criollo farmers, for example, by moving to towns and cities in the Chaco. But these trajectories were not unilinear, and often had unexpected rhythms resulting from chance encounters or affectively intense experiences. In life histories, these affectively intense experiences were a necessary part of the bold move to Buenos Aires, and, ultimately, the creation of the barrio. Thus, people generally moved from rural to urban places, and they often explored several locations and came back home in between, in some cases going back to their home villages in the Chaco.

More importantly perhaps, most of these trajectories were defined by uncertainty. Very few people had planned to move to Buenos Aires or organized their mobility with that goal in mind. Most of the encounters and displacements were unplanned, and this is manifested in the phrase “ending up” in Buenos Aires. The typology of strong women, orphans, people who had undergone breakups or colimbas refer to these unusual capacities, and to the specific
circumstances triggering movement. Tracing trajectories showed these commonalities, and also
the specificity of each experience. In sum, these trajectories were not straight lines. Rather, they
unfolded over specific places, encountered other trajectories, and implied embodied
transformations. Yet, the fact that many of these trajectories ended up in Buenos Aires, and not
elsewhere, also indicates the affective pull of this city as the national capital, and, therefore, as
the most powerful point of reference in national imaginings of progress and prosperity.
Chapter 3: The Villas: The Spatiality of Race in Buenos Aires

Arriving in Buenos Aires, Living in the Shantytowns

In 1954 Lorenzo left the village where he lived, in the area of Las Palmas, Chaco province, and headed to Buenos Aires. He was frustrated because he had not been employed in the sugarcane harvest at the Las Palmas plantation, and was ready to make a claim at the company’s headquarters as the union had advised. When he left his house he had a train ticket, a few belongings in a bag, and a piece of paper with an address. The address belonged to Roberto, a Toba man Lorenzo had met a year earlier during the cane harvest in Las Palmas. Roberto had encouraged Lorenzo to “come to Buenos Aires, stay at my place and work,” emphasizing that “you can find plenty of work in the city.” Lorenzo had not seen Roberto again, but had now decided to accept the invitation. After a bus ride to the provincial capital and a two-day train trip, Lorenzo arrived in Buenos Aires. He described his arrival in the city in great detail:

I got to the train station (…) and I took a taxi because I felt lost. All the tall buildings, everyone moving so fast! The taxi traversed downtown, then crossed a bridge, and we arrived at the address I had. When we got there I saw the place and I was so afraid [he opened his eyes re-enacting the moment of surprise] …. It is a villa (shantytown)!!!

This was not the last time I would hear people from the barrio narrate their arrival in Buenos Aires as a shock defined by two stages: first, the encounter with a city felt as overwhelming and disorienting “so full of people and cars and buses, moving so fast” (as Lorenzo described); second, the shock of learning they would be living in the villas, the infamous Buenos Aires shantytowns. The families now living in the barrio arrived in Buenos Aires between the mid-1950s and early 1990s. Depending on the time of arrival, they confronted different socio-economic conditions. Whereas until the 1970s there was near full employment in the city, the 1980s and 1990s were times of economic crises and rising unemployment, the product of
neoliberal “structural adjustment” programs. Despite these particularities, life in a villa became a common experience to most Toba people arriving in Buenos Aires, including the families now living in the barrio (see Wright 1999).

Most Tobas I spoke with in the barrio depicted the villas as places where “life was unbearable”: precarious, noisy, packed, and violent. For this reason, initially it seemed there was not much to find out about this experience. People said that living in the villas was very hard and this was the reason why they worked to create the barrio. However, later on people told me about aspects of their life in the villas that contradicted their earlier descriptions of an “unbearable” place. Neighbours in the villas were always ready to help. Tobas enjoyed learning about their lives in other places, for example, about people coming from places “with snow.” Many neighbours became their friends and they created a diverse community that could not be reproduced in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, young people like Luciana told me the villas were not more dangerous than the Barrio Toba, and that people in the villas had a stronger sense of community. Why then did people not stay in the villas and make an effort to improve their situation there?

To answer this question, I found I had to engage with other experiences that people were talking about in a fragmented manner. For Tobas arriving in Buenos Aires, what was even more surprising than living in the villas was that many porteños saw them as negros villeros (“the blacks from the villas”). They found out they were attached to this highly stigmatized identification in very unpleasant encounters. Gerardo, a man in his fifties who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1984, remembers that when he lived in a villa called Ciudad Oculta (hidden city), the police frequently stopped him (something he still occasionally experiences). Officers were only guided by his appearance and the proximity to the villas, and they concluded that “he looked
suspicious” and thus they interrogated him for a long time. Every time this happened he got delayed and people in the street turned around to look at him as if he had committed a crime, when he had done nothing more than walk down the street. He looked suspicious, he realized, not only because he “looked poor” but also because he was dark skinned. The racialization of the urban poor, as “negros” and “negros villeros” (blacks from the villa) was something that the Toba, along with other internal and foreign migrants, experienced upon their arrival in Buenos Aires. All of these terms implied being of rural origin, uneducated, potentially violent, prone to breaking the law, and thus in need of control. Negros did not have access to the “city proper” and rather were “thrown together” in the shantytowns, along with thousands of other rural migrants who moved to the city in search of work. As negros, Tobas became the subjects of stereotypes, and these stereotypes prevented them from living in a regular barrio and even walking carefree around the city.

In this chapter, I argue that what made Toba families move away from the villas by creating the Barrio Toba was not so much the forms of life in the shantytowns but the experience of being racialized as negros villeros and the implications of this status in relation to forms of stigmatization and discrimination. Given the alternative stories that people in the barrio told me about how the villas were places full of a rich diversity of people and where they enjoyed forms of solidarity they never had experienced before, I link the strong discomfort in the villas to this racialization rather than life in the shantytowns itself. I therefore discuss two intertwined processes: the experiences of being racialized in the city and the productive encounters this racialization created.

The villas as a racialized place can be analyzed through the lens of the biopolitical management of populations that Foucault and also Goldberg have related to the location of racial
difference in contemporary cities (see Foucault 1988; Goldberg 1993). As negros, Toba men and women were redirected to the city’s outskirts, restricted access to certain places, and subjected to specific forms of regulation of their use of space (for historical and genealogical analyses of the category negros in Argentina see Ratier 1972, James 1988, Milanesio 2010, Adamovsky 2013, Alberto and Elena 2015). However, as negros the Toba were placed in the villas, and there they met other people labeled as negros or non-whites in Buenos Aires. The villas were a place of unexpected encounters for the Toba and many of these expanded their capacities of action in the city. The Tobas’ experiences thus contribute to our understanding of how skin color in Buenos Aires classifies biopolitical populations. As described by Foucault, biopower is a form of power which has at its centre the care and enhancement of the life of a given group, and its protections against any others who can present a threat to it (Foucault 2003). The white urban middle classes supposedly have only European ancestry and are the focus of (relative) state care (as long as they “behave”). In contrast, dark-skinned, formerly rural and poor villeros represent lives that need to be controlled, because they are seen as posing a threat to the general wellbeing of the population (Adamovsky 2013, Alberto and Elena 2015).

Villeros and negros are identities assigned to the Toba upon arrival to Buenos Aires and these were new and alien to them. In Buenos Aires, both terms are tightly interconnected, for they are used together and in many cases interchangeably. While Toba families did not use the category “negro”, they did employ “villero” in a pejorative way, for example to refer to former neighbours, implying they had strange or morally questionably habits. It was not just state

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53 The systematic killing of middle class people from the left during military dictatorships, points to the fact that a sector of the middle class too was object of what Membre calls “necropolitics”, a regulation of populations where people can be arbitrarily killed. (Mbembe 2003)
54 See Lenton (2010) for an analysis of the limits of Peronism in incorporating indigenous identities in Buenos Aires in the 1946 protest the Malón de la Paz (“peaceful raid”). Malón is a word that specifically refers to the indigenous attacks to criollo towns and cities during colonial era.
officials and the white middle class who saw the Toba in the city as non-white. As I will illustrate, the category *negro* is widespread in all social classes, evoking poor people of indigenous or mestizo phenotype, supposedly uneducated, of rude manners, prone to criminality who do not belong in Buenos Aires and are perceived to be a problem and even a threat, as well as responsible for their own poverty. In order to illustrate this characterization I will leave aside other, more complex ways in which the distinction between “*clase media*” and “*negro*” brings together a big array of different experiences and identifications.\(^{55}\) In this sense, I discuss the dichotomy according to which a white Argentina was produced in tension with the Peronist non-white national identity (see Adamovsky 2009, 2012b). In order to describe the categories that tend to be ascribed to the Toba, I will momentarily bracket the internal diversities within both of these groups. I focus on how the Toba fitted into this dichotomy when they arrived in Buenos Aires, and while they lived in the *villas*. I trace the changes in their experience from a period in which *negro* was associated with Peronism, work and unions to one in which it is associated with migration, illegality and violence.

In labeling the Toba as “*negros*”, phenotype matters, for this category not only refers to a class distinction but also to racialized bodies seen as non-European and non-white. Since the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was an attempt by the Argentinean elites to erase racial differences with the default assumption that Argentineans are a “homogeneously white population” (James 1988, Alberto and Elena 2015). Yet racial categories, in correlation with class, continued being used to organize groups who did not fit this paradigm of racial homogeneity. As Segato argues, “The non-white is not necessarily the Indian and the African but rather an other that has the

\(^{55}\) Currently for example some white middle class people talk about having “alma de negro” if they display a behaviour associated with being *negro*, something that adds complexity to the correlation of the notion of negro as simultaneously a class marker, perceived non-white phenotype, and a particular set of behaviours.
traces of the Indian and the African, a trace of the historical subordination” (Segato 2007:23, my emphasis). The notion of the trace is very important in that it simultaneously erases and recognizes. It erases the possibility of Indigenous People being contemporaneous and part of the city, yet it also recognizes the expectation of the founding figures of a white Argentina that non-whiteness would dissolve and disappear when European immigrants became the majority of the population. But this prediction was never fulfilled. In Buenos Aires, the Toba are seen as non-white, but they are not necessarily seen as “indigenous”. As generically non-whites, they are no longer Indigenous People, but people with traces of an indigenous background. Paradoxically the Toba and other indigenous groups in the Chaco are generically recognized by dominant society as “authentically indigenous.” In the Chaco, as indigenous groups, they interact with criollo farmers and state officials (including police, teachers, clerks at social services agencies, among others) who also perceive them as a racialized other. This otherness associates indigenous people with lower degrees of intelligence, being irrational, resisting modernity, having too many children, and ultimately representing a lesser form of humanity.

In Buenos Aires, anxieties about the unruly and dangerous nature of negros have been produced through the organization of space and the regulation of movement in space. Gordillo presents white Argentina as a racial formation, “a geographical project and an affective disposition defined by the not-always conscious desire to create, define, and feel through the bodily navigation of space that the national geography is largely European” (2015:5). The presence of negros in Buenos Aires prevents the white elites and middle classes from fulfilling this project of feeling that they live in a European city. Schematically, as a result of this division, negros are forced to live outside the “city proper” and have been highly regulated in their movements, prevented from living in white residential areas, and constrained from using public
spaces such as city parks without raising questions from the police. I therefore draw on
Foucault’s (1988) notion of a governmental power, which stresses the micro technologies
managing the relations of people with things, in this case a power that regulates the relations of
people with a city. Together with authors who analyze the mechanisms of racial-spatial
segregation in the city, I combine the notion of a governmental power with the notion that
populations under a modern state are divided between those who count and whose life has to be
enhanced and cared for, and those who are seen as undeserving of state care (see Goldberg 1993,
Razack 2002). While Foucault does not make an explicit spatial analysis, his notion of a
governmental power enables us to explore spatial relations that arrange bodies and objects in
places so that subjects come to act as they are expected.56 I will refer to this power specifically in
the regulation of people and their movements in the city.

Regulatory power, however, is not all-encompassing. To unpack this dimension, I focus on
the descriptions of the villas as places of productive encounters, drawing again on Doreen
Massey’s (2005) notion of “throwntogetherness.” If space is a sphere of unplanned encounters
characterized by the emergence of multiplicities of forms of socialization, then the movement of
people and objects can never be fully controlled or anticipated. Chance encounters are what she
calls being “thrown together in space.” The Toba who arrived in the city from the Chaco were
thrown together in the villas with multiple other subaltern groups, with very diverse trajectories
and created new forms of association and uses of the city. Tobas remember the productivity of
meeting people from all over and also the force of their actions when they were part of collective
mobilization in the villas.57

56 By “object” here I broadly consider the large material dimensions of city layout and architecture, and also
commodities and technological devices.
57 Other researchers have identified this constitution of urban collective subjects out of multiple different trajectories
Regulations and associations in the villas changed through time. Thus the first two sections of this chapter give an overview of how the Toba were racialized in Buenos Aires. After this I develop the effects of racialization and the positive encounters in the villas that emerged in the accounts of women and men who now live in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, Toba people who arrived in the villas were connected to the Peronist political movement and the military dictatorships that overthrew Peronism. During the second period, from the 1980s until the 1990s, there was a return to democratic governments while the country experienced a series of economic crises. In both cases, the experience of the Toba sheds light on larger processes, such as the racial logic that organizes the space of Buenos Aires and the making of the villas as places where people from different places converged to create new collective subjects.

I draw on the trajectory of four families that lived in a villa currently known as Fuerte Apache. Only when I had done research in the barrio for a year did one man agree to take me to visit his daughter in Fuerte Apache. I reconstruct Tobas’ experience in the villas mostly from conversations with them and from this visit to Fuerte Apache. My insights are influenced and limited by the gender and age dynamics in place among the group of families I worked with. For instance, I was unable to talk to older Toba women who arrived to the city prior to the 1980s, as they were fewer and two of the head of families living in Fuerte Apache had died several years earlier. In short, my analysis focuses on the experiences of older men (in their fifties and above), and younger men and women (in their thirties and under). I now turn to the brief characterization of the villas and to the category negro as they changed through time.

58 A few other families were living in Ciudad Oculta, another infamous villa. Their experiences have a lot in common with that of families in Fuerte Apache.
Villas and Negros

Toba people arriving in Buenos Aires before the creation of the barrio Toba found themselves living in the villas regardless of whether they had family or acquaintances to host them. The hotels and pensiones (live-in hotels) for the working class in the city were too expensive for someone arriving unemployed from the Chaco, and these places also gave preference to people with good references. Renting a room or an apartment was also impossible for them. In Buenos Aires, you need to provide a property title as warranty to sign a rental lease (if the renter does not pay his or her rent, the landlord can sue both the renter and the warrantor who can pay the debt). The result of this policy is that most working-class people and migrants, whose network of relations are either elsewhere or also renters, have no way of entering a rental agreement, even in working class neighbourhoods.

The villas first emerged in Buenos Aires the 1950s and were originally informal and illegal settlements located on vacant lands, composed of precarious and haphazard shacks made from cheap materials. The villas share a similar history with other informal cities in Latin America (and slums elsewhere): rural to urban migrations, industrialization, and segregation of internal migrants. They also share the basic tension of being “denied” the ability to be part of the “city proper” even though they are connected and part of it at multiple levels (Fischer 2014). The villas are tied to specific national processes such as the formation of Peronism, the successive dictatorships and different economic crisis (see Fischer 2014, Auyero 2014). They were built by

59 Brodwyn Fischer makes a fundamental point about informal cities in Latin America: “[Urbanization] demands that cities recognize the needs and interest that poor informal cities serve, the multiple ways in which they are embedded in urban life and that they expand the limits of the formal city to incorporate what informality does best” (2014:7).
the mass of migrants who were arriving, like Lorenzo, from rural areas to work in the emerging industrial sector. People settled in the villas with the hope of being there only temporarily, until they could find a job and move out (see Cravino 2012). With time some people were able to move out, but others were not. As new immigrants continued to arrive in Buenos Aires, the villas expanded. People living there for many years started to invest in the improvement of their homes, building brick houses, for example. This produced conflict with the military government, who did not want to see the villas as permanent settlements. Dictatorial military governments from 1966-1973 and especially 1976-83 developed policies to “eradicate” villas: evicting families, destroying shacks and other structures, and putting the land to new uses (Blaunstein 2006). People evicted from villas had to move farther away from the capital, in most cases to illegally occupy lands in the greater Buenos Aires area and thus create new villas there.

With the return to democratic government in the 1980s, evictions stopped and the villas were repopulated and expanded. This growth was also promoted by city and national governments that sought to generate social inclusion by “urbanizing the villas”, developing housing projects, connecting villas to sewage systems, and imposing taxes (Blaustein 2006). Importantly, while this may seem like a more supportive system, under both military and democratic regimes the villas were regarded as a place different from the city, which, at worst needed to be wiped out completely and at best needed to be reformed. Both approaches, either to erase or transform the villas, show that all governments have aimed to progressively terminate the villas in one way or another.

Today, the places called “villas” encompass a range of very different kinds of spaces. Some, for example, are illegal settlements built on public lands beside the railroad, with no roads (only corridors), no sewage, and no running water. Others are working-class neighbourhoods with...
paved streets and brick houses. And others are housing projects for the poor. Many villas have a combination of all of these structures – shacks, houses, apartment buildings – oftentimes reflecting the histories of older villas as they changed from shantytowns to developing neighbourhoods with structures several stories tall (such as in the paradigmatic villas 31). In this way, in many cases, the villas are just the same as other Latin American informal cities, while in others they are stigmatized working class neighbourhoods, called “villas” in spite of having the same legal situation and infrastructure as “proper” barrios.

Fuerte Apache, where many of the Toba families first lived, is a housing project for the poor built on legally owned land, with running water and electricity. It therefore fits the definition of a barrio, which has a legal status in regard to land tenure and access to basic infrastructure: solid construction, sewage and electricity. The only structural difference between Fuerte Apache and Barrio Toba is the presence of ten-story apartment buildings in the former in place of small houses with yards in the latter. Nonetheless, Fuerte Apache is seen as a villa by most porteños, the media, and government authorities. The fact that Fuerte Apache continues to be stigmatized as villas, even if it does not have the infrastructural precarity of illegal shantytowns, shows that in Buenos Aires the key characteristic of a “villas” as a place is the presence of the non-white poor. This distinction between barrios (city proper) and villas do not hold for other reasons. Spatially, affluent and poor barrios and villas overlap with one another: some villas are very close to the city centre, while the wealthy have taken over the suburbs by creating gated communities. These suburbs used to be the location of the poor and now are a place of tense coexistence between different social classes. Socially, the inhabitants of villas provide necessary labour, most construction workers, domestic workers, and janitors live in the villas. Thus, the white middle class simultaneously holds stereotypes of and also develops close relations with
people from the *villas* on a daily basis, while also benefiting from paying them low wages.

The imagining of the villeros and *negros* can best be understood alongside the distinction of dark skinned people as “other” in Argentina. This division of bodies dates back to the colonial encounter in the 16th century when physical characteristics were used as signs to distinguish between Spanish colonizers and the indigenous colonized, the Spanish colonial regime created the legal category of “*Indio*” as an opposite other to the imagined civilized, modern European (see for example Mignolo 1995, Quijano 2000, Grandin 2014). During the colonial encounter, the dichotomy gave way to an array of racial categories derived from the intermingling of Spanish, indigenous and African populations. In colonial times the category *negro* meant specifically the Afro-descendent population; this population was associated with the position of being slaves, and were thus distinguished from the *Indios* whom Spanish colonizers in some cases recognized as other nations. While the slavery of people of African origin was abolished in 1813, indigenous populations were not regarded as colonized until the late 1910s. During the state formation process, between 1880 and 1920 the term *negro* and *oscuro* started to be avoided. Afro-descendent and indigenous populations were subjected to a process of invisibilization through the assumption that a new Argentinean race was being made out of the dissolution of the non-whites into a white European immigrant majority (Ko 2009). Darkness was therefore only named to project its disappearance through racial mixing. There was also an assumption that through education and assimilation to European culture, indigenous and Afro-descendants would evolve to eventually turn into white Argentineans.

In the nineteenth century, Domingo F. Sarmiento, an elite writer and later president participating in Argentina’s nation-building process explained the country’s lack of modernity through the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. While he linked civilization to the
culture, science, and progress of white Europeans, barbarism was linked to indigenous and criollo (mixed race) irrationality, chaos and violence (see Sarmiento 1966, Ko 2009). The presence of the latter thus hindered the development of the former. From this analysis, Sarmiento defined a social engineering project, which aimed to create a white Argentinean population through European immigration. The white population would replace and transform the unruly criollos, Afro-descendent populations, and Indigenous People, and this would modernize the country through a process of “whitening”.

The distinction between a population that has the right to be taken care of and others whose life does not count and for whose well-being the state institutions are not accountable is what Foucault identifies as a biopolitical power, one that creates a population that has to be regulated against its own “abnormalities.” Internal others, as enemy and as disease, threaten the well-being of the “normal” population (Foucault 2003). Argentina’s population had to be regulated against its own abnormalities, and defended against its “barbaric” internal others, which had non-white skin and were seen as behaving in an uncivilized manner.

Over the next century, racial divisions were rearticulated, but also veiled. With the arrival of over 6 million European immigrants there was an assumption that Argentina’s population was on the path to becoming homogenously white (Bailey and Miguéz, 2003). The category of whiteness was widened to include a variety of groups, while erasing the notion of race as a form of classification (Alberto and Elena 2015). Because an indigenous person with “education” was considered a citizen and no longer an “Indian”, race supposedly did not matter anymore. However, being non-white and not adhering to European “civilized” habits still implied being an “other,” and white middle classes used this distinction to secure their own newly achieved status. All forms of difference in this period were taken as a threat to the life and prosperity of the
unified political body constituting the state – that is, of white Argentineans. While there was no open institutionalized racial distinction, there were for example no laws about miscegenation preventing interracial marriage; this racial logic materialized in subtler ways such as strict regulations over rent in Buenos Aires that prevented anyone from outside the city from renting an apartment in downtown. The idea of *decencia*, decency, which Adamovsky identifies as a central trope in the making of a middle class identity, can be regarded as an attempt to regulate interracial sociality where *negros* would not be “decent” enough to create links of solidarity with the white middle class (2009).

While whiteness had long been a component of elite identification, it became a component of larger identification with the constitution of the middle class, starting in the early twentieth century. According to Adamovsky (2009) the formation of this identity that had a racial component was motorized by elite political leaders as a way to coopt the middle sector of shop owners and professionals against the popular insurgencies such as the *Semana Trágica*, a series of anarchist riots in Buenos Aires in 1919. The implication of this analysis is that elites sought to create a class and racial separation by identifying this middle sector as white middle class, and distinguish it from a dark skinned popular sector. While the elements associated with this racial distinction have since changed and been put in tension, this racial distinction continues to be a central force in the organization of social inclusion and exclusion in Argentina.

The category “negro” became blurred in the official discourse during the ninetieth century when it was never an institutional category, and even during Peronism, official discourses avoided the categorization. However, starting in the 1940s, the term “negro” re-emerged in common discourse to name not only the Afro-argentine populations but also the larger social group of non-whites. With the consolidation of an urban working class and the emergence of
Peronism, elite and middle classes saw their power being challenged. They reacted by identifying rural migration as an *aluvión zoologico*, a zoological flood that was invading the city from the rural areas (Ratier 1972:31-32). Elites also called these rural to urban migrants *cabecitas negras* (little dark heads), and then just *negros* (black) (Ratier 1972, Adamovsky 2012b). These categories were developed in the cities and expanded to the rest of the country, also referring to a regional difference: “whites” were urban and from the big cities in the centre of the country, while the rural areas were defined as non-white. Negro therefore became a generic signifier to name the entire non-white and mixed race in Argentina’s major cities.

When rural internal migrants arrived in Buenos Aires the spatialization of racial categories was being transgressed. Rural immigrants arriving in Buenos Aires in the 1950s and 1960s were peasants looking for jobs, in many cases after being displaced from their lands, and attracted by the high demand for manual workers in the rapidly expanding industrial sector. “Negro” thus resulted from the proximity in the city between groups that wanted to distinguish themselves from the rural migrants. Elites and sectors of the middle class wanted to feel as if they lived in a European city and identifying the others as “*negros*” was part of the effort the elites made to restrict the access of dark-skinned people to white Buenos Aires. This was done as an informal racialization, since state institutions avoided any official racial classification and just assumed that Argentina had become white. However, while the emerging middle class self-identified as white along with the elites, both groups separated from “the people”, racialized by default as non-white (Adamovsky 2009).

While military governments in the 1960s and 1970s attempted to stop the centrality of the *(negros) peronistas* in the political sphere, *negro* was not explicitly articulated in these dictatorships’ discourse. “*Peronistas*” (peronists) and “*subversivos*” (insurgents, left-wing,
guerrilla fighters) became the abnormality to be suppressed with state violence. Among *subversivos* skin color was not a significant marker as many sectors of the white middle class joined guerrilla movements and were thus part of these “other”. But interestingly Peronist militants occasionally called each other “*negros*” regardless of phenotype and class as a way to strengthen their sense of belonging to “the people.”

During the 1980s, with the return to democracy and in the context of economic crises, discourses linking *villas* and *negros* with criminality spread. With the arrival of new immigrants from Latin American countries, hegemonic perceptions generated a new chain of meanings connecting *villas*, *negros*, and supposedly “illegal” and “out of control” immigration with crime and violence that threatened the white elites and middle class. These associations of non-whiteness with crime and the consequent segregation were not unlike global processes of criminalization of non-whites across the Americas (see Goldberg 1993 on urban racial segregation in the US). In the 1990s, the *villas* gradually became the object of unprecedented forms of violent policing, a process that has since only deepened.

Paradoxically, for a long time the social sciences in Argentina regarded the study of race in the country as a topic not relevant for investigation. The common-sense affirmation that “there is no racism in Argentina” was echoed in the formation of disciplinary subfields that have focused primarily on class and ethnicity. With the exception of Ratier’s (1972) study of the anti-Peronist racism of the 1940s and 1950s, only recently has racial distinction in Argentina emerged as a problem suitable for study (among others Briones 1998, Segato 2007, Ko 2009, Adamovsky 2013, Alberto and Elena 2015, Gordillo 2015). Recognizing the formative power of race in Argentina, I now return to my considerations of the Toba experience in Buenos Aires.
How the Toba Became “Negros Villeros”: Race in the City

One morning during his first days in the city in the early 1990s, and after running some errands downtown, Victor decided to explore the surroundings of the train station. After walking for a few minutes, he decided to stop and take a break. As he used to do in the Chaco when he went to town, he sat on a doorstep to rest. He looked around, observing the city, the people walking on the street, the big houses. All of a sudden a policeman approached him and asked: “Are you about to get into trouble?” Victor replied that he was just resting. The policeman insisted: “Do you come from the villas?” When he replied that he did, the officer asked for his identity document and threatened to take him to the police station for a background check. When Victor showed his ID and explained he had recently arrived from the Chaco, the policeman relaxed and changed his attitude. He explained to Victor why he should not sit on doorsteps: “You look suspicious, like you are planning to rob the house over there. You look like a thief.” He ended up saying: “You cannot stop and sit on the street. You need to keep on walking.” From that moment on, Victor learned that, unlike in the Chaco, in the city he looked dangerous. To stay safe, he had to walk in a specific way, never stopping, having a defined direction, without looking at people or houses. He also learned he had to keep his ID on him at all times.

As we commuted on a bus together, Julio told me about one of the first times he and two other men were invited to play at a music festival in downtown Buenos Aires. It was easy to find their way to the venue, taking first a train and then a bus. After they played, they decided to watch the rest of the performances. They were enjoying the event so much that the time passed and they stayed until the very end when the organizers were closing up. It was past 1:00 am when they said good-bye and left. When they arrived at the bus stop, someone told them the bus would not come until the morning. They had no way to get back home as everyone at the festival had left,
so they decided to ask for a remise (private taxi) in an agency nearby. When they got to the office a man told them through the window that no car could take them. He explained frankly: “We don’t know you, and you could rob the driver”. With no other option, they went back to the bus stop and slept on the floor for four hours until the bus came. From then on, they never stayed in the city past midnight.

Andrea has always sold handicrafts since she came to Buenos Aires. When she first arrived, she sold handicrafts by going door-to-door in middle-class residential neighbourhoods. She never had problems doing this. She compared her experience to that of other women in the barrio, who sometimes have problems when they beg for food and second-hand clothes in those same neighbourhoods. Policemen and other people stop them and tell them to go back home; some shopkeepers prevent them from entering their stores. Andrea explained to me that, despite her friends returning with lots of “food and stuff”, she never likes to beg because of the possibility that the police may stop her or tell her to go away.

It is from fragmented anecdotes like these that I realized the experience of Tobas arriving in the city was shaped not just by living in the villas but also by the embodied experience of being perceived as potentially dangerous “negros” in the city. Only Julio explicitly told me he knew that when the police stopped him it was because they were seeing him as a “negro villero.” Even without this clarification the tensions people refer to point to the experience of visual recognition of an otherness that coincides with racialization in the city space. In my own experience, the only time I was stopped by the police was when I was walking with two Toba men, which an officer perceived as a danger to my own (female) whiteness.

While Toba people were used to being racialized as an indigenous other, they did not expect to be racialized in this way. All the stories they had heard from other Tobas living in Buenos
Aires were about the trains and the parks, the abundance of jobs, with no mention of the villas and the fact that in Buenos Aires they would be racialized as negros. Without any prior verbal communication, these Toba men and women were marked as being out of place in the city, their physical appearance marking them as unusual city dwellers and potentially dangerous “others”. Policemen, business owners, their employers, and private residents shared this perception, showing how these ideas are disseminated across social groups. In the city centre, Tobas’ bodies were read as a threat to the law, and to the security of whiteness. In addition, as negros the Toba’s indigeneity was diffused. There is an assumption that negros have what Segato calls a “trace of indigeneity”, an indigenous ancestor, but not an “authentic” indigeneity, one that lives under a “traditional way of life” (Raibmon 2005). Negro is an “Indian with no culture”, an Indian in the city, a former Indian (see Cadena de la 2000). If in other parts of Latin America Indigenous People in the city are seen as mestizos, in Buenos Aires the Toba are regarded as negros (see Cadena de la 2000).

In these experiences, race was also spatially constructed as the presence of Tobas in the city was linked to them living in the villas. In a self-perpetuating feedback system, Tobas ended up in the villas because they were poor and dark-skinned, and this location further reinforced their classification as negros. The “city proper” was territorialized as a site of residence and enjoyment of white civilized bodies, where negros were allowed only if they were clearly performing a certain type of job. David Theo Goldberg (1993) describes racial segregation as a

60 This experience could also be a symptom of what Adamovsky presents in his history of the middle class (2009). He found that in Argentina, many people that could be economically characterized as working class assume a middle class identity nonetheless. Thus classifying a perceived poor as other could also be an action of class distinction between working class and unemployed poor.

61 The experience of white, working class immigrants arriving in the city is different from the Toba experience. I once helped a neighbour from Belorussia run some errands in the city centre. This man was as new to the city as the two Toba men I had assisted, but unlike them, he looked “very white”. The police never stopped me when I was in public spaces with him.
The foundational principle of modern western cities. The racial city results from the constant need to redefine the other as such, and to spatially separate them from the “normal” citizens. With the end of colonization racial difference was recreated through spatial segregation, a notion developed not only on the basis of notions of violence but also around hygienist ideas that separated racial others, supposedly contaminated populations, from “normal” and healthy ones. Slums were racially defined and located in the peripheries to avoid the contamination of healthy white bodies. In the Toba’ experience, the fear that such separate spaces may be violated presented itself in the anxiety felt by the white middle class in response to the physical presence of Toba men and women, who are not seen as violent but as nonetheless dangerous, in the city.62

Spatial and embodied divisions in the city are not just an effect of political marginality but, as Goldberg argues, a form of governmentality in itself (Goldberg 1993). Racial segregation regulates access and movement in the city, marking whose bodies belong there and whose are out of place. The Toba bodies resting in the city, walking in the street at night, knocking on doors in residential neighbourhoods, were seen as spatial transgressions and as threats to the health and wellbeing of the normal population. Tobas as negros were met with a close regulation of what they did and any action outside a perceived work was interrupted and controlled. This form of power thus not only “fixed” bodies in their “right” locations, the villas, but also policed their movements. Governmental force, therefore, regulated the presence of negros in the city by directing people to choose to move and associate according to set arrangements. Victor learned it was easy to arouse the suspicions of police, and so he began to walk with his face set forward, keeping his ID always safe in his pocket. Julio learned that it was difficult for someone who lives

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62 I use anxiety in the sense developed by Mawani (2009) as a diffused sense of threat that, because of its unidentifiability, seems unpredictable. This is an uncertain form of fear that is regarded as beyond the control of individuals and may generate more extreme reactions (including social separation, violence, among others).
in the villas to return home after midnight, and so he left for home early. Andrea did not like
taking the risk of being harassed, and so she carefully regulated her actions inside of residential
neighbourhoods, choosing acceptable activities such as selling handicrafts, over “riskier”
behaviours such as begging. If in the Chaco the Toba were also racialized as an indigenous
“other”, this alterity did not usually generate fear.\(^\text{63}\) Being seen as dangerous was therefore a new
experience for them, and became central to their experience of navigating the urban space.

Territorialization and a regulation of movement, however, are not enough to stop or erase the
negros and the villas from the space of a white Buenos Aires. Villas spread close to the most
high-end neighbourhoods, growing “beyond control”, and negros use the city and necessarily
share spaces with the white middle class. The villas not only provide cheap labour but also
“feed” popular culture. For example, cumbia villera, a genre of cumbia music specifically played
by people in the villas, has become a popular style that often animates the weddings of the upper
classes. The villas are an inevitable part of the city and are places from where alternative forms
of urban life are developed. They were also the central place from which the Tobas’ experienced
life in the city for many years. This productivity acquired specific dimensions during Peronism.

**Living in Villas Under Peronism. Affective Engagements**

During the first period of arrival of Toba people in Buenos Aires, negro as a category was
associated with manual work, unionism, and Peronism. Peronism was a populist political
movement named after President Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955), who extended worker’s

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\(^\text{63}\) In the Chaco Toba bodies are part of a typology that distinguishes aborígenes (“Indigenous People”), criollos
(mixed race rural population) and whites (of European descent). In the Chaco being recognized as aborígenes
implied being the poorest of the poor and regarded as backwards, lazy, deceitful, dependent on state assistance,
among others. Being seen as violent and criminals was not a part of this categorization.
rights, promoted lower class access to services, and emerged as an anti-elitist, anti-European social and cultural force (James 1988, Elena 2011). While it spread to other social sectors later on, the urban and industrial manual workers, organized into unions, were the central force supporting Peronism. Therefore at the time when the first Toba people arrived in the city, internal migration, the emergence of villas, the expansion of an industrial working class, and Peronism were tightly interconnected. While Peronism did not address its supporters as negros, the Buenos Aires elites and sectors of the middle class connected Peronist supporters with the “cabecitas negras”, and with what earlier Sarmiento had characterized as the barbaric other (Ratier 1972, Ko 2009, Elena 2011).

Negros peronistas were seen by anti-peronists as people of rural origin, mixed race, and who blindly followed a political leader who manipulated them with his charisma in an authoritarian political project. For elites and sectors of the middle class the negros peronistas presented a direct threat. The term “negro peronista,” while not used by Perón and Peronist officials, also became a marker of self-identification among Perón’s followers. After the 1955 military coup overthrew Perón and Peronism was banned as a political party, peronistas became associated with “subversivos” (violent dissidents). However not all peronistas were part of guerrilla movements attempting to retake power by force. Likewise, segments of the white middle class were central actors in the Peronism movement gone into clandestinely, when military government prescribed the Peronist party. Nonetheless, during the military governments of the late 1950s and 1960s the villas became stigmatized as places where supposed subversivos were hiding. This was another reason why they put so much effort into evicting the villas (Blaunstein

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64 Borges and Biy Casares under the pseudonym Bustos Domecq, paradigmatically presented these negative images of negros peronistas in the short story La fiesta del Monstruo (1968).
While the Toba now in the barrio do not identify as Peronistas, in the villas and during this period they became inevitably entangled with this movement. If in the city they were seen as negros, their neighbours in the villas regarded them as fellow villeros and workers, and thus potential Peronistas. Lorenzo was the first person now in the Barrio Toba to arrive in Buenos Aires. Before settling in Buenos Aires for good in 1960, Lorenzo had spent several months in the city between 1954 and 1955. Lorenzo’s narrative about the initial time in Buenos Aires was organized as a series of spatial displacements that involved living in several villas. He arrived in a villas located very close to the Port called Isla Maciel. He was relocated at the Hotel de los Inmigrantes because of a fire, and a few months later he moved out of the hotel and rented a shack in Dock Sud, another villas beside Isla Maciel, on the border between the city of Buenos Aires and greater Buenos Aires.

When Lorenzo returned to Buenos Aires five years later he went directly to Dock Sud and rented a place there. After a year, Lorenzo was able to buy a small wooden shack there. In the late 1960s, when the military provincial government threatened to evict the villas he, along with many other people, resisted eviction. The military government agreed to give them provisional housing in Ezpeleta, a place in Southern Greater Buenos Aires farther from the Capital. He moved there in 1968, and five years later, in 1973, authorities contacted him to tell him that “modern apartment buildings” were ready for them to move in. These are the housing projects that later became known as “Fuerte Apache.”

In spite of these displacements and the negative consequences of being seen as a negro, he

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65 The “Hotel de los Inmigrantes” was a residence in the Port itself where all foreign immigrants arriving in Argentina were forced to stay until they got legal permission to reside in the country. Lorenzo ended up in the same place as immigrants from overseas. In the Hotel, Lorenzo made friends with other men who helped him to obtain a job in the port and to get a legal permit to work there.
always found a place to live in the villas, and he always had employment in the port of Buenos Aires. Regarding these relocations, Lorenzo’s memories highlight three main aspects of his experience that show that being seen as negro was not only a constraining experience. He remembers villas as places of diversity associated with the emergence of Peronism and with the experience of becoming an urban worker and also with the political experience of organizing against the eviction of his villas. In his description, he highlighted that the constitution of these collective subjects allowed him to enhance his capacities of acting in the city, and this was only possible because of the intense conviviality developed with others in the villas.

When I asked Lorenzo about his experience of Dock Sud back then, he described it with enthusiasm as a place where he met people “from all over”. He told me how when he was single, a lot of men got together every Friday night at his place. He cooked food, his friends brought wine, and they ate and played cards. One of his friends, the Correntino, played the guitar really well, and they all sang and stayed up late. Some of his close friends were men who worked with him in the port. He also remembered “Italians were good with money. They were able to move out of the villas, to [a proper] barrio really fast, some after only a year of saving”. He therefore experienced the villas as dynamic places with people coming and going, mingling, and having a good time. Lorenzo also described in detail his work in the port, his coworkers, how fiscally responsive he was and how much stronger he became by loading and unloading ships, and racing his friends while carrying the heavy loads on their shoulders just for fun.

These experiences point to the villas as places where diverse people established intense daily interactions. This is what Paul Gilroy identifies as a postcolonial conviviality, which is the spontaneous and everyday interactions (in contrast to discourses) between different races that produce an anti-racist cohabitation (2005). For Gilroy, this is an actual (rather than enunciated)
form of “multiculturalism” or cosmopolitanism that emerges form below and contrasts with the multiculturalism of media, political, and policy discourses. The intimacy in the villas brought together people with very different trajectories into a new life in common. Because of this shared conviviality in some moments people were affected in the same manner and came together.

One of the most intense experiences Lorenzo lived upon his first arrival to the city in 1955 was the following. One afternoon Lorenzo was drinking mate with a friend when a group of people came to look for them to join a rally to see Perón. The friends inviting them were animated, had a banner and invited Lorenzo and his friend to carry it. Lorenzo and his friend got enthusiastic and joined. They walked through the port and into the city and joined more and more groups “Oh, how many people I could not believe!!” When they reached the Plaza de Mayo (next to the presidential house) it was harder to advance further. They pushed against other people and made a space for themselves at one side of the plaza. Then Perón came out to the balcony: “Everyone cheered, we could see him, we were so happy!!” Notably, Lorenzo denied being Peronist, but his account indicates that a Peronist rally was too interesting for him to pass up. He and his friend felt animated enough to stand up and walk to the plaza; they pushed other people to get a good spot to see Perón and shared the joy when they finally saw him come out to

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66 In 1955 Perón’s second presidency was violently interrupted by the military coop self-proclaimed as Revolución Libertadora (“Emancipating Revolution”). Military officers took power of the presidential palace and air bombed Peronist supporters regrouped in Plaza de Mayo. Lorenzo also remembers this event and the way he escaped the bombings that day as he was able to board a last boat taking him from downtown Buenos Aires to Dock Sud on the other shore of the Riachuelo river. He had a very clear understanding of the political event and the bombings as part of the overthrow of Perón.

67 Lorenzo knew who Peron was as this was his second presidency, and according to his accounts of the first trip to Buenos Aires back in 1955 all Buenos Aires was permeated with signs of Peronism, such as hearing Peronist songs.

68 On another occasion, Lorenzo vividly narrated the arrival of the boats with immigrants to the Hotel when people where received with the Peronist march. “The people were escaping wars and famine in Europe” At that point he sang the whole Peronist march to me. I was surprised to see he knew all the lyrics in spite of self-recognizing as “not a Peronist”. Furthermore, in this account he was interestingly showing that in the mid 1950s whites were poor Europeans escaping war and living in the same place in the city as Toba families did. The racial categories were thus not developed over a pre-existing class divisions but being employed in order to generate this class differentiation.
the balcony. Marching to the plaza was so exiting that they felt like they needed to join and walk to downtown Buenos Aires.

This experience can thus be understood as one of joining a collective body. One of the transformations of Peronism was the centrality that the working class assumed during this period, a class that until then had been ushered to the social and spatial margins (see James 1988). During the rally, the collective body of what the white elites saw as “negros Peronistas” literally took over the centre of the city. The rally of negros Peronistas challenged the spatial segregation of the negros to the villas. Ten years earlier, on a now commemorated date when a huge mass of people marched to the Plaza de Mayo (the park facing the presidential palace) to ask for Peron’s freedom after being put in jail, a photographer of the time shot a now famous image of Peron followers sitting on a European-style water fountain in the park, with their shoes off and their feet in the water. This image indicates that the photographer saw this presence of the Peronist rally as a disruption in the city. Using the fountain to rest sweaty feet needed to be recorded as an indication of peronistas’ uncivilized use of a Europeanized public space. From then on the rallies of negros peronistas such as the one Lorenzo joined generated similar reactions. The demonstrations prevented the elites and middle classes from feeling they were living in a “white” European city (Gordillo 2015), and further challenged their control over the city space. The excitement of Lorenzo can therefore be understood as part of the collective joy of taking over the centre of the city, by rallying together, occupying the central spaces of the white Argentina and giving them new uses.

69 This march was a year earlier of Peron’s first time election as a president, when he was holding the roles of vice-president and minister of labour the role in which he gained the support of unions. He was put in jail because of a dispute with a high command military officer in an attempt to prevent his candidacy as a president. The mass protest generated his release. A month later, Peron was running for president.
In a similar way, Lorenzo remembers being part of a big port strike in 1966 that resisted the transformation of the work conditions implemented by the military government that took over that year. He explained how the government changed the pay system from one in which workers were paid per ship unloaded, to one in which they were paid per day, no matter how many ships they unloaded. Even though he showed he had a clear understanding of the reasons to strike, he distinguished himself from the union. The following segment of an interview illustrates this:

Ana: Were you part of the union?
Lorenzo: Me? Part of the Union? No, no.
A: But did you participate in the strikes?
L: No, no I did not. The only thing I did when there was a strike is that I did not work, I joined the others. How can I work when there is a strike?

Lorenzo followed this exchange with a critique of both the military interventionists and the supposedly 50,000 new workers who were hired as strike-breakers. In his participation in the rally and the strike Lorenzo further shows that the regulatory power of the state is always

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70 The number is too high, according to a Spanish newspaper the people on strike were 6000, so people hired to continue port activities were probably 5000 at the most (most likely less) (La Vanguardia, 18th of Marzo, 1966: 22).
limited. While people perceived as negroes were pushed to the margins of the city and highly controlled in their movements, the thrown-togetherness of “negros” in the villas and the experiences of conviviality such as the Friday dinners at Lorenzo’s shack literally created the space for the emergence of a powerful collective subject, even if only temporarily. This illustrates the force ironically made possible when a collective is created through attempts to regulate and limit its members.

This narrative is also indicative of an affective and political involvement rather than one based on identification. During the strike he was part of the mass of workers who stayed at home, he was not a strike-breaker; he was part of a collective action that almost completely interrupted port activities for a week (La Vanguardia 1966). However he does not identify as part of the union.

Becoming part of this collective body is different from articulating a Peronist political identity.71 Lorenzo was not striking with others because of a union’s discourse that resonated with him and made him bracket differences and stress commonalities with other workers. Rather he linked himself with other Peronists in an affective, embodied way, triggered by enthusiasm in one case, and by the shared anger and deep understanding of the new forms of exploitation that generated a sense of solidarity in the other case. In both cases the experience was made possible by his friendship with coworkers and fellow villeros. In our conversation he made it clear: how could he not be furious about this change in pay that would reduce their salaries? How could he betray his friends who worked with him in the port, with whom he spent his days working side by side? How could he ignore his friends who came over for dinner and were joining the strike

71 In the Chaco and Formosa provinces, Indigenous People were incorporated into politics through Peronism but in a very different manner, they are incorporated in the 1980s, as indigenous populations and through political patronage relations. The experience of Peronism in the Chaco thus contrasts highly with mass mobilization and union politics in the city (see Iñigo Carrera, 2006, Gordillo 2008).
too?

These situations are thus better understood as an affective engagement in politics (Beasley-Murray 2010). Thinking of politics as affective implies tracing the motor for action and association not just in the struggles of identity and cultural articulation that become significant in a specific historical context (Hall and Grossberg 1986). Affect draws attention on the embodied associations of people that unfold in specific places and happen beyond forms of representation. Lorenzo joined the march or the strike because of the shared excitement and shared anger, and not so much because he bracketed his Toba identity to put forward an identity as a peronista and as a worker. When Tobas were thrown together with other negros in the villas, their trajectories converged with multiple others, and new forms of life in common emerged. When a collective body of negros came together, they were able to act in powerful and new ways – ways they were unable to deploy as individuals and ways that they had not anticipated.

Complementing ideas about governmental power, Lefebvre (1991) has shown that spatial practice is both the sphere of reproduction of power relations and the emergence of new forms of interacting. Parallel to an affective conception of politics that can be identified with Deleuze and his reading of Spinoza (1988), Lefebvre finds the sensing body as a place where new forms of the political can emerge (Lefebvre 1991). Doreen Massey (2005) takes this one step further to identify the intersecting trajectories of people, objects, ideas, in space as a productive force creating what she calls “spatial multiplicities”. Multiplicity is the only way space can be conceptualized, and is in space where different relationalities and histories unfold simultaneously. This multiplicity is never totally controllable, which she contends makes it a sphere of creativity where it is possible to constitute relations that are not completely regulated. Encounters in space allow new histories to emerge, and enable the constitution of collective
subjects with unknown capacities of action (to rephrase Spinoza: nobody knows what many bodies can do when they come together as one). Because power relations can never anticipate the result of encounters in space they can never fully control what unfolds from chance encounters in space. The tension between the governmental regulation of movement, and the unexpected encounters and conviviality unfolded in the villas. In the villas the Toba as negros became subjects to be controlled so that they did not hinder the well being of the white and middle-class population. On the other hand, in the villas, by accessing a job that made him incredibly strong and by coming together with “people from all over,” Lorenzo developed capacities he had never imagined. Further, as part of a collective subject as negros peronistas people from the villas, he could stop the port’s activity or momentarily take over the city centre.\(^\text{72}\)

The villas, in short, were places of constitution of a new collective subject out of a multiplicity of trajectories. People arriving from different points of the country that had no previous connections, now started to share their everyday experiences and through these actions they started to have a history in common. This commonality was not just the effect of being denied the recognition as citizens (of being only a subaltern “rest”). Their life in common in the villas generated its own creative forms of relating that went beyond the denial of them as “normal” citizens. Lorenzo hosted dinners because he was interested in meeting new people, went on a march because it was exciting, and joined a strike because he was as angry as his coworkers were. Joining these collective bodies is thus affective and unfolds spatially connecting the villa and the port, the villa and downtown Buenos Aires. It was the result of encounters in specific places: the villas, the port, the street, and the city centre. In space, Indigenous People, rural migrants and Latin American immigrants were thrown together, connected and at moments

\(^{72}\) Jon Beasley-Murray analyzes how the force of what he identifies as a multitude, is captured by Peronism (2010).
becoming collective subjects acting together as one collective body. In sum, Lorenzo’s narratives show that coming together with others in the villas was a moment from which new forms of action emerged.

During the 1960s, Lorenzo was also part of the villero movement that resisted evictions and fought for better infrastructure (Cravino 2012). In 1967, during the military dictatorship of Onganía, Dock Sud, the villas where Lorenzo lived, received several threats of eviction. This was part of the general military governments’ policies to “eradicate” shantytowns (Blaunstein 2006, Cravino 2012). Lorenzo joined other families and a group of university students and together they demanded new housing from the local government. He was unaware of how dangerous these political associations and claims were at the time, when any Peronist militant could be killed or thrown in jail by the dictatorship. They succeeded and the government promised that they would be relocated in temporary houses until they could get proper housing in a definite barrio. The temporary location was in the district of Ezpeleta, in south Buenos Aires Province and farther away from Capital than Dock Sud. In 1968 Lorenzo moved to the new barrio that became his and his second wife’s home for over five years. In 1973 authorities contacted them with the notice that they could move to the new permanent homes, modern apartments in Ciudadela, on the border between Capital and the Conurbano, and thus closer to the city centre. A few months later they moved to this new barrio, called then “Ejército de Los Andes.” It was the first time he lived in a 10 story towers, “piled up” over and underneath other people. He liked this apartment; it had everything they needed: a washroom with warm water.

73 Fuerte Apache continued to grow during the late 1970s when new towers were built. The first buildings were finished at the end of 1960 during Ongania’s dictatorship. In 1973 there was a transitional democratically elected government, as Cámpora took power it allowed Peron to return. It was during the third Peron presidency that Lorenzo got his apartment. The third presidency came to an end with Peron’s death in 1974, followed by the unstable government of his wife Isabel Peron, and the subsequent 1976 dictatorship. By moving to Ejército de los Andes Lorenzo avoided a wave of evictions of villas that left thousands of people homeless (Cravino 2006).
and electricity.

**Fuerte Apache: A Place of “Apache Indians”**

The Toba families arriving in Buenos Aires and the *villas* from the Chaco in the 1980s and 1990s entered a very different environment than earlier migrants like Lorenzo or Raul. Argentina at this time was struck by a series of economic crises. In the 1990s unemployment grew, reaching unprecedented levels. Neoliberal “structural adjustment policies” mandated the privatization of state services and the shrinking of government services, while the pairing of the currency with the US dollar (that made import of goods inexpensive) dismantled the national industry. People living in the *villas* who were formerly employed as manual workers, could only find temporary employment from now on; they were hired illegally with poor compensations and no rights. Villas had become a permanent location for the urban poor, and as rural to urban migration increased, the *villas*’ population escalated.74

Fuerte Apache was expanded in the 1980s with the construction of new towers (see Alarcón 2003) and grew with the informal construction of shacks around the apartment buildings. During this period, Fuerte Apache, together with the other *villas* in Buenos Aires, came to be associated with criminality (see Isla 2007, Isla and Míguez 2003). While unemployment generated the emergence of youth gangs in the *villas* and poor neighbourhoods, they were held as responsible for the city’s higher crime rates when violence and criminality was widespread across social classes. What was distinctive about Fuerte Apache is the fact that the housing project was

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74 The escalation of unemployment in the *villas* resulted in the formation of the unemployed movement, the *Piqueteros*. The *Piqueteros* originated in Northern Argentina, organizing claims around the right to work, and developed new forms of protest by blocking national roads and then the urban areas main avenues, preventing circulation (Svampa and Pereyra 2003). The state of generalized unemployment also caused young people in the *villas* to inescapably get involved in gangs and illegal economy (Míguez 2004).
identified as the most violent place in Argentina. Further, a place originally known as Ejército de los Andes came to be named “Apache Fort,” and was therefore imagined and racialized as a fortified indigenous stronghold.

Silvia, a woman who is now in her forties and grew up in Fuerte Apache, along with several people from the Barrio Toba told me about the event that led to the name change. Newspaper articles and journalistic narratives about this event confirmed these memories, even if the Toba added an important detail. In the late 1980s José de Zer, a TV journalist who was well known for sensationalist coverage of crime and supernatural events, reported a shooting between a gang and the police in the villas Ejército de los Andes. The gang had been involved in a robbery and the police were trying to capture them. The gang regrouped to their apartments in the projects and shot at the police from the windows of an apartment on a high floor (see Camps 2000, Alarcon 2008). According to Silvia, José De Zer reported:

The criminals are shooting from one of the towers making the barrio inaccessible to the police. No matter how hard they try and how many officers they involve: the criminals are shooting from a high floor, making the barrio inaccessible. It is inaccessible as a Fort! As an Apache Fort!

From that moment on, the media renamed the place “Fuerte Apache”, and most people in Buenos Aires learned about “Fuerte Apache’s dangerous criminals”. Interestingly, this villas was attributed to an indigenous identity but one that evokes the warlike “Apache Indians” represented in Hollywood films. Fuerte Apache has a cinematic referent in the 1970 movie named “Apache Fort, The Bronx”, referring to the African-American neighbourhood in New York City.

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75 I searched for news coverage of this event with no success. All journalist chronicles agree in marking this event as giving origin to the name but give no specific date to the naming.
76 Alarcon, an investigative journalist refers to the same series of events.
77 The only existent histories of the barrio are research journalism articles by Sibila Camps 2000 and Alarcon 2008.
York City, and José de Zer probably had this movie in mind when he chose that name.\textsuperscript{78} If the villas were a place of negros that had “traces of indigeneity”, an Apache Fort was a place where Indians had become powerful delinquents, and thus were equated to “Apache Indians”. And “Indians” were fighting back against the “white” city. This name therefore captures white middle class fear and desires about the villas as violent places of non-whiteness. The name resonated in such a strong way that almost nobody knows the official name of the barrio.

Synthesizing the visceral fear and anxiety that the presence of the negros generated among the white middle classes (Gordillo 2015), this name associates negros with Indians assumed to be a real threat to the city. This takes us back to Foucault’s idea of racial formations as emerging from a war situation, one in which the enemy is now internal and threatens the society as a whole (2003), evoking the armed Indigenous People who threatened Buenos Aires from the Pampas in the Spanish era and in the early days of the post-independence period. These are the negro-Indians that have continuously prevented Buenos Aires from becoming a fully white city, as desired by white Argentineans (see Gordillo 2015). Fuerte Apache thus frames indigeneity in Buenos Aires within a generic-indigeneity evoked by reference to North America Indians but also affectively links it with the “trace of indigeneity” that the negros hold and that constantly haunts white Buenos Aires.

While narrating these events Silvia further added that the journalist who named the place “Fuerte Apache” knew about the Toba families, who coincidentally were living in the same building where the shooting took place. According to her, the journalist believed the Toba were protecting the gang with supernatural powers, and did it so effectively that the police could not

\textsuperscript{78} The movie “Fort Apache, The Bronx” directed by Petrie (1981) is about the adventures of a policeman in this neighbourhood.
reach them. “Everyone was afraid of us and they thought we protected the gangs with a special power, that we made them invincible.” For her, in short, the press renamed the whole barrio Fuerte Apache because the Toba families living there made it inaccessible to the police. Even though this is probably a personal interpretation, this story is nonetheless very significant. It brings the negros and the Toba together back in a circular move. The Toba became negros in the villas of Buenos Aires because of their non-white phenotypes but in a process that diluted their indigeneity. But when villas were perceived as a threat the notion of indigeneity still present in the category negros came back to the front and the press gave one villa the moniker Apache Fort. At least in Silvia’s account, the presence of the Toba in the housing project turned the villas into an indigenized space imbued with an unusual power to resist the police.

Negro again becomes a category that names the non-whites. This term included not only Afro-argentine and the mixed raced rural migrants to Buenos Aires, but also included the never-erased Indigenous People, who were not only alive in a remote rural area but also continued to haunt Buenos Aires (see Briones 1998, Segato 2007, Gordillo 2015). The naming of the allegedly most violent villas in Buenos Aires as Fuerte Apache only strengthens this idea that the Indigenous People never completely vanished from the city, making this elusive, phantasmatic presence even more powerful (Lazzary 2010). Michael Taussig (1986) has argued that because colonizers in the Amazon feared Indians as terrifying savages they were always ready to unleash violence and terror on them. Likewise, after the incident that led to naming this villa “Fuerte Apache,” this place started to be depicted as one of the “most dangerous places in all Argentina” (Camps 2000). Under this logic Fuerte Apache became the object of unprecedented policing methods in the late 1990s, as we shall see.

79 I did not find a press article reporting the presence of the Toba in Fuerte Apache.
In the 1980s a group of Toba families from the Chaco arrived in Fuerte Apache, where Lorenzo was living. They first stayed with acquaintances and soon found how difficult it was to get an apartment there. They considered occupying the premises of abandoned shops, and so they contacted Lorenzo to ask him for advice. Lorenzo remembered telling them that: “they had to act all together, a single family would get evicted. They had to occupy the premises at night and stay there for many days until the police would accept their presence.” The group did as Lorenzo said and were successful. The premises had poor infrastructure: no bathroom, no running water, and no electricity. But they made the best of it, they connected their new home to electric lines, organized a kitchen and washroom. They lived for around two years in those premises until they were able to move to apartments in the same villas.

Different members of these families told me how soon after they started to become integrated in the villas. Children started school and made friends. Women did the house chores alongside female neighbours and they watched over their young boys playing soccer from their balconies, (sometimes with the now internationally renowned soccer player Carlos Tevez\(^\text{80}\)). Antonia remembered being pleased to send her children to a school that also had a high school. The men got jobs in construction, and many times found employment through contacts with their neighbours. Raúl remembers how convenient the location of Fuerte Apache was: he was only forty minutes away from the city centre. It was easier for him to get to work when he lived there than when he moved to the barrio Toba, which is roughly three hours away from downtown Buenos Aires. These families remember how they became part of the villas and enjoyed many aspects of living there. They too, as Lorenzo, enjoyed aspects of life in the villas and became

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\(^{80}\) Carlos Tevez played on the Manchester City team in the UK between 2007 and 2013 where he gained international recognition.
integrated into it.

According to Raúl, during this period their neighbours learned that they were Toba and started calling the apartments the place of “los Indios” (the Indians). He also remembered how he surprised a taxi driver when the driver asked him: “Is it true that there are Indians in this villas, as people comment?” Raúl replied it was true and then pointed to his daughters who were just joining him in the cab, “They are Indians, and I am an Indian too”. The driver was very surprised and remained silent for the rest of the trip. This interaction indicates that the Toba had a reputation as “Indians” both inside and outside the villas and that this identification generated curiosity. At the same time, the Toba were not readily identifiable as phenotypically different from other villeros, and the taxi driver had no clue he was talking to “an Indian.” Inside and outside the villas they had to clarify they were “Tobas.” Otherwise, people saw them as regular negros villeros. This is one more example of how Tobas fit into the category of negros, especially when associated with the villas. Conversely it demonstrates how indigenous bodies in Buenos Aires are read as negros rather than indigenous, where negros is an all-encompassing category to name the non-white bodies irrespective of the differences that exist among them.

**Growing Up in Fuerte Apache**

During my fieldwork, I met younger people who grew up in Fuerte Apache and spent their childhood and teen years there. For them, growing up in Fuerte Apache was a different experience from that of both Lorenzo’s and the other people who arrived in Buenos Aires as adults. Showing similar forms of attachment that many people in Buenos Aires have toward the “barrio” (neighbourhood) where they live, for these youths Fuerte Apache was their “barrio,” and many of them did not feel a need to move out or to create an indigenous place. One of them
was Silvia, who spent her youth in Fuerte Apache and structured her life history around her addiction to drugs when she was a teenager. Silvia is currently an active member of the Toba church, and that is probably why she emphasized how “dark” her experience in the villas was.

While she describes her adolescent period as “being lost” and a time of her life that she regrets, she also described her experiences as a series of adventures, where she got to explore the city and do things she never expected. She started taking drugs with a boyfriend in high school. When she was on drugs, she stopped worrying about everything, and forgot about all the problems in the villas and in her family. School became unbearable after this experience and so she dropped out and began to spend most of her time with her boyfriend. She referred to this period of her life as “la joda” (partying).

When she began taking drugs every day, things got more complicated. She lost a sense of time and place, and started to depend on drugs to function. As she could not always pay for the drugs, she got indebted towards drug dealers and several times they harassed her and her family. She distanced herself from her family to keep them away from trouble and moved with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend became a thief, and with time he became part of a more organized gang. At one point they were living in a very nice house in a gated community with other young couples, and the men were robbing houses of the area (which the affluent middle class use as weekend escapes). One day she realized she had no idea where that place was or how to get out of it. This sense of being literally lost is what she describes as triggering her desire to “get out of that life”. During the time of the negotiation for the barrio, she got in touch with her family. Her mother was disappointed with her use of drugs, but requested a house for her in the barrio nonetheless. Moving out of the villas and into the barrio was the turning point in her life, she stopped taking drugs and cut all relations with her previous boyfriend and friends. She depicted
the villas as “hell for me” and the barrio as a “calm place where I could hear the birds sing again.” She stressed how both worlds were opposites and how she made an explicit effort to never go back to the villas again. However she did not express a need to create an indigenous place as the adults did, but rather a place free of drugs.

When my recorder was off, Silvia began talking about one of her sisters, Alex. Alex is the only person from the group of Toba families in the barrio who is transgender and is called a travesti, a man living as a woman, who has breast implants and keeps male genitals (see Kulick 1998). Alex started to behave as a woman when she was a teenager in the villas. There she began hanging out with gays and travestis and had a boyfriend for the first time. She is currently living with her boyfriend in the suburbs, not too far from the barrio. Silvia explained that she and Alex were the focus of a lot of gossiping in the barrio and were regarded as “lost children”. She interprets her addiction and Alex’s transition as something that only happened because they came to Buenos Aires and ended up in the villas, and therefore as something that would have never happened to them in the Chaco. These accounts show that children and teenagers were having experiences in the city that were very different from that of adults. While Silvia regrets having gotten into drugs, it was a moment when she was very close to her friends, she could forget about the problems in the villas and was able to live in another place, a middle class gated community. For Alex too, the villa was the place where she changed her gender identity. Thus for both sisters life in the villas allowed them to do things they would not have been able to do elsewhere.

81 Travesti is the term used for a particular Latin American sexual identity that is linked with a lower socioeconomic status. In Argentina and Brazil, most travestis who grow up in small towns and rural villages need to migrate to the cities, where they can find a community and can access the means to transform their body (Kulick 1998). They are the object of very strong social stigma, and in Argentina their life expectancy is strikingly low, limited to 41 years of age only (they cannot access the health system and are the object of systemic violence) (Fundación Huésped and ATTTA 2014).
For Elisa, who still lives there, Fuerte Apache was, in contrast, the best place to develop a “normal” life and start a family. Elisa is one of the Toba youth who remained in the villas when the rest of her family moved to the barrio. She challenges the stereotypes around the criminality of Fuerte Apache and the dominant narrative of how the Barrio Toba was created. The description of my experience visiting her in Fuerte Apache provides insights into this alternative view.

Getting to Fuerte Apache was quite easy. One Sunday morning I met Raúl at a train station only 20 minutes away from downtown Buenos Aires. After a 10-minute bus ride we were in a regular working class barrio with modest, two-floor houses and quiet streets. At one turn we faced Fuerte Apache, which I only recognized from the highrise towers. I was finally seeing the “most dangerous location in Argentina” and yet I could not feel the disturbing presence of the monoblocks that journalists described. Rather I saw the carts of a Sunday market and farther away the 10-story housing projects, not different from others in the suburbs. The only reminders of the tensions around this place were the three officers from the Gendarmería who were standing beside a pick-up truck and holding their rifles at the intersection where access to the villas is located. Raúl made me walk as far from them as possible. We crossed the street quickly, without making eye contact with the gendarmes, and only relaxed when we were inside Fuerte Apache.

We walked past the market and arrived at a soccer court with synthetic grass, and a tidy fence. “The court was a recent donation of Carlitos Tevez. My son played here, sometimes with him, when this was a dust field,” Raúl explained. We arrived at the complex of buildings where Elisa lives, walked up the stairs and knocked on the door. A smiling young woman opened the door. Elisa is a housewife, and her husband Mario works as a staff member of a maintenance
company. They have two children who go to school in the villas and a baby. When the children came to greet us Elisa mentioned that Mariana, their oldest daughter “is first in her class,” and she showed me a school photo in which Mariana was carrying the Argentinean flag, which is an honour given only to the best students.

While Elisa stirred a sauce and we chatted in the kitchen, she told me how when her parents moved to the Barrio Toba from Fuerte Apache she wanted to stay. But she was 14 and was too young to stay by herself, so she moved with them to the Barrio Toba. Only a few months later she went to Fuerte Apache to visit her older sister who was living there with her boyfriend's family and stayed with them permanently. When she met her current husband she moved in with him and his siblings and parents. Elisa explained to me that she does not like the Barrio Toba because it is too far away from the city, too isolated, and people are not as friendly. She did not know anyone in the barrio. Furthermore she argued that Fuerte Apache is actually safer than the Barrio Toba. The only time she got robbed (she lost a new bike), it was in the Barrio Toba. She had never been robbed in Fuerte Apache. That is why she gets angry when people portray her barrio as a dangerous place. In Fuerte Apache she found neighbours who helped her a lot, from giving her a place to live to helping her with her pregnancies. When her husband got a job and they had enough money to move out of their in-laws’ place, they did not hesitate to rent an apartment in Fuerte Apache. After lunch Elisa showed me her wedding photographs and stressed how much different friends had helped her to prepare the party. Past 4 pm, Raúl suggested we head back, and we walked to the bus stop uneventfully.

In our conversation, Elisa constantly stressed that Fuerte Apache is an average barrio, and that

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82 Mario asked me about my visit, “Are you a journalist? Do you want to write about this barrio?” I explained that I was researching how the Toba have arrived to Buenos Aires and that I was an anthropologist, and he looked happy with my reply. I realized that while anthropologists harass the Barrio Toba, el Fuerte is constantly approached by journalists that want to portray “life in the most dangerous place in the country.”
the Barrio Toba is not so different in regards to safety: they are both more or less dangerous.

Elisa stresses how solidarity is stronger in the villas, and thus she openly rejected the barrio when she moved back to Fuerte Apache, and chose to keep sharing her everyday life with friends and neighbours there. Elisa’s account reveals that for some families that moved to the barrio not everything was automatically better. Moving away from the villas implied detaching themselves from those long and close relations established there, and that was not necessarily an easy change. This was a very different version of the creation of the barrio from the ones told by people living there.

Elisa mentioned that there was only one period in which she felt truly afraid in Fuerte Apache and that was when the control of the villas became militarized, which happened right after her family had moved to the Barrio Toba. She remembers that “for some time you could see many military uniforms in here, they were green and blue and some of those combat uniforms you see only in the movies.” Elisa explained that these security forces took over the barrio:

They were carrying all types of weapons, not just the normal guns police have, they were carrying machineguns, rifles, all long guns and they were loaded! They always had their hand in the trigger, ready to shoot, a real danger! I got very scared when I took the children to school and had to pass through several controls. What if they pulled the trigger by accident? What if they shot a kid?”

Interestingly, she only saw the presence of the military forces (rather than gangs) as the main source of violence in Fuerte Apache. She was describing the fact that in 2004, in response to a supposed growth of violence and criminal activities, the province of Buenos Aires (under the control of Felipe Sola) ordered the provincial police to withdraw from patrolling Fuerte Apache and called for the intervention of national military force. With this action, it became the first villas to be policed by Gendarmería Nacional a federal force that normally only controls the borders or makes interventions in the event of unmanageable social unrest (as for example the
event of a riot) (Cravino 2006). From then on, Gendarmería constantly policed the barrio.\(^8\) El Fuerte was the laboratory for this type of militarization of shantytowns that was later extended to other villas. Gendarmería became a stable presence regulating the movement of bodies of the negros in and beyond the villas, and on my visit to Fuerte Apache Gendarmería was the only indicator that this was not just another working-class barrio.

These new articulations of race, with assumed uncontrollable violence, and criminality are not processes taking place in Buenos Aires alone. Most cities in Latin America and the rest of the world, in different ways have undergone a process of exceptional forms of policing of internal others (see for example Wacquant 2008, Bourgeois 1995, Auyero 2014).\(^8\) Goldberg found that in the 1980s, racial segregation in North American cities is not only a way to confine a population and negate their access to rights, but also becomes the locus of new anxieties around barbaric forms of violence emerging from the slums towards white spaces. This anxiety justifies new forms of control and policing that is used to legitimize the killing of dark-skinned – especially young and male – bodies. In Buenos Aires, as reported by CORREPI (2014) every year, this implies the regular killing of male youth by police and gendarmes, especially in the villas. This means that the militarization of slums creates them as places of exception, spaces of interruption of the civil law and where a population is defined as “not counting” as a real life (Agamben 1998). The villeros, as other slum dwellers, therefore do not hold civil rights, and if they are killed their death does not count as an actual death and for example is in many cases not reported in the media. The constant presence of military forces who, as Elisa remarked, display

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\(^8\) Gendarmería is a force created for the policing of borders and transit over national roads. It has both military and police functions (Escolar 2007)

\(^8\) The cities of the “Empire” have simultaneously militarized the control of the suburbs while it directed an unconstrained military violence towards its “external others” (Gregory 2011). In both cases the place of the other become a space outside the law and whose life does not count.
war weapons and are always ready to shoot, makes life in the policed villas a concession more than a right. Negros in the villas are not just “left to die” through the deterioration of state services, but are now also actively killed by the police. Police see young male villero bodies as an imminent threat and do not hesitate to pull the trigger and kill youth as they are regarded as always already a threat to them and to “normal” citizens. This is a point that goes back to Foucault and his notion of racialization as a form of internal war where the non-whites are a constant threat to white civil society. And yet this is a relative process, as according to Elisa, most times things are calm and Fuerte Apache is just a regular barrio, one where they can sometimes forget the presence of the gendarmes. Furthermore, this is a resisted process. The long tradition of political organization in the villas has resisted evictions, guaranteed the maintenance of basic state services and people have also mobilized and legally challenged the police abuses and violence.

However the images about villas and negros as sources of danger, (strengthened by the militarized control of this villas in 2004), had profound effects on the spatial arrangement of the city and the regulation of the movement of the villeros’ bodies in the city increased. Toba people who were living in the villas in the 1980s experienced the beginning of this process and a limitation of their movement across the city space. It was during this period that men experienced being stopped and interrogated by the police only because they were in the city. It was after the naming of Fuerte Apache as such that the families that had formed the handicraft cooperative started to think about moving out. The desire to move out of the villas is something they share with other villeros, as many people who currently live there express a desire to live in a regular barrio and stop being seen as criminals. The Toba families had specific opportunities to escape this stigma, poverty as well as the restriction of civil liberties the new forms of policing
imposed on the villas.

**A Different Shade of Non-White**

Raúl arrived in Fuerte Apache in the early 1980s and became a construction worker. When employers asked him where he lived, Raúl would avoid saying it was “a villas” and he just said he lived “in the Ciudadela district.” Eventually, Raúl decided to tell his coworkers that he was “Toba.” People were initially sceptical and would say, “No way you are Indigenous!” However, once they believed him he received increased attention: his coworkers were interested in his life in the Chaco, how he hunted, what he ate. His friends respected him for this different kind of life he led in the Chaco. Raúl soon learned that in Buenos Aires being an “Indian” was not as bad as being a “negro.” Through such experiences, Toba men like Raúl realized that their indigeneity could, ironically, help them to escape the stigma of being negros. Furthermore, for the people arriving in the barrio in the 1980s one of the economic options that they had in the city was to start producing “indigenous handicrafts” and selling them in fairs or door to door in middle class neighbourhoods. When they developed this activity they became even more aware of the interest in an “authentic” indigeneity generated among people in Buenos Aires, and also how fear was erased from these relations. Ironically to be more clearly recognized as authentically indigenous became a way to escape the extraordinary forms of policing in the villas and the regulation of their movement in the city.

In connection to what I developed in Chapter 1, the possibility of being recognized as indigenous and specifically as Tobas from the Chaco changed the attitude of the people they interacted with in the city. The ability to clarify that they were not negros but indigenous, specifically by selling handicrafts, playing Toba music, telling stories and organizing workshops
that marked them as “Tobas” began to allow them to escape the suspicious gaze to which villeros are confronted in the city. Being seen as Tobas allowed them to establish long-term relations with some people such as schoolteachers, indigenist activists and anthropologists. As long as they remained in the villas, however, this positionality remained ambiguous. Creating the barrio as a distinct place marked as a Toba space, therefore, allowed these families to carve out a different shade of non-whiteness for themselves.

Evoking the time he had to spend a night by the bus stop because he missed the last bus, Carlos told me that when he started to perform as an indigenous musician as a way of living he spent several nights sleeping in the park. I asked if he had trouble with the police, as they generally evict people from the parks at night. “I had my guitar with me, I had no problem,” he told me, and added that he was wearing an Andean vest and was selling handicrafts.

Nowadays, when Toba people act as cultural workers, they take particular care of their appearance; they wear feathered head-dresses, and vests and jackets from the Andean region, something they do not wear in other circumstances and is not formally part of “traditional” Toba dress. They also carry the traditional musical instrument and display them, such as the nvike or Toba violin made of a tin can and a single cord. They carry them even when they do not know how to play them. Thus, they incorporate generic indigenous markers that are recognizable by the white middle class and demark their dark-skinned bodies away from being negro villeros. This active production of a different non-white body allows them to move around the city centre, and access places such as music festivals in a way they could not do as negros villeros. Moving in the city always presents the possibility of being seen as negros nonetheless and therefore Toba people have to reinforce through generically indigenous clothing or handicrafts that they are something different, mostly by displaying an indigeneity that is intelligible to average porteños.
When Tobas started to sell handicrafts and present themselves in this way, they effectively gained the attention of people from the city. Many middle class porteños may be interested in relating to their “indigenous brothers,” while they are not interested at all in relating to the “negros villeros.”

Their new position in the barrio allowed the Toba to get access to and create a different mobility in the city centre. The performance of this different shade of non-whiteness was effective also because the creation of the barrio provided an even stronger base for their identification as such, as I have argued in Chapter 1. The barrio presented an alternative path for all of them to avoid the heavy policing imposed in Fuerte Apache and a different way to access the city as cultural workers.

In relation to my point in Chapter 1 about the Toba youth currently living in the barrio who cannot fully be recognized as Tobas, something similar happens to Toba youth who continued to live in the villas. One day I found Gimena, Rubén’s daughter-in-law who was born and grew up in one villa. She was doing the laundry in the front yard of their house in the barrio. When Rubén arrived, he mentioned she was behind with the laundry after many rainy days and added: “In the villas you never do laundry on rainy days. Because you have nowhere to hang it to dry.” She laughed and looked down. He looked at me and asked, “Do you know Gimena is a villera?” “But you also lived in the villas for several years” I replied confused. “No, we are from the Chaco,” he replied. In this case Rubén was still actively distinguishing his daughter-in-law as villera,

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85 There is a long tradition of people form the middle class working in villas, as volunteers, activists and advocates. Some people have worked with families now in the barrio both in the villas and the barrio. However, most groups that visit the barrio have the very specific target of helping Indigenous Peoples and they do not engage with “villeros.”

86 I was confused about the reference in regards to the laundry. Most people in Buenos Aires including middle class, do not own a drier and thus unless you have inside space to hang your clothes it is quite normal to avoid doing laundry when it is rainy. This commonality made the reference to the villa even more forced.
meaning a poor person, who may be dark-skinned but does not identify as Indigenous.

Interestingly Gimena later told me her father was a Toba man, but she was born in the villas and seldom talked about Toba culture with her father. In the context of the barrio, she did not feel like she could claim a Toba identity. For Tobas born in the villas and for second-generation Tobas in Buenos Aires, their detachment from the villas even when they were connected to them in several ways, closed the possibilities to identify as Toba. This disengagement and boundary was demonstrated in this anecdote where Ruben needed to mark Gimena as an “other” and giving her no space to recognize herself as Toba as well. In another conversation I asked her further about this and she said that she had always been close to her father and learned a lot form him but she never learned the language. In this way she seemed to be explaining to me how she had “lost” her Toba identity, while she also recognized she had learned things from her father and now was living with a man, Rubén’s son, who self-identified as Toba from the barrio. In this example Rubén was denying Gimena the possibility of being villera and being Toba nonetheless.

This anecdote also shows how many people in the barrio were constantly trying to mark the barrio as a place that is different from the villas and that its inhabitants are therefore not villeros. But this was an ongoing process that needed to be constantly actualized. Outsiders such as myself needed to be reminded that they are a different kind of people – “Tobas” rather than villeros – and that the barrio is an indigenous place and not a villa. Creating the barrio therefore implied what Strathern calls an active “disconnection” from the relations they have established in the villas (Strathern 1996). While many families visit relatives who still live in the villas, they detached from friendships, forms of cooperation and the forms of collective action described above.

Yet, at the same time, there were moments when people in the barrio transmitted a sense of
having lost something by moving away from the villas. This was expressed to me only very indirectly. In one of my last visits to the barrio, one person broke the dominant local narrative about how adult Toba people feel completely disengaged from the villas. We were alone in his home and drinking mate in the living room when Mariano, a man in his sixties and a construction worker, remembered that when they left Fuerte Apache to move to the barrio he considered becoming a drug dealer. Once his family had moved out of the villas he could take the risk to sell drugs and keep his wife and children safe somewhere else. He thought he could finally make some good money for himself and his family. He had a friend who was already in the drug-dealing business and they started to talk about using his old apartment in Fuerte Apache as a base for expanding the business. However, he finally decided to give his apartment to relatives and abandoned this project. Mariano thus had the possibility to remain connected to the villas and make money out of this connection. While this story emphasizes once more how villas are seen as places of criminality and degeneration, in this case of illegal drug dealing, Mariano told the story with a tone of honest disappointment about how he had missed a good business opportunity. He emphasized how tired he was of never making it out of poverty. No matter how hard he had worked all his life in the Chaco and in Buenos Aires, he had always remained poor. His story, in short, highlighted that the villas was a place where unexpected connections could happen. While drug dealing is seen as morally wrong and against teachings of the Toba church (and Mariano’s wife was a faithful member of the Unida), he was also implying that drug dealing would have allowed him to make good money, and stop living in poverty.

Buenos Aires is a city generally understood to be “white,” both in public discourse and until recently in mainstream academic research. The experiences of Toba people who began arriving
in Buenos Aires since the 1950s simultaneously undermines this conception while illustrating
how such conceptions are created and maintained through forms of racialization, spatial
segregation, and regulation of movement that are central organizing forces in Buenos Aires.

Attention to these forces allows us to reconfigure understandings of the villas and of the
relations that developed there. Many Toba people explained that “life in the villas was so bad”
that they had no choice but to move out, and for several months my research seemed to indicate
that there was nothing else to explore beyond this statement. In this chapter I have shown that
other aspects of the experience in the villa can emerge from the accounts of a family living there.
In these other discussions people who eventually created the Barrio Toba showed that the
negative experiences in the villas were not with other villeros or with the place itself. Rather it
was the exceptional forms of spatial regulation and policing that defined the villas as places of
illegality that affected their lives the most. While the people who created the barrio made a
strong effort to disconnect from villas and to erase these years of experience in them, I have
shown how they also remembered positive forms of socialization and good times they had in the
villas. Building on these positive experiences some younger Toba people created an opposite
narrative to that of the adults moving out of the villas. People like Luciana have remained in the
villas and do not see the barrio as a safer, cleaner, greener, and in general more desirable place.

Attention to processes of racialization and spatial regulation has allowed me to discern their
productive qualities as they enable new forms of action and social connection. The Toba were far
from being “docile bodies,” or victims who were displaced to the villas and redefined as negros.
Encounters in the villas created different collective subjects that had an impact in the political
life of the city as they transformed it not only from the margins, but by claiming their belonging
to the city proper. As part of these collective subjects the Toba were able to do new things: meet
friends, appropriate spaces in the city, participate in strikes, take drugs as an attempt to forget about their problems, scandalize the media by being seen as “Apache Indians”, or become respectable families in “the most dangerous place of the country”. These actions, spread over time and space, challenged the dominant forms of control over their mobility and use of the city space. Some of them were also actions that remade the links between villas as informal cities and the city proper (Fischer 2014). These capacities for action created in the villas were paradoxically lost with the creation of the barrio.

Most people in the barrio do not articulate an indigeneity defined by a political positioning within a formal field of politics of recognition established by the state. The creation of the barrio as an indigenous place, rather, generated encounters with middle-class people who are interested in working with “real” Indigenous People living in Buenos Aires. What became of these bodies and identities once they were positioned in the space of the barrio – the kinds of encounters enabled by the barrio, and the political positionings enacted by them – is the topic of my next chapter.
Chapter 4: “Meet the Indians”: Middle-Class Humanitarianism

The Barrio as a Site of New Connections

When I first arrived in the barrio Toba, I was struck by how many groups of middle-class people were developing projects there: a group held a drumming class on weekends, university students organized a literacy project, a foundation opened a daycare, a single volunteer librarian built and ran a library, just to mention a few. The Toba referred to these groups and also to my own work as “ayuda” (help), and the people who comprised them as “people who are helping in the barrio.” The people who “help” were mostly middle-class, young or middle-aged people of European background who live in the Capital, the Buenos Aires city center, or alternatively in the middle class barrios or gated communities in the Conurbano.

Beyond these commonalities, the groups are very different from each other. Many of them were involved with education (including university students, schoolteachers, or researchers like myself), some were part of Non-Governmental Organizations, and others were Christian religious groups (including catholic parish groups, and non-Toba Evangelical church organizations). People “who help” came with the most diverse types of conceptions about the Toba’s needs and had different approaches to what they could do to assist them: provide food, lead meditation sessions, teach music, aid children’s literacy, share Bible readings, bake bread, film a documentary, among others. Their perceptions of the Toba’s needs, however, tell more about the middle-class groups that seek to help than about the barrio itself. What is particular about Toba families in the barrio is that they usually accept all of these groups and all of their proposals and rarely suggest any modification.

Most families in the barrio are involved in relations with these groups and/or individuals within these groups. They have met people who want to “help the barrio” when they, for
example, attend a handicraft fair, at the school workshops, when they ask for food donations walking door by door in the city or they are contacted by people who have heard that “there is a Toba barrio in Buenos Aires” and want to visit the barrio. Most Toba families accept every visit without hesitation. Many people explained that they are not interested in some projects, but they still participate because “it is good to work with people who are enthusiastic.” Andrea, for example, recognized that developing small vegetable gardens in the barrio would not be very efficient because the soil in the barrio is not good, and she knew about this because she grew up on a farm. Yet, she accepted the agronomists’ project because the group was motivated, they brought nice fruit-trees, and were interested in promoting her handicrafts.

In this chapter, I explore the encounters of the Toba in the barrio with middle-class groups from the Capital. These encounters are based in divergent interests where people from the city see themselves as agents of improvement in the face of one or another seemingly urgent need. The presence of so many groups in the barrio reveals the attraction that the barrio Toba generates among the Buenos Aires middle class. The Toba are seen as Indigenous People recreating cultural specificity in a city imagined as “free of indians”. In the villas, the Toba were seen as indigenous and some middle-class groups approached them there. The existence of the barrio as an indigenous place made these encounters easier and more numerous. Yet, most of the projects remain uncompleted or fade after some time. Middle class groups often get frustrated with the unexpected way that families engage in the projects and then leave the barrio.

While specific projects are understood as failures, the encounters are productive; they bring people together, and further, they change the capacities for action, and the possibilities of moving through the city for all the different people involved. As a result of these encounters Toba families get basic resources and access state services, they “get busy” in spite of
unemployment, and can access the city centre in a different way: selling handicrafts at markets, developing educational workshops in schools, getting help in asking for a doctor’s appointment in a hospital, among others. The middleclass groups are also transformed in the process: they experience the poor suburbs of Buenos Aires, feel good and receive recognition for helping “those in need,” have first-hand access to “indigenous culture,” and acquire cultural enrichment by experiencing this diversity. In other words, the encounter allows the Toba to generate income and access state institutions in downtown Buenos Aires, and the middle class groups to expand their experience (by leaving their familiar places in the city), and to shape themselves as “good people”. Through help, white porteños can feel connected with the Chaco without actually having to travel there.

However, when these middle class groups are incapable of finishing a specific project or the barrio families distribute the resources they have provided in an unexpected way (e.g. they do not share with all families in the barrio), many visitors get frustrated and disillusioned. In many cases, the groups who help in the barrio follow a cycle that goes from excitement, to frustration, to decline in the visits and, then, to the abandonment of a given project. For the Toba the terms of the encounter also offer some limitations: it is draining to receive so many visits, it is frustrating to see groups discontinue visits after a relationship was built, and, in addition, the relationship is limited in that they are approached and invited to participate as long as they remain clearly, “authentically” Toba.

In these relationships, the Toba are defined as a group who needs help because it lacks specific qualities to live in the modern world, they lack food, employment, knowledge, health, technical skills, and more. It seemed particularly frustrating for people like Andrea when agronomists regarded them as ignoring how to cultivate a vegetable garden when they have lived
on subsistence agriculture and been exploited in cotton fields in the Chaco for decades. It is also frustrating when they are regarded as lacking all commercial skills to sell their handicrafts, when they have been doing this for many years. However, they are very patient and positive with all groups. The encounter positions the middle class groups as “trustees” who can help the Toba overcome these limitations. In doing so this relation recreates hierarchies and implicitly justifies the Toba’s marginality as a result of their own inabilities (Cowen and Shenton 1996, Li 2007). Therefore, the help creates a common space, while simultaneously recreating these groups as different. As I will show, this difference is further racialized and produces an implicit moral superiority among “people who help.”

In spite of the rich anthropological literature on development, I will not be directly engaging with it for two main reasons. First, the middle class groups are not clearly “experts” or part of development institutions. Rather they position themselves as “groups of friends”, spontaneous visitors, or self-motivated professional people who were “touched” to learn about the Toba’s problems and “moved” to help. Second, these groups do not draw on a technical knowledge while they help the Toba. In Tania Li’s (2007) words, they do not render the encounter “technical.” Approaching the Barrio Toba is described as a “spontaneous calling” and the activities carried out there are not based on a formal assessment, but on spontaneous ideas, informal conversations, and suggestions. In all cases, including the actions of a few NGOs working in the barrio, intense affective relations define the encounter. Middle class visitors to the barrio explained to me how they went there following a strong desire to “meet the Toba” and listen to their stories about their un-ordinary life in the Chaco, getting in touch with the spiritual and supernatural dimensions of Toba Culture (see Taussig 1986). They also expressed being driven to help out these people in distress. So while these forms of assistance resonate with
knowledge and group classification produced in development encounters, these encounters bear more of a resemblance to humanitarian aid and charity. Consequently, I am interested in focusing on the affective and spatial nature of the encounter itself, and in the productivity of the encounter.

In what follows I unpack the encounters created between Toba in the barrio and middle class groups in their spatial and embodied materiality. To do so, I follow a politics of encounters and the insights offered by analyses of humanitarian aid relations. Politics of encounter can be linked to the analysis of contact zones, as the examination of the material interactions of multiple groups who come to share the same social and material place (Pratt 1992, Stoler 2002). Mawani (2009) calls colonial proximities the generative encounters in space that result from the intersecting trajectories of groups in a common space. She analyzes a colonial city in British Columbia, Canada, where first Nations groups, white settlers, and Chinese immigrants share an everydayness. While my ethnography is not about a colonial encounter in the strict sense of the term, it shares with work on contact zones questions about the productivity of the daily and intimate relations that constitute racially distinct groups. My analysis is therefore situated in a postcolonial Argentinean context, one that has not broken away from the making of racialized hierarchies (for Canada, see Razack 2002).

The encounters in the barrio emerge out of interconnected processes. One process is the formation of racialized spatial hierarchies I partially analyzed in Chapter 3, where the non-white mixed race, indigenous and Afro-argentines were pushed to the margins of the city (both to the shanty towns and Greater Buenos Aires), producing a white Buenos Aires. Second, the Toba families emerged in the 1990s as authentically indigenous and thus as a different form of non-white people. Being recognized as indigenous not only implied being the recipient of special
rights granted by the state, but also targeted them as being worth the help of the urban middle class. This form of humanitarianism took shape in the 1990s and in the context of neoliberal reform. Schematically, with the interruption of populist projects by dictatorships and later by the economic crises that accompanied the return to democracy, the Argentinean state gradually retracted its services and the reach of what had previously been considered universal rights. During the 1990s unemployment grew exponentially, turning big portions of what was previously working class into a population working for basic survival. In this context, the role of assisting those in need became increasingly covered by Non-Governmental Organizations, which in the 1990s expanded in number and scope (see for example Jacobs and Maldonado 2005 for references to Argentina).

Third, in the movements from downtown Buenos Aires to the barrio Toba, the middle class people shaped themselves as white and moral subjects. They did this by moving out of their ordinary spaces, visiting an otherwise unknown area of Greater Buenos Aires, infamous for being poor, and by relating with the Toba. In other words the travel to the barrio is a small adventure and a moral project where “good” white people go out of their ordinary places to visit a radically different place and people. This making of whiteness through the possibility of movement beyond their everyday space and into the space of victimized “others” resonates with a colonial history. Travel and writing about it was a constitutive part of (white) colonial subjectivities and spaces (Pratt 1992). These narratives present civilized, adventurous, and mobile men who leave their homes in the metropolis to explore the wilderness of the colonies and meet indigenous others. These narratives propose that as part of this travel and consequent encounters, white men prove their courage and their moral superiority in comparison to the local Indigenous People (Razack 2002). On the flipside, these narratives present indigenous
populations in the colonies as “fixed” in space, chaotic and “indomitable” as their landscapes (see Gordillo 2001 in regards to the landscape of the Chaco), as well as intellectually and morally inferior. These narratives thus prove the colonial need to produce both racialized subjects, spaces and hierarchies (Razack 2002), which are divisions that have been recreated in postcolonial contexts.

One of the clearest forms of recreation of these spatialized subjectivities are the contemporary European and North American engagements in humanitarian work in the generic “Third World” (for example Baker 2007, Heron 2007, Mathers 2010). The travel of the middle class to the barrio Toba is however, a variation of these social relations. First it is a form of aid produced by a marginal Latin American middle class that lives in the same city as indigenous “others”. In the social relations I am analyzing there is no transnational North-South connection between people who help and people being helped, but rather it is a class-based and racialized relation between more affluent and poorer inhabitants of the same city and established within the same national borders.

In this chapter I do not examine the history of aid; rather, I explore how “ordinary affects” that enable and are intensified in everyday encounters are productive not only of indigenous and middle class subjectivities and places, but also on the uses of the city and the politics of mobility, access, and exclusion from places within the city. I am not bringing back the concept of conviviality here because I believe that these social relations recreate racial divides and hierarchies that limit the possibility of creating horizontal forms of conviviality. While the encounters around helping and being helped create a space in common, I will argue that it also

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87 I take the notion of ordinary affects from Kathleen Stewart (2007), in this case to specifically discuss the affects of the drive to help and the disillusion of the middle class, and the affective engagements of the Toba.
recreates people as racially different. This is the opposite of the process Gilroy highlights with the notion of conviviality and the one I have used to describe the villas (2005). Finally, I will not be focusing so much on the dynamics of improvement but rather on the outcomes of the interaction in the making of places, subjectivities, and possibilities for moving around the city.

In what follows I explore these dimensions simultaneously in regards to: a) how much “help” Toba people receive, b) how the latter appropriate and manage this help, many times redirecting the work of middle class groups into other activities, c) the divergent expectations of the middle class about the Toba as “authentic” Indigenous People, and d) how Toba families compete for connections, and in doing so, how they put into question the notion of a homogeneous, harmonious indigenous community held by many in the porteño middle-class.

“Plenty of Visitors”: Help from the Middle Class

Initially, I felt uneasy about this proliferation of groups, projects and researchers in the barrio. I thought that with so many groups requiring the barrio families’ attention I could get a distorted view of their urban experience, for people would be pulled in too many directions. I knew about the research of a couple of PhD students being done in the barrio, and, consequently I thought maybe there was nothing new to tell about their experience. Later, I realized that these interactions are a central aspect of the production of the place of the barrio and the movement of people connecting the barrio to other locations. For this reason, I expanded my field study to include these relations. To get to know the middle class visitors, I participated in their activities in the barrio, and attended their planning meetings in Downtown Buenos Aires. I also draw on my own experience as part of one of these groups; along with three other researchers I organized a computer workshop with youth and children in the barrio, and I helped a man from the barrio
organize and conduct a Toba Language workshop at the University of Buenos Aires.

As I tried to arrange my first interviews in the barrio, I had to deal with people’s busy schedules. For example, Raul’s response to my request to meet him for an interview was, “Saturday morning the literacy group comes and in the afternoon I have a social work student doing a survey. Let’s meet Sunday afternoon.” On most occasions when I visited someone, they had to answer several phone calls and host other visitors while they hosted me. Being busy receiving visits was a central aspect of many of the families’ everyday lives.

Families in the barrio identify the groups who approach them for a visit, or to offer a donation of used clothing or suggest an activity to be done in the barrio, as "people who help." This identification points to some commonalities these different middle-class groups have from the perspective of the Toba. They see these groups as composed of people who are relatively affluent, live in the Capital, or middle class barrios in the Conurbano, and have privileged access to state institutions. Furthermore, they often racialize these visitors as white. For example, Martin explained one of his first encounters with a person collaborating in the barrio as follows: “When I started to work on an education project, it was my first time collaborating with a white woman. She was so white that initially, I was shy to talk with her. When we met I was silent, I could not dare to speak.” While the Toba in the barrio interacted with “white” people in the Chaco, for some of them this was their first time collaborating and thus a new type of relation. The Toba at the barrio regard the city centre as a place of mostly whites and a place where “rich” people live, and thus the fact that groups arrive from the Capital or other middle class barrios makes the Toba locate the visitors as affluent. One of the first questions they asked me is where I lived. Most of the groups of visitors travel by car and take the highway to get to the barrio (unlike Toba families who use the train and suburban buses). Finally, most of these groups come
because they want to visit an “indigenous barrio” in Buenos Aires, and they do not visit any other poor barrio. Many of these visitors assume that Toba families arrived all together to the city and thus see them as a homogeneous group. This implies that the relations are specifically racialized, where Toba are seen as authentic and thus as having a direct connection to clearly distinct Indigenous People who inhabited the land before colonization. This authenticity and its connection to pre-colonial times is one of the points of the attraction.

For the most part, the work that middle-class groups do in the barrio can be characterized as humanitarianism. Hanna Arendt distinguishes two ways of relating to the suffering of another person (2006: 78-80). One is a rational response linked with the practice of development, in which three processes – evaluation of circumstances, calculation of possibilities, and planning of strategy – mediate the provision of assistance.\textsuperscript{88} The other is an emotional reaction to suffering, where people in better conditions would “naturally” feel compassionate when they witness another person experiencing hardship, and will generate an immediate response: give, cure, rescue the suffering other. Though it is hard to maintain the distinction between “pure” approaches, the encounters in the barrio are mostly what Arendt characterizes as emotional reactions and thus closer to the practice of humanitarianism.\textsuperscript{89}

Building on Arendt’s ideas, humanitarianism has been synthesized as an intersection of reason and emotion, and also as the encounter of politics and ethics (Fassin 2010: 269, Ticktin 2014:).

Middle class groups describe their interventions as an unavoidable reaction to the perceived

\textsuperscript{88} The anthropology of development has made very significant contributions to understanding how national and international agencies identify populations that “lack” knowledge, resources or services, make a diagnostic of their "needs", create programs, and apply technical knowledge to "improve" conditions (Li 2007, Cowen and Shenton 1996, Ferguson 1990).

\textsuperscript{89} Of course, a quick reaction to suffering and generalized giving can never be deprived from all rational planning, and there has been a tendency for charity and humanitarianism to become more and more technical, bringing it close to practices of development. The opposite is also true: rational planning is full of emotional motivations to improve the conditions of suffering people. Charity and humanitarianism are thus also organized around a technical knowledge when delivered by institutionalized aid organizations. But this is not the case in the barrio.
suffering of the Toba people living in the city. But this analysis of an abstract humanity is not enough without considering the simultaneous production of racialized subjectivities that result from it. In this case, racial classifications recreate who is the subject providing the aid, and who is the one receiving it. In this classification the Toba, as compared to other groups of people who are poor, are defined as being innocent victims and thus subjects worthy of care (see Ticktin 2014).

Charity as a concept and practice is related to the catholic practice of helping those who are vulnerable in your own society. Since the Middle Ages in Europe, the catholic church in collaboration with local aristocracies organized forms of local assistance for people in need - the wounded, the orphaned, the poor - on the basis of a universally shared humanity (Minn 2007). However since its origin, charity is not about an equally shared humanity but rather reinforces and secures class difference as it distinguishes between one person who is suffering and one who is strong, with the capacity to help (and this is also why these encounters contrast to the relatively horizontal conviviality in the villas). Through time these practices allowed white Christian elites to avoid recognizing themselves as responsible for class inequalities, but rather to present themselves as saviours (Minn 2007). Humanitarianism is linked to government and civic responses to crisis and emergency, like a flood or earthquake, and also including social catastrophes as is the help to civilian victims of war. Humanitarianism is presented in contrast to national government and policies as guided by emotion and compassion for the suffering of the other rather than in policies and law solely based on reason (see Fassin 2010, Ticktin 2014).

Yet different ethnographies have shown how humanitarianism is not outside politics and is itself a form of government; humanitarianism is “where politics meet ethics” (Fassin 2010, Malki 1996, Ticktin 2006, 2014). By governmentality, I mean a form of control over the conduct of
people that is not only deployed by the state, but also takes the form of micro-technologies of regulation of aspects of life by a diversity of actors and that were not previously regulated (Foucault 1991). Miriam Ticktin summarizes recent anthropological exploration of humanitarian governmentality:

deployed across many significant geographic and social contexts, which displaces a concern with systemic inequality to focus instead on individual suffering, transforms political violence into experiences of psychological trauma, and turns a concern of politics and justice more generally into an emphasis on emotional responses to victims. (Ticktin 2014)

As charity, humanitarianism does not seek to identify the social causes of a given emergency and does not base its actions in a long-term program. Both charity and humanitarianism imply an urgency that requires an immediate response and a generalized form of giving (Bornstein 2012). Furthermore, the practices of both charity and humanitarianism tend to racialize both groups (the ones helping and the victims), which is another way in which these relations shape victims as sharing a humanity that is yet different. Humanitarianism in the Barrio Toba defines dark skinned people as in need and white skinned people as able bodies who help, in a way that is similar to how North/South engagements racialize the subjects of help (see Razack 2002, Heron 2007).

While the Toba are not the stereotypical subject of humanitarianism (they are not refugees or victims of an earthquake), the forms of engagement with them follow this logic. The media depicts the Indigenous People from the Chaco as victims of famine, and floods and political abandonment (see Gómez et all 2007). The people who help on their part are not members of organized aid agencies such as the Red Cross and are rather “spontaneous” visitors. In the barrio, it is mostly middle class groups who enact this form of immediate help. While their focus may vary most groups share a sense of urgency, urgent need for food, housing, literacy, cultural
rescue, among others. The Toba are perceived as being in urgent need of help, but also as authentic indigenous they are seen as radically different from the white middle class groups and this combination of perceived difference and urgency makes them victims and triggers emotional engagement that materializes in visits, donations and the planning of activities. The engagement of this white Argentinean middle class in the aid of Indigenous People in their own city is thus not a typical humanitarian relation and therefore complicates the study of humanitarianism.  

One of the sources of this sense of emergency is generated in media representations about Indigenous People in the Chaco. The middle class groups connected to the barrio Toba share an expectation that the barrio has the same problems they have seen in media representations of “the Toba in the Chaco.” These representations include: skinny bodies facing nutritional emergency, people living in small huts in the middle of Chaco’s dusty lands, and people living with houses under water. The emergencies supposedly present in the Chaco are assumed to also be problems of the barrio, e.g. “nutritional emergency,” “chagas epidemics,” and even “floods.” Raúl, a retired construction worker, for example, explained how during a big flood in 2004, when media attention focused on the flooded Chaco, middle class groups intensified their “help” in the barrio too, even though most of the Toba living in the barrio were not affected by the flood, which took place over a thousand kilometers away. Groups of the middle class were expecting the Toba in the barrio would be related to the families experiencing the flood but they were not.

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90 Ticktin’s article reviewing all anthropological examinations of humanitarianism specifically addresses Transnational humanitarianism, which leaves room for exploring the “national” and local varieties (2014).
91 For an analysis of media representations on Toba bodies see Wainer and Vivaldi 2009.
92 Such media construct the Toba as passive victims while erasing the ongoing processes of land dispossession, agro-industry’s role in transforming the environment and dispossessing Indigenous People from means of subsistence. The indigenous groups in the Chaco have fought all of these processes which media depictions of Tobas as passive cease (Gómez et al 2007).
This interest in the Toba is also connected with a long tradition in Argentina and across the world of missionary work with Indigenous People. Unlike other poor people who are accused of “never improving no matter how much help they are given,” following common sense prejudices about people in the villas, the Toba are seen as innocent victims of progress in which they cannot participate because they live according to a “primitive” knowledge. Since colonial times they were seen as more open to Christianity because they are seen (following the western myth of the “noble savage”) as in a state of “pure ignorance”, and having experienced authentic suffering after their contact with modernity (see Minn 2007). Therefore, the groups in the Chaco attracted not only the local branches of the catholic church but also British and North American missionaries who specifically came to the country to work with them (see Gordillo 2004, Miller 1979). They are also regarded as more prone to conversion to catholicism because of their actual engagement with Protestantism. Many of the middle class groups who visit the barrio, whether related to the Catholic church or not, produce the Toba as a group worth helping. The Toba in short are seen as innocent Indigenous People, bearers of a backward culture, not responsible for their own suffering, and a group that can improve if properly educated.

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93 In Latin America, the Third world priest movement and liberation theology complicates this division of groups worthy or unworthy of help. There has been a very important involvement of the church in villas but the liberation theology groups did not work from a charity model, and rather considered themselves as co-participants in emancipatory practices.

94 Among the Buenos Aires middle class, charity is a widespread practice: almost constantly schools, churches, offices, sport centers and supermarkets collect food and second hand clothes to donate to “people in need”. Each institution searches for the destination of the items donated, one year it could be the victims of a flood in a given province, another year a poor rural school.
Figure 7: An activity with children led by one of the groups helping in the barrio. Photo by the author.

Middle class engagement in the barrio as an emotional response to suffering was manifested in the selection of images for the website of “Aid the Toba,” the biggest NGO to work in the barrio during my fieldwork. These images present the people at the Barrio Toba as vulnerable, poor, and weak. The page alternates between referring to people from the barrio as originarios (first nations) and carenciados (the lacking ones, or poor); it also visually and verbally presents a narrative that goes from lack to “improvement.” The photographs that illustrate “problems” are in black and white, visually stressing the darkness of the Toba bodies, and they show images of people from the barrio literally without any background. The editing choices were intended to remove colors and consequently highlight a non-white phenotype. Furthermore, by removing their bodies from the background of their homes and barrio, the images highlight individuals as lonely suffering victims. In these images, the Toba appear in worn clothes, barefoot, and showing their missing teeth. In contrast, the photographs under the tag “goals accomplished” are in full color and include the background. In one a girl in her private school uniform sits in a classroom, while in another men building a house with the help of (white, male) workers from
the NGO. In sum, the web page condenses the idea of the Toba as different and as victims, and the people who help as compassionate and active, and as agents effecting a transformation. The Toba in the second type of images appear to now be transforming themselves into normative, productive subjects.

These images recreate ideas of the Toba as victims and in a “state of emergency” (see Fassin and Pandolfi 2010). They also produce the members of the Fundación as ethical beings who are helping those most in need. In a circular move the members of the Fundación, by helping the Toba, and teaching them to help themselves (what Foucault would call a technology of self), the Foundation members are becoming better white people (Fischer 1997). In addition, this foundation explicitly states they are not evaluating the causes or judging the responsibility of Toba’s poverty but are serving people in their most urgent and visible needs, thus distancing themselves from technical approaches of development NGOs working elsewhere. Linking with the images unfolded in humanitarian interventions, the opening text in a brochure for Aid the Toba explains their mission in the following way:

Imagine someone drowning in front of you. You are able to save this person. Imagine that before doing so you devoted some time to find out how this person fell into the water, judging whether he was reckless or not, questioning his lack of swimming abilities or the inconvenience of coughing when trying to make himself understood. The purpose of the Foundation is precisely to offer help for the most urgent needs, while the necessary policies are orchestrated for more definite solutions. (My translation)

This foundation is therefore producing this idea of urgency, of their work as triggered by a human emotional response for the suffering of the other, and the provision of an immediate assistance to the victims of a life-threatening emergency.95 Several schools that make big

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95 The link between the notion of development and the colonial project as an ethical project has been widely explored by Cowen and Shenton (1996).
donations of second hand clothing supplies to the barrio, and the catholic groups who approach the barrio to perform “service work”, also share this notion of the Toba as people in urgent need.

However, middle class groups who visit the barrio are also very different from one another. Many are small groups of three to ten people, linked to an institution like a school, the catholic church, or an NGO. Others are informal groups of friends and acquaintances. Only a few people approach the barrio by themselves, as for example the librarian who heard about the barrio and started to collect books for a library. While the motivations of these groups are complex, their different approaches define different types of interaction.\(^{96}\) I gradually started to distinguish these middle class groups and generated rough typologies in my field-notes to keep a record of them. The typology was created from my position as a middle class porteña (person living in the capital), but they are also part of historical ways in which the city of Buenos Aires has related to the “indigenous others” (with this I mean the historically changing dominant discourses and forms of regulation organizing populations in the city). A big division I drew is between groups who visit the barrio only rarely or not at all, and the ones who engage in regular activities there. In addition, some groups see the Toba as starving Indigenous People, victims of poverty and government abandonment and want to help them by giving them food. Others see them as having a knowledge that needs to be preserved; while others see them as potentially revolutionary subjects who will engage in radical forms of activism.

Weekends are always particularly active in the barrio. On several occasions, many cars were parked by the Community Centre upon my arrival, indicating that some activity was underway. I

\(^{96}\) There are links between this categorization of groups, for example one NGO that helped repair the Community Centre shares some ideas about the Toba’s poverty while they also expect to learn from them as indigenous.
often saw groups of people arrive in cars, drop off several plastic bags with second-hand clothes and food donations, chat with one of the families for a while, and leave. In addition, I saw children from a school come to give clothing donations, people from a nearby gated community who participated in a single-day activity for children including games and hot chocolate, and others who came to watch a preview of a documentary film about “the Toba.” Many of these people I would never meet again; they were making a one-time contribution to the barrio and would be back, maybe, only a year later.

Among those who were regularly visiting the barrio was the group, which I call Toba Art, that was composed of college students. I met them after one of their drumming workshops (I will expand on their experience later). On another day I met a group of university researchers working on a literacy project with older children. Undergraduate and graduate female students conducted work with children to test the use of a booklet for literacy. They met every other Saturday with a group of around twenty school-age children and did the activities from the booklet with them. Many researchers like myself, and students in Anthropology, Linguistics, Education, and Social Work, approach the barrio as place to learn about cultural difference, implicitly regarding the Toba as one of the most authentic of all urban indigenous groups in Buenos Aires, as I have discussed in Chapter 1. Thus, researchers actively reinforce a self-definition of the barrio as an indigenous place.

The barrio attracts different types of NGOs. However the ones that helped the negotiation of the local lands, and are connected with what can be characterized as an Argentinean indigenist movement, are no longer active in the barrio. Probably because these organizations are busy

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97 While this has changed since the 1980 when Argentinean Anthropology became mostly Social Anthropology and thus interested in the location of Indigenous People in the larger political, historic and social context, there has been a long tradition that still permeates studies in the present of considering the Toba as authentically indigenous. For a thorough discussion on the history of the Ethnography of the Gran Chaco region, see Gordillo (2008).
helping land conflicts and disputes elsewhere in the country, which are regarded as sites of political urgency, given the violence and imminence of land displacement. During my fieldwork, I met people who had worked in these organizations and had collaborated with the creation of the barrio, and they recognized being now disconnected and distant from the barrio.

The groups that Toba families value the most, however, are those that continue to visit the barrio regularly and for several years. In all cases, people from the barrio work hard to keep these relations active across time.

**The Barrio’s Appropriation and Management of “Help”**

Even when activities are supposed to include the whole barrio, not all families participate in receiving every visitor. Each family works with a set of groups from the middle class and while some are involved in many projects working simultaneously with several groups, some others are seldom involved with them and yet may sporadically show up in specific activities. People in the barrio appropriate the help of visitors and have to manage the activities they perform in the barrio, by for example giving them access to common spaces, inviting other families to a given activity, planning and working with them in specific events. Families thus keep these relations active, and help middle class groups in their activities. To maintain relations with several groups at the same time, families in the barrio have to manage the time and energies they devote to each of them.

From all the families I met, the busiest of all was Fernando’s. He was also the most organized.

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The indigenist movement had an important role in the 1990s supporting the creation of indigenous legislation both at the national level and in specific provinces. See Carrasco 2000. The two NGOs that aided the creation of the barrio are linked with larger NGOs that have been involved in the creation of national legislation.
person in managing the assistance of middle class groups. He was the “president of the barrio” during my fieldwork (the president of the comisión managing the civil association representing the barrio as a community, see Chapter 1). Because he works with a large number of people, he needs to tightly organize his involvement and the time he dedicates to each project. When I asked Fernando for an interview, he told me to come on a Saturday morning, the day he had set for receiving people in the barrio. During the week, he works on projects that need him to be outside the barrio, and he often commutes to the Capital to attend meetings or run errands. Some of the tasks that he performs on weekdays, I learned, included meeting with Aid the Toba, delivering talks, and attending meetings as a Toba leader at, for example, the National Institute of Indigenous Development. Sundays, he explained are reserved for his family.

Because I was never alone with him during our interviews, and because I shared the meetings with multiple of the groups who “help in the barrio,” who were also visiting him, the setting of the interviews and what was going on at his home on Saturdays ended up being as interesting as the topics we discussed together in the frame of multiple recorded interviews. One Saturday I met a music producer who had recorded a CD “with music from the Chaco” with Fernando and featuring some of his relatives from the Chaco. He was consulting him about the art of the CD. Another day a group of university pharmacy students were interviewing him about traditional Toba medicine. On another Saturday, I met a group from a catholic parish who wanted to do their “service component” in the barrio. They proposed to bake bread with anyone interested and distribute it among the families. Most of the people who showed up on Saturdays were new or sporadic visitors. Fernando was always in a good mood, was patient, answered questions, got

99 I first met Fernando to ask for his permission to do my work. We had a very short conversation, standing by the door of his house as I interrupted his lunch after a busy morning running errands in the city. He insisted on having the conversation nonetheless because we had tried to meet several times with no success.
enthusiastic about projects and gave information about how and when to use the Community Centre. During the meetings with new visitors, I saw how he managed expectations by, for example, letting the parish people know he would not have time to bake bread himself.

Fernando was also the point person for the NGO I call Aid the Toba, whose projects have an ongoing influence in the barrio. I will stop to consider Fernando’s interaction with Aid the Toba as a particular case in the managing of middle class groups that implied very specific responses from Fernando and his family. Aid the Toba is one NGO with a charity philosophy manifested on their institutional web page, which I have described above. Since 2005, the NGO, pays for tuition to a private catholic school (that is located in front to the barrio) for many children in the barrio; they have organized houses’ expansions (from one to three bedroom) of all houses with children in the barrio; they created a daycare in the barrio; and they donate clothing, tools, and computers at least twice a year. In 2009, the NGO along with Fernando and Selena, Fernando’s twenty-five year old daughter, presented a cooperative project to the National Institute of Social Development. The project was approved but when I finished fieldwork (in August 2010) it had not been implemented yet. This NGO has also been an important source of contacts; for example, it linked adult youth to the employment agency “Manpower,” which placed them in sporadic low-skill jobs in the district, such as cleaning factory buildings in the industrial complex.

Fernando explained that the members of Aid the Toba trust only him and his family, and while they continue to help other families, they are disappointed with most of them because they show no signs of progress: “The NGO pays the tuition for many children but so far, we are the only family whose children graduated from high school.” Fernando explained proudly one day as he pointed to the pictures on his wall showing his two daughters’ high-school graduation. He
explained, “Last year Juan [from Aid the Toba] asked me: Why? Why are the rest of the families not like you? You are the only one who has taken the opportunities we provide.” After graduating from high school, Fernando’s older daughter Selena became his “right hand” in his work with Aid the Toba and she was also the only person in the barrio attending university, and she had chosen to study social work. Fernando explained that for the last few years, he had to convince Aid the Toba to keep paying children’s school tuition. They wanted to stop that assistance when they learned that two of the funded children had dropped out of school, and were now known in the barrio for having “fallen” in la joda.

This small conflict is indicative of the type of tensions generated between people who help and the families in the barrio. The NGO delivers assistance that is accompanied by an expectation of improvement, and this improvement is measured with specific indicators, in this case obtaining a high school degree. Fernando and his family had been able to understand and meet these expectations and thus, were able to continue working with Aid the Toba for several years. To do this, they had to acquire specific habits required by specific institutions. Fernando explained that at school his daughters did their homework, asked for help when facing a difficulty (in contrast to most Toba children who are known to be “shy”), and had graduated. His own house exemplifies another of the signs of improvement that Fernando has worked to create. Unlike other houses in the barrio, his is neatly painted, clean and decorated.

While the general interest of Aid the Toba was to help those in most need, the effect they expected to achieve was to produce the Toba as normal subjects, who self regulate themselves in order to advance in the educational system, who are hygienic (have a nice painted home) and search to improve. This is what Foucault for a very different context of France described as technologies of self care (1988), which in this case are forms of self regulation not only of a
generic working class but as I have been arguing are racialized within a postcolonial context. These technologies of care in a postcolonial context and a relation of “help” also implies a definition of who is worthy of help and who is not, while creating separations within the people helped. By working on improving themselves and showing signs of “improvement,” Fernando and his family moved from being just victims to being worthy victims, while most of the families in the barrio were now turning into unworthy given they had not shown the expected signs of improvement. Fernando and his family in contrast obtained more support, and were able to mediate the assistance of other families in the barrio. Managing help for Fernando thus was not just keeping a schedule and helping organize the work of the different groups helping the barrio, but also implied developing habits that enabled him to be regarded as trustworthy by the NGO and other institutions.

Interestingly, Fernando also inverted the direction of the “help” when he described to me the work he does on Saturdays in the barrio. That day he received people in the barrio and he recognized that most of them are interested in Toba culture.100 He was not only aware of the expectation to learn about a different culture brought by the middle class groups. In addition, he recognized that by receiving everyone who wanted to meet them as Toba, it is he who helps visitors; that is, he helps them to learn about indigenous culture and have the experience of chatting with an indigenous leader. In this way, Fernando manages help in two directions: he distributes the assistance of Aid the Toba to the families in the barrio (and his relatives in the Chaco, as I discuss in the next chapter), and he allows the middle class visitors to access and experience “Toba culture” in a way that accords with their expectations.

100 During the meetings I also found out that Fernando was tired of anthropologists. It was tiring for him that anthropologists showed up for a period of time and then disappeared. This part of the conversation stressed what I already sensed, that being a researcher in the barrio is also regarded as part of the group of people who approach the barrio to help and meet the Toba.
While other families have not been so efficient in keeping projects for such a long time or working simultaneously with so many groups, many families welcome the visitors and seek to maintain these relationships. Thus, another aspect of the management of assistance is the work to incorporate the middle class groups into a routine of frequent visits to the barrio, and when necessary, redirecting the work into other activities beyond the ones that had been initially planned. Most families are active in greeting multiple visitors and putting into action their diverse proposals.

The practice of hosting visitors in Toba homes is an important part of the work of maintaining active relations with middle class groups. These visits are when new projects are planned and logistics are discussed, but they are also moments for maintaining and cultivating social links. Generally speaking, most visits begin with questions about the well being of the visitors’ relatives and other people from their respective groups and organizations. In my visits, I routinely answered questions about my family but also about many of the anthropologists who I know and worked in the barrio. Families thus spend considerable time receiving people and drinking mate as part of the work of keeping these connections active.

Another way of maintaining relations is through inviting middle class groups to activities that are not a part of the work they are doing, including celebrations in the barrio. In this way, families promote a routine of visits to the barrio among the middle class groups. Families also keep relations active by sending cell phone messages, to say hi and check in when the next visit will take place. This is a form of socialization that is not restricted to the barrio in Buenos Aires; I participated in it during my work in the Chaco region, and as I sought to keep in touch with people through time beyond my fieldwork.

In the barrio, families describe with sadness having lost contact with “people who help” from
the Capital. They describe it as an unfixable loss: because they lose their contact information (address, phone number) or because they lose a cell phone with a number they cannot recover, they also lose touch. Unlike the cities and towns in the Chaco where Toba families can trace people from the middle class by showing up at their house or work, the relations with people from the Capital can be lost leaving no trace. Different men and women thus explained with sadness how they have lost touch with a group or a person who used to visit them frequently in the past. Therefore, people in the barrio deeply lament when regular contact is interrupted and when someone does not show up any more. The main critique of researchers, in fact, resides in their fluctuation of periods of visits and periods of interruption of the visits. They see this as a sign of lack of commitment and the utilitarian nature of the visits of researchers. In their narratives they stress how they miss the group of people even more than the activities they produced; thus, I argue that the contact is generally more important than the project itself.

A final point is that in these relations with groups of the middle class what is generated is also a disconnection. Families in the barrio have kept themselves actively disconnected from social movements taking place around them in the Conurbano. For example, the movement of the unemployed has a strong connection to all the barrios in the area, but not to the barrio Toba. As I took the train back and forth, I often observed groups associated with the unemployed movement traveling downtown for a demonstration, and there were venues of the unemployed movement not far from the barrio. However, the unemployed movement was not present in the barrio Tobas. I have also mentioned in the introduction the Toba were not present in the bicentenary march. The lack of connection with something that is close and accessible is also indicative of

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101 I regret to have been yet another anthropologist “disappearing” after fieldwork. I expect to return to live in Buenos Aires and thus continue our relationship.
how the relations with middle class groups are prioritized by Toba people over other political options.

These encounters were therefore affective, spatialized, embodied, and regular. These encounters are affective, in Spinoza’s terms, because they transformed the capacities of action and the possibilities of moving around the city of the people involved (Spinoza 1996, Deleuze 1988). While the people of the middle class have a “default” possibility to move out of downtown Buenos Aires and go to a place of authentic Indigenous People, the Toba are limited in their possibilities to move around. It is the connections with the people of the middle class that extended their possibilities and allowed them to visit downtown Buenos Aires as something beyond their non whiteness. The Toba are thus in a better position to move than when they were in the villas, and yet they are still rather “fixed” in place as they are the ones who need to wait for visitors to show up.

Encounters also generated moments of intensity: when middle class people arrived in the barrio they are thrilled to “meet the Indigenous People,” and enthusiastic to help and to learn from them, while they remained unaffected by the rest of the urban poor. In this intensity, however, these middle-class people shaped themselves as moral subjects, people who care for others and go to great lengths to visit these others and work with them (Fassin 2010). Encounters were spatialized: they unfolded in the barrio, which is recreated in each of these encounters as an indigenous place, and they transform how people can move through the city (Massey 2005). They were embodied, as middle class groups physically moved to the barrio, and engaged with Toba families in common activities. In this embodied movement, the middle class people learned something and got enriched; they also learned from differentiating themselves from the Toba, who are perceived as unhealthy, ignorant, and out of place in the city.
For both groups, the visit, being physically there, mattered and was productive of who they are. The creation of different racial subjectivities is a result of these embodied encounters, which recreate difference as being embedded in the materiality of the Toba and middle class bodies. In this contact, the Toba were shaped as clearly indigenous (a different shade of dark compared to villeros) and the middle class people actualized themselves as white. This “racial proximity,” to use Mawani’s (2009) term, produced not only a dichotomous division between dark skinned rural indigenous and white urban middle class subjects but also a variation and graduation within the categories of white and indigenous. Finally, these encounters implied an everydayness; while the connections lasted, groups of middle class people established a routine of visits and acquired a familiarity with the Toba people they worked with.

The Barrio’s Redirection of “Help”

The encounters with the middle class groups who regularly visit the barrio allow families to redirect the “help” towards activities they were not originally planning to be involved in. I distinguish what I call the redirection of activity (in this case of the middle class groups) from “negotiation.” In a negotiation, the parts involved make concessions to achieve a bigger aim. Here there is no compromise or search for a partial agreement, but rather a priority over the encounters and an “open-endedness” of the direction these encounters will take.

For example, Julio asked the group Toba Art, which conducted drumming classes on Saturdays, if they could find a market fair where he and his wife could sell handicrafts. One of the women in the group got in touch with a market in the Capital and made the arrangements to get a spot for Julio’s wife. The day of the market, another person in the group picked up Julio, his wife, and the handicrafts in their car and took them to the market. This group also helped
Andrea to find schools where she could deliver workshops. This kind of redirection of middle class help is common; it may involve small requests such as asking for help fixing a computer, or getting a ride to Capital, but it also includes assistance with filing government forms and performing other bureaucratic procedures. Thus, middle class visitors who go to the barrio frequently end up aiding the people in the barrios’ access to state institutions, both to municipal institutions in the district centre and to national offices in Capital.

One of the most striking moments in the redirection of use of help was when one man in the barrio had difficulties obtaining his national ID card from the identity office. Martin is a man in his seventies who needed to obtain the equivalent of a Social Insurance Number to get paid for a language workshop he was conducting. Because I was involved in the workshop project and knew he had to apply for this, I offered to go to the office with him. The day we met to go to the office, Martin explained with concern that he had lost his National Identification Card, a universal ID for Argentinean Citizens, which is needed to access any state service. A year before, some youth from outside the barrio had stolen his ID along with his wallet. Both he and I knew that the visit to the office would probably be a failed attempt but we went nonetheless. At the agency, an employee explained to us that she could not process the request without the ID.

From that moment on, a long process started. Martin talked with the municipal social worker that assists the barrio and concluded that she was of no help because she requested his Birth Certificate in order to help him. He asked me if I had any connections at the ID office to issue a new document without presenting a birth certificate. I told him I did not know anyone, and further, I was surprised by his request, as in my experience it is impossible to get an ID just by knowing somebody in the office and without a birth certificate. Martin contacted relatives back

\[102\] For more on indigenous fetishism with official documents including ID cards see Gordillo (2006).
in the Chaco to get him a copy of his birth certificate and they responded a couple of weeks later saying they could not find it in the local registry. At that point, I realized that his birth, 65 years ago, was probably not registered in the Chaco given that local authorities at that time often did not care to register the births of Indigenous People (Gordillo 2006, Carrasco 2000).

With other colleagues who were also helping to develop the language workshop, we spent a large portion of the planning meetings trying to find more information about this. We searched the web for information, made phone calls to the documentation agency, sent emails to inquire. After one month, we were frustrated. It seemed there was no possibility to get an ID without the birth certificate but Martin insisted that the only way was to get “a contact” in the ID agency. We insisted we had none and discussed traveling to the Chaco to get a birth certificate or an equivalent document and try to obtain the ID with it.

Finally, one day, Martin got a visit from a woman who was a school administrator and had a friend who worked in the office of a national congressman. She arranged a meeting directly with him. Martin told us later that the congressman met with him in his office Downtown and then walked with him to the ID office. The congressman explained to the ID office employees about Martin’s irregular situation and the agency made an exception. Martin got his ID card issued and printed that same day. With the right contact in the city, he was able to solve in one day a problem that had gone unresolved for several months.

Martin's access to his ID synthesizes the way many people in the barrio appropriate and orient their relations with middle class people, in order to access state institutions. Martin did not try to solve the problem by himself, but looked for assistance among all middle-class people he knew. He repeatedly explained his problem to everyone he worked with, asking for a “contact,” until, eventually, he succeeded. While different middle-class visitors met him for other reasons, we all
involved ourselves in helping him obtain his ID card, which was the most important priority for him at that time. In short, he redirected our work toward obtaining his ID card.\textsuperscript{103}

This experience also showed how Toba people in the barrio have a very hard time accessing state services and institutions. This access is difficult for a number of reasons: without assistance, procedures may be very hard to follow, and it is hard to spatially locate the desired offices in the dense proliferation of agencies and state buildings in downtown Buenos Aires. Indeed, Toba in the Chaco have been excluded from basic citizen rights such as the identity registry for decades (Gordillo 2006, Carrasco 2000). Moreover, the Toba as part of the urban poor in the Conurbano, are subjected to state assistance through complex bureaucratic mechanisms including patronage relations with Peronist political brokers and a politics of waiting: they have to personally and repetitively attend state offices and wait for hours a day to obtain a meeting with a state employee in order to apply for state assistance (Auyero 2001, 2012). Yet they also remain in the margin of patronage relations and state help.

Because most Toba in the barrio are not registered as legally residing in Buenos Aires, and because their small demographic numbers makes them irrelevant as a group for the exchange of “favours for votes” with political brokers, they are not the target of patronage relations as other barrios are, and as the Toba in the Chaco are. In my 18 months of work I did not once see the barrio as a target of patronage relations, not even during municipal or provincial elections. In contrast, during my fieldwork in the Chaco, I observed how everyday life was constantly shaped by patronage relations. In the Conurbano, the focus of the punteros' attention is on large villas

\textsuperscript{103} Showing the different relation with institutions Fernando has, in contrast to Martin, he once told me: “We spent a long time talking about the people who do not have an ID card. Some children never had one issued! But I say what did the parents do? They had to bring their birth certificate with them.” His perspective shapes him as proper citizen who understands his rights and follows procedures responsibly. He implied, following government logic, that people in the barrio with no ID card were outside civil rights because of their own responsibility.
and the community leaders who can influence large numbers of people (Auyero 2001, 2012). Without political brokers to ask for help, the middle-class groups become key actors for Toba in accessing state institutions. Middle class people who visit the barrio help complete forms, drive people to offices, accompany Tobas for procedures, and may serve as contact persons for follow up requests. This local reorientation of the “help” that middle-class people offer compensates for the absence of other means of accessing state institutions, and for the incapacity of the institutions themselves to be accessible to the people in the barrio. In this way, the Toba in the barrio have established direct connections with people from the middle-class that replace a dependence on political brokers as a means to access citizen rights and state services.

In sum, the management of help compensates for the lack of state assistance in some cases, and in others it allows access to state bureaucratic procedures that would be very hard to access otherwise.

**Visiting a Place of Authentic Indians**

In this relation the place of the barrio is central. First, the barrio eases the access of middle class groups to them: instead of having to enter the “dangerous and inaccessible” Fuerte Apache, middle-class people can drive to a less stigmatized poor area of the Conurbano. Second, and as I stated in Chapter 1, the barrio is distant enough to maintain its cultural difference as a place. The production of the barrio as an indigenous place, and thus as “exotic” to most average porteños is thus central to this relationship between middle-class groups and Toba people. The barrio is thought of as a place of particularly authentic “*indians*”: Indigenous People from the Chaco who speak an indigenous language and used to gather fruits and hunt in the forests of the Chaco not long ago. The Toba are also infamous among the middle class for their poverty and
marginalization. For the average Buenos Aires middle-class person, the word “Toba” resonates both as a group of authentic Indigenous People, and as one of the poorest populations in the country. As such, the Toba in the barrio are a focal point of middle class interest.

Groups who help never explicitly discussed about Toba authenticity, but it was implied in several ways. One way authenticity is implied is through the expectation that families are coming from the Chaco and in particular, the rural Chaco, and that they lived in rural villages (and not in other peri-urban barrios). Another is that families are expected to show their engagement in specific cultural practices that match images of indigenous identity: speaking Toba language, making handicrafts, communal sharing of resources and reciprocal relationships with one another. Finally, there is an expectation that Indigenous People hold a specific, even mysterious cultural knowledge: a spiritual relation to nature, a knowledge about the medicinal uses of plants of the Chaco forests, the performance of shamanic curing practices, a natural approach to childbirth (including having Toba trained midwifes and home birth), among others. These cultural practices are projected on to the people in the barrio, understood as radically different and, in some respects, incommensurable with a western knowledge and as such are one of the primary attractions of the barrio.104 The recognition of barrio families as indigenous is of crucial relevance for the relationship with middle-class visitors; none of these middle-class groups I met during fieldwork works with any of the neighbouring barrios, or villas, or other marginal barrios in the Conurbano facing many of the same problems. They only work with the Toba – and this has a lot to do with their status as Indigenous People.

Skin color is another marker of difference, but as discussed in Chapter 3, the Toba’s darkness

104 These cultural practices including for example shamanic conceptions of the body are in some cases part of the experience of the people from the barrio, but as has been shown in other works it is always in a state of redefinition since the experience of colonization forcefully incorporated these groups to modernity and its regimes of knowledge.
is distinguished by middle-class people of European background from that of a generic “negro villero,” and yet as the experience of the Toba who lived in the villas show, in the city their bodies were never recognized as Toba and rather were always seen as that of negros. Toba’s retaining darkness is important to the visitors, for dark bodies are another mark of “purity,” yet the bodies have to superimpose other markers to be recognized as different from the negros. The markers are living in the barrio, knowing the language, playing Toba music. This is also why it is not surprising that during performances in downtown Buenos Aires people use any generic marker of indigeneity, including Andean clothes and even feather head dress, that they never use in the Chaco.

On the counter side a lack of darkness is also a problem. Ricardo is a lighter-skinned man from the barrio whose father was white but who was raised by his Toba mother and grandparents and, as such, recognizes himself as fully Toba. He complained he always has problems being recognized as Toba because he does not look like one. He needs to make an extra effort to be regarded as such, e.g. show that he speaks Toba language, tell stories about hunting in the Chaco, etc. (see Lawrence 2004). Ricardo explained that being lighter-skinned however helps him “pass” as a “generic” working class man. In another occasion he commented that other men in the barrio are many times seen as “foreigners” coming from Bolivia and have to show proof that they are indeed Argentinean, an experience he did not face.

This interest in the Toba because they are authentically Indigenous People turns the barrio into a piece of the Chaco in Buenos Aires, according to middle class representations. Middle-class visitors enjoy watching the Toba produce handicrafts. Many of them wear sports clothing showing they are on a field-trip. In sharp contrast to the Toba who see themselves and are seen
by relatives in other locations as city people, visitors of the middle class tend to assign a rural nature to the barrio, and assume that the Toba there are living “just as they do in the Chaco.”

During their visits, representatives of these middle-class groups asked many questions about life in the Chaco, the exotic foods that Toba eat there, the plants used to cure illnesses, and about supernatural events. In school workshops I attended, people from the barrio presented themselves as coming “from the Chaco” and the emphasis on life in the Chaco erased their present location in the city, making it unclear whether they still live in the Chaco and are only visitors to Buenos Aires. This ambiguity was also present when they collected second hand clothes and food donations “for the Chaco,” presenting themselves as an extension of the rural villages (their connections to other Toba locations is a topic I develop in the next Chapter).

Because displays of “culture” further allows them to generate income as cultural workers, families have to stress that what they do and know has an origin elsewhere, i.e. in the Chaco, and not in Buenos Aires. Therefore, they have to bracket their urban experience and even more importantly erase their experience of urban poverty in the villas. For example, while the clay handicrafts they sell were developed in style and technique in urban settings such as Buenos Aires and Rosario, to generate interest in the handicrafts they cannot fully disclose this. Instead, they emphasize the cultural meaning of the pieces, presented in this way as a “traditional” knowledge. For instance, they explain to the people buying the handicrafts that the owl is a “Toba sign” of good luck, and that an open hand “represents” prosperity.

When the middle-class groups that approach the barrio assume that this place is “a piece of Chaco” in Buenos Aires, they unintentionally create a distance between the barrio and the city, and they rhetorically detach the barrio from its location in the Conurbano. This creates a paradox; families in the barrio can connect with groups coming from Capital because they are
Toba, but by being “authentic” and “exotic” Indigenous People they are seen as external to the city, and not actually a part of the Conurbano. As they distance themselves from an identity as urban subjects, they negate the possibility of being indigenous *and* urban at the same time. And yet this is a way of accessing the city centre, as Martin did in order to get an ID or as people do every time they do a workshop at a school.

Furthermore, the emphasis that “we come from the Chaco” gives no room for the fully urbanized Toba youth who came to the city as children or were born in Buenos Aires to be also recognized as Toba. It limits the possibilities for young people to “do cultural work” without the experience of living in the Chaco. People of the middle class are not interested in the youth and they do not get invitations to do cultural workshops, even if they know how to make handicrafts and have accompanied their parents in doing the workshops. This makes it almost impossible for the youth to claim an identity as “real Indigenous” people, as the possibility of an urban indigeneity is omitted in these interactions.

Turning now to the way visitors are transformed in this encounter, the search of the middle class groups for observable results of their work with the Toba reflects work on their own selves to produce and maintain a white middle class subjectivity (see Foucault 1988: 133-170, Razack 2002: 14). In Fernando’s relation with *Aid the Toba*, it was manifested that if the Toba families do not show signs of improvement, it is hard for the middle-class groups to assign them the status of “normal” subjects, cultivating their subjectivity. The disillusion of the middle-class groups recreates a situation where the Toba are seen as part of a life outside of normality. Because they do not show this work on the self, their life falls out of a politics of care, a care provided in this case not by the state but by the middle class groups themselves. When Toba in the barrio do not collectively show the expected signs of improvement, there is no choice but to
leave them alone.

As representatives of these “white porteños” groups of visitors are mostly middle class and not members of an established elite, they also have no guarantee of remaining part of the “normal population;” they are white but can easily slide down into poverty, illness, and dispossession. Purmina Mankekar uses the notion of the Indian (lower) middle class being on a “slippery slope”, which in spite of all the differences, echoes the situation of this also less certain middle class positioning that the visitors to the barrio inhabit (1999) and that distinguishes it from broadly speaking North American or European middle classes. But while the relationship lasts, the work in the barrio partly affirms these people’s middle-class identity. As part of a white middle class, they have the possibility of becoming “generous aid workers,” “recognized members of their community,” prestigious “advocates for the dispossessed.” As such, the encounters that take place in the barrio are an instance in which people of the middle class cultivate their progressive whiteness, reinforce their class belonging, racial distinction and privilege.

Both groups become different and racially different in the travel of people from the middle class to the distant barrio. Thus, the travel of middle class people is connected to the making of race in development and humanitarian projects, where a generic and advanced “north” assists a generic third world (Razack 2002: 14). The variation is that this white middle class is not the same as a generic North American or European white middle class, even when many efforts have been made through Argentina’s history to become close to this whiteness (Ko 2009, Alberto and Elena 2015). Therefore, in Buenos Aires people engaging in helping others are on the one hand part of a middle class that inhabits much more uncertain conjuncture, and that also participates in other genealogies of help, (e.g. liberation theology). While not explicitly linking themselves to a
Christian charity, third World Liberation Theology, Peronist militancy in the bases, or the history of a transnational humanitarianism in the barrio, many people who help in the Barrio Toba follow from these genealogies. In all cases “help” recreates a situation where white people go to help people in need, and in this relation both groups recreate their racial difference. This movement to the periphery of their middle class areas of the city reinforces the making of Toba as other and as victims; and the white middle class as adventurous and moral beings who make the effort to go and help an other.

These encounters also help make different forms of white subjectivity. In their work in the barrio, people from the middle class produced their own whiteness as being “good” because they are helping the Toba who are in need. They become white in their difference from the Toba: they are students who know something they can teach in the barrio, who come and go to the barrio and back to the city centre. This movement outside the middle class areas of the city, thus recreates the Toba as other and as victims and the white middle class as adventurous, moral beings who make the effort to travel an unfamiliar location to help an other. Middle class people coming back to their homes and lives after helping in the barrio, are transformed. They are now better people, more caring, more adventurous and more experienced, they had gone through the adventure of traveling to unknown areas of Greater Buenos Aires and have met “radically different” people. The aid work thus reinforces their whiteness and produces a specific one, one of people who are morally superior, because they care and they are “doing good” (see Razack 2002, Fassin 2010).

Not outside these forms of government, many groups of progressive middle class attempted to involve the Toba in political activities that they thought would be good for them. In these activities, people recreated themselves as progressive white people who both care and struggle
for the rights of Indigenous People. This specific work brought them together with other groups of progressive whites for example during the planning of the counter celebration of the bicentenary anniversary of Argentina’s independence when one group working in the barrio presented as working with urban Indigenous People and got together with other activists, even when no Toba from the barrio wanted to participate. Their activist work reinforced their specific whiteness, one committed with social change, yet gravitating with other white middle class activists to generate activities, while indirectly distancing themselves from generating a common action with subaltern groups.\textsuperscript{105} As white middle class they also had the possibility of transforming themselves from a group doing work to help the Toba in the barrio, to being activists who are committed to more “urgent problems,” like a counter celebration. This subjectivity, while aimed at countering dominant forms of exclusion for Indigenous People, cannot become totally independent from dominant forms of whiteness. For example, the group still created a social hierarchy when they assumed they had a better understanding of politics than the Toba in the barrio did. In sum, becoming close to the Toba implied developing a specific form of whiteness without losing aspects of middle-class status.

Thus, the whiteness of the middle-class groups that is produced in the barrio is not homogeneous, but presents variations that become even more visible in relation to the Toba as extreme cultural others. Some of the visitors shape themselves as compassionate white people and they elide the link between their privilege and the disposition of Indigenous People in the Chaco. Others see the Toba as a source of knowledge that can enrich them, can make them a different type of white person more aware of, for example, the spiritual world. Finally, the group Toba Art (whose experience we develop in the next section) experienced their encounter with

\textsuperscript{105} For a discussion on the limits to the production of “alternative” forms of white subjectivity see Saldhana (2007).
Toba as a transformation that radicalized them politically. Because of this we can argue that the middle-class groups need the Toba in the barrio as much as the Toba need them. Middle class need the Toba to feel and get activated in political action that is still not framed as political, they need then to get outside their places of relative privilege (of barrios with running water, cement buildings and trendy shopping areas), and they need the Toba to become better and to “be good”.

To summarize, the production of racialized subjects in this encounter goes two ways. The Toba are shaped as authentically Indigenous People whose place is the barrio, and whose identification is in contrast to the generic “negros” of the Conurbano as a whole. The groups of middle class visitors are shaped as progressive or compassionate whites that move from downtown Buenos Aires to the indigenous place of the barrio, and in this movement they distinguish themselves from non-sympathetic whites who never left downtown Buenos Aires.

**Longing for the Radical Indian**

There are groups from what I broadly characterize as the political left, who approach the Toba with the expectation that, as Indigenous People, they will be involved (and sometimes be a vanguard) in radical politics. This approach has also been a source of frustration. As I mentioned, during the negotiations over land for the creation of the barrio, in particular, a lot of non-Toba Indigenous People living in the city enthusiastically supported the request of Toba families. One of them explained to me that he and other people supporting this negotiation saw the land request (the first one of Indigenous People in Buenos Aires) as a radical claim: asking for land titles outside “traditional territories” and in the national capital. They expected this would be a very important precedent for other urban indigenous groups seeking land titles in Buenos Aires. Yet, once the barrio was created and as the families in the barrio became more involved in cultural
work and less engaged in political activism, the groups and individuals supporting them grew disillusioned.

Two acquaintances involved in indigenous movements in Buenos Aires who openly confront the state, mentioned they had periods of work with the barrio but that, eventually, the relationship faded. For example, one middle-class activist concluded that “People there are involved in too many things, they receive too much attention.” He finished his account by saying: “I think they are lost for the cause” and laughed, meaning he has concluded that he cannot involve them in activities of radical confrontation. The other friend, who is an indigenous himself, an autonomous activist and who was present during the negotiation of the barrio, told me he had wished to create a stable link, but “people are too busy making a living.” He added that he understood the situation. People in the barrio have big families; they are worried about basic economic survival, and getting food, as well as helping relatives in the Chaco cover their basic needs. They both expressed that while they had expected the barrio to be a site for an emergence of radical political practices of indigenous demands in the city, this potential has been lost in the process of both producing a living and in managing the amount of assistance they receive.

The experience of one of the more left leaning groups visiting the barrio sheds light on this disenchantment. The group formed when several education students approached the barrio as they were researching about Toba music for a college assignment. Most of the members of the group were pursuing a degree to become primary school teachers and knew each other from college. After their work was done, they decided to continue to work in the barrio and invited friends to join the group. When I met them in the winter of 2009 they had over 10 members, and most of them were in their mid-twenties and lived in downtown Buenos Aires. They were self-
funded; they got donations from friends and family and in a few cases from companies where they had acquaintances. A few of them had cars, which they used to go to the barrio and later to the Chaco.

I attended an activity they organized to celebrate indigenous day in the community centre at the barrio, and then I attended a peña, a folkloric music event in a small theatre in Capital. Carlos, one musician from the barrio played some songs along with other self-recognized indigenous musicians and folklore groups. There, I learned that during that entire year they had been raising funds to travel to the Chaco and work there for a month. Through people from the barrio, they had contacted a cultural centre in a town close to Castelli in Chaco province, where they would develop a literacy program, art and music workshops, yoga classes and a film festival. For the literacy program, they were self-training in the method created by the popular educator Paulo Freire. I often saw them in the barrio and also in Capital: at the university, and at the annual counter-celebration of the Conquest of the Americas. As I walked with them in that rally, they expressed with sadness that they had invited several people in the barrio to come to the march and offered them rides, but they all declined the invitation, explaining they had to work early the next day.

In the beginning of the summer, the Toba Art group left for the Chaco where they met the group of young Toba people who run the Cultural Centre: Antonio, Julia, and Miguel. The three of them are activists, and also either journalists or teachers, and had taken the management of the Cultural Centre out of municipal jurisdiction. They camped there until they got the right to manage it from the provincial government.¹⁰⁶ I knew Antonio from previous work in the Chaco

¹⁰⁶ While they collaborated with NGOS and the church they are also critical of both institutions and also of older generations of indigenous activists who they consider too dependent on these institutions.
and met him in the Chaco a few days after the Toba Art group had left town. We had met in the Cultural Centre where they all worked, and Antonio told me their time there had been “very powerful.” He explained the group had organized a lot of activities but he had also made sure they “saw as much of the communities’ situation as possible.” For this reason, he rode with them in their cars to several rural communities in the area and introduced the group to several Toba leaders.

When I met the group back in Buenos Aires in late February they explained that the trip had impacted them profoundly. They learned a lot about land conflicts and now they saw this as a priority of their work. They explained that they were following urgent land conflicts in the Chaco and supporting related political actions. That day they invited me to go to the organizing meetings for the counter-celebration of the bicentenary anniversary of national independence, which would take place in May and which I attended a few days later.\(^{107}\) Despite the impact of their trip, they explained that they were not going to work much in the barrio anymore because people in the barrio were not so involved in more urgent problems and actions. For several months they dedicated most of their time to the organization of the counter-celebration, working together with other experienced groups of activists from the left, e.g. radical indigenous leaders, an autonomous radio station, and university student organizations. They continued to fund-raise for travels and develop activities in the Chaco. They also started a reading group on “Marxism and Indigenous People” at a cultural centre. The relationship between the Toba Art group and the barrio grew distant with the disillusionment they experienced as they became more self-aware as activists. And yet, paradoxically, while the families in the barrio were not radical in the way the

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\(^{107}\) The counter-celebration was organized by groups of the left as critique to the silencing of indigenous dispossession from the national history. The counter-celebration took the form of a camp in a park close to the official celebrations.
group expected, the barrio deeply influenced their political trajectory. From the work in the barrio, the group had stretched its relations into the Chaco where, as they considered, more serious events were taking place. Interestingly, while the groups connected to the Chaco through the barrio they considered both places as different: the Chaco was where more urgent matters demanded their work, and the barrio was where people were not as engaged. While subtly detaching the barrio from the Chaco, they also reinforced a differential attribution of political relevance. The Chaco was considered by them as the place where real problems were happening and where people are engaged in important struggles, while the barrio was seen as only a marginal location for indigenous politics, a place of maybe less “committed” (to social change) Indigenous People who are only focused in selling handicrafts (this is my own interpretation).

The relation between Toba Art and the barrio demonstrate how the families in the barrio are never able to fully meet the expectations placed on them by visiting groups, even those who have more critical approaches to social inequalities that traverse the Toba. Also while families accept all projects they are never able to participate in all the proposed activities. While the reason for the disillusionment of Toba Art was particular to its expectations of radicalism, the temporal process was not different from that of other groups. A common experience is that the middle-class groups approach the Toba with fascination and enthusiasm, find a warm welcome, and positive responses to their proposals. As activities unfold and encounters become more frequent, the middle-class groups grow frustrated when people do not show up for activities, when people do not show markers of the expected improvement, and also when, for example, donated clothing is distributed in unexpected ways.

For some groups, the disillusionment moves them to work with one or two families “who are different” (who have progressed, or are more engaged in contestational politics, or are better
craft makers, depending on the interests of the people helping), while many of them abandon the work altogether and are replaced by new groups. A key aspect of the disillusion in most groups of people “who help” is that ultimately they find that the barrio is not a community linked by relations of solidarity, reciprocity and a common use of resources as they expected. Rather, families are in competition with each other, they collaborate only occasionally, and many times public resources are used privately.

The Community that Doesn’t Exist

During my visits I saw how different families hardly ever worked together in a given activity. This was also a conversation topic among people. For example, one day I joined Beatriz and Lidia in the barrio Community Centre’s kitchen to help them cook empanadas to sell to a group of musicians organizing a small music festival in the barrio. As the time came to assemble the empanadas Beatriz sent Lidia to look for her sister-in-law to help. Lidia came back alone, she explained that her in-law had been helping in the kitchen in an event the day before and was tired. Lidia commented that things are not as they used to be, “people do not work together anymore”. Refusing to work together, as many people explicitly explained was related to the fact that families now “worked by themselves” and in addition were in competition with one another about who would be the main collaborator with a given group.

Some families in the barrio compete for the attention of these visiting groups and try to maintain the focus of each group on them to the exclusion of others. I saw the tensions around this expressed in, for example, the planning of a trip where a group of researchers offered Fernando the chance to travel with them to the Chaco for their project. Raul and Andrea, who had collaborated with this group more intensely during their work in the barrio, felt betrayed.
when they were not asked to join the trip. Later, they expressed their frustration and were included. Thus, when middle-class groups associate with different families, they generate tensions among these families. Part of managing the assistance, then, is work maintaining the focus on one family who would remain in relative control of the activities of the given group. At the same time, families also subtly manage middle-class groups by promoting competition between them. During the computer workshop with children I developed along with other researchers, the parents of the children made casual comparisons between our work and that of one of the other groups. For example, one parent told us that other university students gave color pencils to the children and provided a snack. By doing this, they were indirectly asking us to do more to keep up with the other group.

When people who help do not insist on getting to know other families in the barrio, they may end up working with only one or two. Some people in the barrio openly discussed this. Silvia explained that initially all families in the barrio worked together but that now, every family “was by themselves.” She remembered with a tone of nostalgia that in the past all women cooked together when there was a celebration in the Community Centre, but “now everyone is busy with their own work.” I was also surprised when Marcos, a man in his sixties, told me that his adult nephew had “stolen” a school workshop from him. Because Marcos does not have a cell phone and he relied on his nephew to be contacted, his nephew had diverted the invitations originally for Marcos for himself. Marcos’ nephew thus got all the payment and the profit from selling handicrafts.

The NGO Aid the Toba generated the largest gathering of families I observed during my fieldwork, when they asked a representative of each family to attend a meeting to plan the enlargement of the houses in the barrio. However, this was hardly a smooth collaboration. In this
meeting they created construction teams, where men of each family joined a team of four people each. Each team was expected to rotate in the construction of the houses of each of its members. The members of the NGO were very strict about the need of the team members to cooperate in order to receive the construction materials. If a team did not make progress in the construction they would not get the bricks and cement needed to complete the construction. This seemingly forced cooperation was a source of big tensions throughout the project.

During construction, people complained that others did not show up to work, or only hurried during work on their own houses and slowed down for the others. In this way, the NGO ideal of working with a “community,” whose members collaborate with each other, was challenged by the tensions and competition between families. Even when the NGO wanted to impose a discipline of cooperation, some families did not complete the work and lost the possibility of receiving the donation of construction materials, something that disappointed them and the NGO.

Another recurrent point of frustration across several groups is when resources such as a big donation of second-hand clothing are distributed in each family’s specific networks. Middle-class groups make the donations with the expectation that each family in the barrio will get an equal part, not recognizing that families may prioritize other relations outside the barrio. But at the same time, a Toba family’s engagement and work in a given group’s project is seen by that family as the right to use the resources made available by them. Thus, for example, the library created in the barrio was only used by the children of the families comprising the Barrio Association who have helped build it. As I will explain in more detail in the next chapter, the Toba in the barrio circulate resources following other relations, and within networks that send resources to barrios in other cities (as for example Rosario) and to villages in the Chaco. These networks do not include all families in the barrio and, therefore, when families do not share with
each other, middle class groups interpret this as a sign of mismanagement, selfishness, and even corruption. Both the competition for help and the way resources are distributed is a central conversation topic. Fernando is often criticized for attracting too many groups and for working by himself. But other families are also blamed for organizing activities without inviting the whole barrio.

Yet, relations of collaboration between families in the barrio are never totally broken: families who do not work together in projects organized by groups of the middle class still share important objects such as the nvike, the Toba violins that are an important part of workshops at schools. Only a few people own these violins and know how to build them and, still, they share them with other families with whom they are in competition for delivering workshops in schools for them to deliver these workshops. I also saw a generalized borrowing and lending of tools and house supplies. I saw for example a lawn mower Lorenzo owns being used by several families. I also was surprised to see how “mobile” a clothes’ spin dryer could be when I saw Mariana weekly lend it to several other young women and personally carry it on a cart to their houses many blocks away. It is considered rude not to lend something that is requested by a neighbour, which means that the restricted circulation of a project’s resources does not exclude other forms of sharing.

There are also enduring relations with people from the middle class who are happy to go step by step and are open to the change of direction of their plans. Some of these people particularly enjoy traveling to the Chaco with some members and are enthusiastic about small progress. This was the case of one enthusiastic school administrator who had helped fundraise for a water pump for a village in the Chaco and then traveled with one family to install it. She described herself as friend and expressed her enjoyment of just visiting the barrio and talking with people. Several
researchers too have gone and continued to go and have organized several projects in collaboration creating continuity across many years. They were valued because of this but also because of small gestures such as taking their baby children to visit the barrio with them.

Another aspect of collaboration that came to my attention during the computer workshop I conducted was the use of public space. Getting the keys for the Community Centre became a central part of the daily routine. Initially, Andrea instructed us that we borrow her keys for the workshop, because only three families have copies, and they could not give us our own copy. Every Monday morning we went to Andrea’s house and asked her for the keys, and after the workshop we had to return them to her. A few times she was away and we had to go to ask other families for their copies. In each case, we had to give a long explanation about why we needed the keys and why we were asking for them. Further in the first meeting of our workshop, several children told us that this was the first time they had entered the library room because they were not participating in the library project and, thus, never felt they could go, even when the librarian who had created the library opened the library every other week.

This use of the “community” buildings contrasted with the idea of public space held by middle-class visitors, who assumed that the community centre, the library, and the dinning room had to be used by the whole community. Middle-class groups understood the absence of other families in these spaces as a lack, in their words, of “participation,” “interest,” and “commitment.” They saw the use of the community centre by only a few families as a bad use of what is public instead of these differential relationships and the inevitable competition for resources. The restricted use of what they have donated and consider “common” is seen as a form of mismanagement and is a major source of disillusionment with the “community.” The expectations of people of the groups who come to help is to work with Indigenous People who
do not have individual self-interest, who work together and collaborate at all times and who share all resources. These romantic ideas about a “primitive communism” is particularly projected onto the Toba as they are seen as “authentic” Indigenous People, former hunter and gatherers from the Chaco, and in the case of the barrio imagined as a cohesive group, who all came together from the same villages in the Chaco, share blood relations, and thus have a deep history of being a community and working together. All these are the common representations of what a community is and should be (see Brow 1990).

As I mentioned before, disappointment about not finding the community they were expecting may provoke middle class groups to discontinue the work in the barrio, and disconnect from families. For example, a social worker who was formerly involved in the barrio explained her disillusionment as follows:

Do you know how much I had expected to work with a community like this one [during her social work studies]? When I first came to the barrio I was so happy, I made so many plans but then as time passed I got drained. People asked me to have a health station and I brought a doctor and we fundraised to have basic equipment; but then someone robbed all the equipment and the doctor refused to continue. They said they wanted to have a school and I helped create the high-school annex in the barrio. Now very few children graduate. I came weekly to the Community Centre and people just did not show up. I asked why and they said I had to visit them in their houses, house by house. Why could they not come to the Community Centre? I got so tired, I gave them everything and they show no sign of improvement. So now I have given up. I only work in this office now [several times a week she works at a health station at the catholic School that serves all the people from the area].

Middle-class groups tend to value specific signs of collective transformation and progress. They expect not just one youth to finish school, but all of them to do so; they expect families to organize collectively and to selflessly forget other commitments or work opportunities and

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108 As discussed in Chapter 1 the expectation of finding a community is not only a romantic idea of middle class groups, but also a legal requirement for creating an indigenous association, registered in the Institute of Indigenous Affairs, and having a legal figure is a requirement for receiving lands.
expand the houses of every member of the group; they expect all houses to be equally neat with
new paint and very clean; in short, they expect the families to show that they worked to improve
themselves and thus are worthy of more help (see Li 2007). Furthermore, the people at the Barrio
Toba receive assistance as long as they remain clearly marked as a Toba community, as
authentically Indigenous People who share and cooperate. When middle class groups find there
is no community in the way they expected it to be, that resources circulate in unexpected way,
and that there is no “collective improvement”, they leave the barrio.

Closely Distant
In 2006, an article about Toba youth from the barrio was published in a progressive newspaper in
Buenos Aires. The article plays with images of modernity (city, the “wealthy,” rock music) and
tradition (Chaco, “real Indians,” fishing) and portrays the Toba youth as embodying this tension.
What I found even more interesting is how these tensions are spatialized by the author, who
wrote:

One has to go more kilometers than one thinks to get there. The Highway hot-sheet hotels
mix with brand new cars transporting people who live in ritzy-gated communities. We are
in the outskirts of the city looking for a Toba community that someone told us is around
here. We are looking for a settlement of pure aboriginal people. [When we find them, we
see] the Toba Indians were sent behind a garbage dump in the middle of nowhere. Even
more: they have no nearby river like the Bermejo [in the Chaco], so that the children
could do what their parents did in the Impenetrable - fish¹⁰⁹ (Vitale, 2006)¹¹⁰

This article is another example of the images that shape the barrio Toba as an exoticized piece
of the Chaco in Buenos Aires; it shows that the attraction this exoticism generates among the

¹⁰⁹ *El Impenetrable* (the Impenetrable) is a large forest in province of Chaco, inhabited by many Toba communities.
middle class is not only restricted to the middle-class groups that work in the barrio. This journalist who went there only once, also presented the barrio as something spatially distant and exotic. While the article is full of observations about how heterogeneous the space of Conurbano is, the journalist is only interested in the juxtaposition that implies separation and distance. In this distance from downtown Buenos Aires “one has to take the highway”, something authentic and revealing is going to be found – namely, “pure aboriginal people.” We can sense the excitement in his description: this interview is different, is not just another suburban group of children. The Indigenous People have to follow certain criteria to be intelligible as such: be the poorest among the poor “living behind a garbage dump”, come from the “Chaco profundo”, “the deep Chaco”, and be “pure aboriginal people” (in contrast to being mixed race). He also links authenticity with the “traditional” practice of fishing, which the youth can no longer engage in. These paragraphs, in sum, condense the fact that to clearly define a group as a target of “help,” there is a need to shape a subject grounded in a specific place: the barrio as a place of difference, more connected to the Chaco than to Buenos Aires, and which does not fully belong to the city.

In this article, the journalist presents himself as an adventurous person who will see a reality hidden from the average porteño: the Indigenous People formerly living in “the impenetrable” and now living behind a dump in the city. He presents himself both as a middle-class professional and also a sensitive person who physically moves out of the comforts of the city to encounter the Toba. Furthermore, in this commuting he will reveal what “Argentina is really about”, and transform himself. This is a narrative line that, with variations, underlines most of the middle class groups’ explanations of their work.

In this chapter, I have unpacked the constitutive and everyday relation between Tobas and the people from urban white middle classes who visit the barrio. This encounter is created out of the
spatial possibilities the barrio enables: the barrio is a place where these groups meet and constitute themselves as racially different out of a long tradition of charity and humanitarianism.

The visitors to the barrio thus follow what Arendt first, and research on humanitarianism recently, has characterized as an emotional approach to politics in the form of help. This approach produces racialized and moral subjectivities. Transnational humanitarianism creates relations where a generic west that is economically advanced helps a third world experiencing an eventful crisis. Humanitarian encounters create racialized subjects whose distinction from one and other is emphasised. Further in these relations, aid workers become “good” people, and victims are understood as people unable to control the events they suffer from and who are regarded as sharing a basic humanity (Fassin 2010, Ticktin 2014). The relation produces a moral imperative to save certain victims. I have shown a variation of this relation where middle class people (and not NGOs or big organizations) help people in their own city who are simultaneously their neighbours but are perceived as radical others, “the poorest among the poor” and also innocent victims.

I have shown that in the everydayness the projects allow the groups to shape themselves as specific types of white and dark skinned people. In the relationship the Toba become a group that in being indigenous, is particularly “worth saving,” because they are authentic and rural and are expected to be flexible to change. But when people of the middle class spend some time working in the barrio they start distinguishing between the families who, according to their own different standards, “get engaged”, are “hard working”, show “signs of improvement”, and are “committed” to social change. This approach is socially and affectively productive as both groups mutually benefit in the encounter, but it also defines the conditions of the subsequent disillusionment. The Toba more often than not cannot meet the different expectations set by the
groups and the latter end up leaving their work in the barrio. The affective arch that goes from intensity to disintegration recreates the groups but also introduces some variations in what each of them can do.

These relations start from unequal possibilities of moving through the space of the city. While since their arrival the Toba have had hard times accessing the city centre and have experienced a policing of their bodies in downtown Buenos Aires, the white middle class has both the privilege of living in downtown Buenos Aires and has access to fast methods of travel; they can get in their cars and drive to the barrio in 40 minutes. Once more, white subjectivities in this relation are shaped through movement and exploration while the Toba are expected to be in the barrio, waiting for their visit (see Razack 2002).

An embodied (racialized) and spatialized politics of encounter allowed me to trace how in their attraction to the Toba, the middle-class groups seek to obtain from the Toba a specific knowledge, a status as saviours, or an entry to an activism engaged in “revolutionary” politics. The Toba get reinforced into being “authentic indigenous” people who have a rich culture and who are also particularly vulnerable. In these encounter, spaces are also recreated. Schematically, the barrio is made as a piece of the Chaco in Buenos Aires; the Buenos Aires city centre is produced as a place of modernity, inhabited by white Argentineans (who police non white bodies’ movements in it) and that reaches out to help those in need, while the Chaco becomes a distant and mysterious place that still hosts authentic Indigenous People. In these encounters both groups transform the possibilities of moving through space. Toba families access schools, market fairs, government offices, and cultural centers; they become authentic indigenous in the city. For their own part, middle-class groups access a barrio of “pure Indigenous People,” “save” people with their food donations, teach them how to cooperate to build their own houses, and travel to
the Chaco to meet indigenous leaders engaged in “serious” land struggles.

In this relation, both groups produce variations within the simplified racial distinction between white and non-white. The Toba are recreated as “authentic Indians from the Chaco,” a form of non whiteness that, as I argued in chapter 3, is more valuable in the city than being a generic “negro villero.” At the same time, the “people who come to help” reinforce their whiteness in their contrast to the Toba and produce a variation within it. They perform work on their selves and become sensitive, charitable, and progressive and thus become “people who do good”. I have approached these relations from a politics of contact that allows focusing on both the encounter itself, the changing intensities of the relation and the effects of the continuous collaborations. In the next chapter, I extend an exploration of contact into the networks that link the barrio Toba with multiple other locations.
Chapter 5: Subaltern Assemblages


Connecting Heterogeneous Elements

The families that donated large quantities of clothes and food for “the starving Indigenous People of the Chaco” during Miguel and Leandro’s visit to a public school in a lower-middle-class neighbourhood in the City of Buenos Aires were probably expecting these donations to end up in a far-away rural village in the Chaco. A few months earlier, the TV news had been filled with images of sickly adults and malnourished children under headlines of “nutritional emergency.” A report by an NGO claimed that over five Indigenous People had recently died of hunger in the Chaco Province\(^{111}\). As we carried bags of second-hand clothes, canned food, and blankets (among other things) to a small truck parked by the sidewalk, the school headmaster confirmed this idea: “As soon as we heard it was for the Chaco, every family gave as much as possible. We cannot believe this happens these days.” However, the distribution of these objects followed a complex and multifaceted set of trajectories. I estimated that half of the items stayed in the area of the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, that a few were sent to other barrios Toba outside the Chaco, and that around 40% ended up in rural villages in the Chaco Province. This was not the product of the “mismanagement” of donations but rather a distribution that went beyond the possibilities of what humanitarian action showed on the TV news can anticipate.

This chapter examines how people, objects, and relations in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires get entangled with others in distant locations. I draw on the concept of assemblages to trace how Toba people create networks of interconnections entangling a multiplicity of close and distant

places. These networks function as assemblages for the way in which these connections link heterogeneous agents, objects and relations from diverse sites. The barrio Toba in Buenos Aires was a privileged position from which to trace the associations as I could see for example how resources obtained from the urban middle class then are circulated to multiple other locations. Traveling with people from the barrio to other barrios such as Rosario and Castelli, and to rural areas such as Bermejito and Espinillo further allowed me to trace the associations across space and see how this subaltern spatiality is constantly remade across distance.

While the Toba assemblages constitute a network in its more regular use as a set of connections across space that bring people or elements together because of their similarity (professionals, phones allowing communication), I employ the concepts of assemblage and network to highlight heterogeneity. To do so I draw on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Latour (2005), respectively. Latour’s notion of “network” emphasizes the action or work that results from a particular association of diverse elements where the action can be generated by any or all of them, but is not restricted to individual people (2005). He thus rejects what he calls the taken-for-granted interactions evoked in sociological concepts such as “gender” or “ethnicity.” The notion of “assemblage” makes us trace how elements are brought together and connected, what Deleuze and Guattari call a territoriality. On the other hand the authors draw attention to the elements that both extend the given activity and organization but may also threaten its organization, what they call lines of deterritorialization112.

A specific ethnic group organizes the connections I analyze. It therefore constitutes an ethnic network, and fits in the literature on diasporas that highlight the forms of translocal cultural

112 I use the concepts of (de)territorialization both as an organization of the activity of an assemblage. The notion has direct spatial implications as the organization of an assemblage is generally extended over space through implicating different elements.
production that are produced beyond state jurisdictions. The literature on diasporas has generated very productive examinations of ethnic groups spread across the world and connected to each other, creating new forms of socialization beyond the boundaries of a given nation state. The literature on diasporas started with Arjun Appadurai’s engagement with the cultural transformations effected by globalization (1996). More recently the concept of diasporas was taken from migrant translocal communities to examine the experience of Indigenous People living in cities, given while many times they have moved within a same country, they too create connections across regional jurisdictions (see Wilson and Peters 2005), and creating translocal and pluriethnic connections (see Ramirez 2007, notion of hub).

By using the term assemblage instead of diaspora I want to draw attention not only to the specific ethnic dimensions of Toba’s links but also to the connections they establish with other actors and further with material dimensions that are necessary for the specific activity of the network to emerge. The assemblage created with Leandro’s and Martin’s visit to the school had at its centre Toba families spread-out in different locations, but it also involved the mass media, a school, and middle class families affected by media images and families in the Chaco that collected totora leaves in the bush and marshlands, and produced baskets for them to sell at the school. Through these assemblages, people not only distribute objects but also collaborate to do bureaucratic procedures, solve problems (for example a teenager dropping out school), and in a few cases build a steady control over space. In other words, these assemblages reshape the spaces that they link elements from, and in doing so they create what I call a subaltern spatiality. By subaltern spatiality I mean a control over space shaped by people located in subaltern position, this is excluded from regular politics and the formal economy (see Guha 1983). Yet I show subalternity is not only a relative position of exteriority to “civil society” (the population
regulated by law and rights). In these assemblages Toba people connect dominant relations such as formal education, with relations outside them such as the collective appropriation of resources from the bush in the Chaco.

Assemblages also have a spatial dimension and their activity resides in connecting different places, and not only ethnic sameness. They interconnect downtown Buenos Aires and a school with towns and villages in the Central Chaco, and other urban barrios outside the Chaco, like the city of Rosario. By connecting heterogeneity of elements assemblages produce a new activity that is not only the sum of individual actions and is not implicit in any element by itself (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The new activity that emerged in the example above is the distribution of objects outside a formal market or family relations of sharing. The notion of assemblage in short allows me to think the heterogeneity of relations and elements that are connected across space and produce a new activity.

Assemblages have shifting temporalities. They recombine associations and activate relations, such as family relations, each time. When the mass media disseminated images of hunger in the Chaco and the school contacted Leandro and Martin, and organized a donation campaign, an assemblage of distribution of objects from Buenos Aires to the Conurbano and the Chaco started to take shape. In spite of how efficient the unfolded connections were in redistributing goods there was no warrantee that this given assemblage would remain together or would be recreated in the same way in the future. In my ethnographic analysis, and unlike both Latour and Deleuze and Guattari’s work, I explore how subaltern assemblages extended in time and how they were recreated.

To trace the organization and productivity of assemblages that transverse the barrio I first follow how through these assemblages, people distribute goods. Second, by analyzing my
experience in an evangelical church encounter, I trace how relations recreate assemblages across time and space. Finally, I analyze a case where one extended family constitutes an assemblage that is constantly generating activity, and thus, they coordinate simultaneous actions within different points of the assemblage. To follow this, I draw on my experience participating in the workshops people from the barrio deliver in middle class barrios; and on my travels with them to the cities of Rosario (Santa Fe province), and the area of Castelli and Saenz Pena in Chaco province, including two rural localities in the area of Bermejito (North to Castelli).

Moving Packages: Activating Assemblages

The circulation of packages between the Barrio Toba and other Toba locations takes place on a regular basis. Toba people from rural areas in the Chaco region send packages to the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires with raw materials to produce handicrafts and finished handicrafts. Other packages circulate in the opposite direction, and second hand clothes, canned food, and house items donated to the Barrio go back to the Chaco. In both ways boxes are sent as encomiendas to and from several towns and cities in and outside the Chaco. When Martin and Leandro, the men in charge of the workshop of the opening vignette, received the items collected by the school, they started a careful work of distribution. First, they kept a portion of the food for themselves, and took the clothes that could fit Leandro’s four sons and daughter. Martin’s family is clearly not the poorest in the barrio. Martin and Leandro are recognized musicians and get many invitations to perform traditional Toba music. But none of them has a steady income (none of the adults in the family have a salary or pension), and they are often not paid for their performances

The notion of assemblage has been used in anthropology mostly to refer to transnational and global dynamics, such as the compelling work of Aihwa Ong (2006) who understands neoliberalism as an assemblage of heterogeneous work and economic relations constituting one complex system.
(they are only given donations). Several times a year they barely make ends meet, they eat very little, and Leandro’s children lacked shoes at the start of the school year. Keeping part of he donated food therefore allowed them to eat for several weeks. Once they kept some items, they distributed all other clothes and food. They gradually placed donated objects into smaller boxes and distributed them outside the nuclear family. When I asked about the distribution, their answers were short and elusive, but in the following weeks I was able to partially track the distribution down.

Martin told me they had immediately given a big part of clothes and some food to a neighbour, a widow living outside the Barrio Toba who has five children. She is neither Toba nor a relative but Martin knew the children, who regularly ask around for food and money. They decided they needed the items the most and gave them a big part. When I asked Leandro, he explained he was going to send two boxes to the Barrio Toba in Castelli (Chaco Province) where he used to live. Two of his cousins are taking care of his house there, and they would distribute the items among relatives. “In the Chaco everyone is in need. Everything is hard to get: clothes, blankets anything we send is useful,” Leandro explained to me. He also mentioned he was maybe planning to go back to the Chaco and live in that house with his own family, and, thus, the cousins would have to move out. I understood this sharing was a way to make himself present with them, and mitigating the potential tensions of asking them to move out. Two weeks later, Carolina, Leandro’s wife, mentioned she had gone to the bus station to send a package to her mother in a rural village a few kilometers west of Castelli. Her mother sends handicrafts several times a year and Carolina and Leandro sell them in the city. Carolina and Leandro keep the money they get for the handicrafts and send boxes of used clothes back to the villages. Carolina also sent one box to a brother who lives in a town near their mothers’ and was helping
her to get a provincial subsidy through a local *puntero*, a political broker. Finally, a month later a prestigious *doctor*, shaman, was visiting the barrio and performed healing sessions for Martin who was having very bad headaches. In another visit I saw a small box Martin had packed for him with the last part of the donated items.

The boxes sent to Castelli and the villages were carefully packed and shifted: put into cardboard boxes and taped, names of recipients were handwritten; packages were taken to the bus station, and sent as *encomiendas*. Encomiendas are packages delivered by bus companies and is a delivery service much more reliable and faster than regular mail. In my travels to he Chaco, I saw the other end of this circulation: relatives pick up the packages at the bus station by showing their IDs to certify they are the recipients. Some recipients live in the town where the package is delivered (like Leandro’s relatives), and, thus, only have to bike one or two kilometers home. Others (like Carolina’s mother), who live in a village several kilometers away from any town, carry medium-size boxes by bike or motorcycle. When packages are bigger or numerous, people who live in rural villages either do more trips or need to hire a *remise* car or a truck.

Deleuze and Guattari show that elements participating in an assemblage are fragments that have been enfolded from other arrangements. In my own analysis I add that these arrangements are spatial as for example the complex organization of people and relations that a “school” is. The specificity of the elements and their organization is what shapes the assemblage. In this case the specificity of the objects donated mattered, as the canned food was either saved for consumption or shared with the widow who needed them. The relations that were conjunctural (not regulated and were not repetitive) were also shaping the assemblage. While reciprocity with family members was at the centre of the way distribution happened, Leandro and Martin did not
share with all of their close relatives and rather the assemblage organized around unexpected circumstances. A t-shirt extracted from a middle class kid’s wardrobe put in a bag along with other used clothing, stored in a school cabinet, and given to Leandro and Martin after their performance playing Toba music,\footnote{\textit{Toba music} is an eclectic genre of music played by Toba people and especially developed as part of the Unida church religious services. It combines “traditional” elements, such as shakers, with the Spanish guitar. The style itself is also a result of the mutual influence with criollo music. Se Citro and Torres Aguero (2014).} served to pay the unexpected visit of a shaman that healed Martin. All these elements and relations are fragments extracted from other forms of relation (i.e. fashion, mass media circulation, a school as an formal education institution) and put into new functions and generating a new activity, in this case the distribution of resources. The elements being circulated reorganize the place they were extracted from, and the places they circulate around, in regards to the action of the assemblage. The elements connected, even if only slightly, reorganize the school, the barrio, and the villages in the Chaco where boxes arrive. The activity of the assemblage also reorients the actions of people in these places. For example, in the Chaco people engage in receiving the packages and distributing the items; they also reciprocate with handicrafts or materials for producing handicrafts.

But linking the elements together in this assemblage was not a smooth action of coming together or a “flow” of objects from place to place. The workshop demanded preparation: a teacher got Leandro’s phone number from a friend and called him to request the visit; Martin and Leandro had to travel to the barrio of Flores in the Capital, and they had to carry a big box of handicrafts and baskets to the school. When people from the Chaco send materials to produce handicrafts connection is not easy either. Because the vegetable fibers used to weave baskets are only obtained in the rural areas, people in the villages send large quantities to the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, and also send already-produced baskets. Totora and palm tree leaves do not fit...
neatly in a box and are heavy. Palm leaves are packed in square packages and wrapped in cloth, tied with string; *totoras* (reeds) leaves are tied together in cylindrical packs of around 1.5 meters of length and half a meter of diameter. Women who make handicrafts need the leaves to be long to weave strong baskets. Thus, people in the Chaco make sure *totoras* leaves are not broken or damaged in the trip, and they likewise send them as *encomiendas* to Buenos Aires. In the Chaco people take the *totoras* packages to the bus station, and many times they do it by bike balancing the huge packages on the back. In the bus station they face another problem. Andrea explained that when a bus company takes these packages for the first time they complain that they are too dirty, too big, too oddly shaped, and a bus driver may refuse to carry them. But several bus companies and bus drivers know about these exchanges and have made a habit of carrying them. When the packages arrive in the Retiro bus station in Buenos Aires, they need to travel over an hour to get to the barrio. *Remises* (as buses and trucks in the Chaco) in the train station near the barrio Toba also got used to carrying handicrafts materials and do not complain about them. They have a standard fee for the packages and charge each big package as an additional passenger.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that desire is the force that put bodies in motion, connects them to other bodies, and is productive of new connections. In the now famous passage they claim, “The question posed by desire is not ‘What does it mean?’ but rather ‘How does it work?’” (109). In the same passage they continue: “It represents nothing, but it produces. It means nothing, but it works” (109). For my analysis the question of desire helps to unpack what a “connection” is. A relevant question following these authors is: What is the action that elements perform when they come together? Connecting Buenos Aires and the Chaco is, however, not effortless “work” where two elements converge together generating an action.
Thus, connection not only poses the question of how it works once the connection is done, but also how did it come together in the first place. In this case connecting is not just an easy meeting up (in the wide sense Deleuze and Guattari define it as the extension of associations and capacities) and rather implies an effort and some determination. To carry handicraft and handicraft materials Toba families take particular care of establishing good relations with bus drivers, bus companies, and *remise* owners. Connections therefore always imply effort and frictions. The material qualities of totora and palm leaves imply that these elements do not “flow” from rural villages in the Chaco to the barrio Toba in Buenos Aires but that they travel in rough conditions, on bike racks ridden on dirt roads, on buses and trucks. The characteristics of the packages demand for people and vehicles to move in spite of the frictions slowing them down. Efforts against the frictions to movement have a limit, and when packages are too heavy, or when bus drivers are not familiar these frictions may stop movement altogether. (I go back to this question about connection and the efforts against friction in the next section.)

While some connections that are activated each time an assemblage distributes packages can be partially expected due to kinship obligations, others are more circumstantial or the product of spatial proximity. Martin and Leandro had no pre-existing reason to share donated objects with the widow, for instance. She is not a relative, she is not Toba, and she is not a fellow church member. But she is living close by and sending her children around to ask for food because she has no other option. This connection, therefore, extended the assemblage. Likewise, the sudden visit of a shaman who healed Martin created in a few days an intense relationship that was not expected, and did not exist before. This relationship brought Martin to share with him whatever was left. These relations took distribution beyond the extended family members working together.
Unexpected lines of connectivity both extend and threaten the assemblage’s activity. There was some risk in sharing with the widow who is a neighbour, as they could end up not having enough to give to Carolina’s mother or to Leandro’s cousins, and, therefore, there could be potential conflicts with them for not having shared. In fact, Martin felt in debt to the shaman and paid him with his own cellphone, since he considered the box of items donated was not enough. Therefore, if the shaman had visited Martin earlier he might have given him a big part of the donated items they received, threatening the forms of sharing their family members were expecting. The ad hoc and conjunctural nature of the networks creates shifts in the emphasis of relations and also in the spatiality of the distribution of packages.

For all elements included in the assemblage, the circulation of second hand clothes and handicraft materials is productive, and has an important role in the economic subsistence of families. On one end, it allows families in the Barrio Toba of Buenos Aires to produce the handicrafts they sell and generate a cash income. Thus, people who do not have a job can generate cash in this way. On the other end, it gives access to valuable goods to families in the rural areas. In the rural villages in the Chaco region, people wait for packages with donations with a lot of expectation. While in many rural villages food can be partly obtained through subsistence agriculture or gathering, fishing and hunting; clothes, house supplies, bicycles are expensive and hard to obtain in the Chaco, especially for families with no cash-income. On both ends, the circulation of goods between the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires, other barrios, and rural areas offers an alternative to unemployment and low-paid jobs.

Furthermore, in the case of the donated clothing, its specific color, texture, and style matter.

115 Sending back remittances is not usual, as most of the urban families are in a very precarious situation. I saw that when people get any payment they quickly spend most of the money immediately in food and in buying cellphone credit. An indirect form of cash circulation is when a family pays the bus ticket for a relative in the Chaco to come and visit. In all cases the circulation of objects rather than money is the central relation.
Most people in the Chaco region value wearing a nice baseball cap, or a fashionable silky shirt. In the Chaco, these items cannot be found easily or at an affordable price. The circulation of packages consequently allows access to these “nice” things to both families in the city and the rural areas, and therefore it enables participation in consumption habits they would not access otherwise. People in marginal barrios in cities, towns, and in remote villages regularly watch TV and see shop windows in towns and city centres, and, thus, have seen what they cannot afford to have. In short they enable people living in a “far away” village to participate in some globalized desires for certain type of goods. The networks of distribution, in sum, are outside the formal economy yet are connected with it. Handicrafts are produced in the household and allow a cash-generating activity for people who sell them in the city. Likewise, second hand objects are not bought yet allow people who receive them to access “nice things,” thereby indirectly participating in consumption practices.

However, these spatial networks of circulating of objects do not level inequalities among Toba families in a barrio or villages. In many cases, they reinforce the relative affluence of a particular family and its power over a particular location. When a family manages the distribution of a huge amount of second-hand clothes donations, they also recreate their position as redistributors and as more affluent and influential than others. Because families seek to concentrate resources within their networks, and often compete with each other, in the Barrio, and in most Toba locations I visited, the information about the donations or the arrival of handicrafts or raw material for handicrafts is kept as a secret. The secrecy is used to avoid pressure exerted by other neighbours to share handicraft material or donated items.\(^{116}\) Families bring boxes of donated clothes in the barrio as discretely as possible, something that is quite

\(^{116}\) See Salamanca and Tola (2002) for an analysis on the pressures to share.
difficult to do considering the quantities of boxes that are received and the proximity between houses in the Barrio Toba. Gossip about another family receiving a donation or handicrafts’ material may prompt some people to show up to ask for something. During a visit to Silvia she made this clear: “I know my uncle received more than ten boxes of clothes from a school. But he keeps everything for himself or sends it to his in-laws in the Chaco. He even sells the clothes! But I’m going to go and ask him, I don’t have money so he should give me some.” Later she told me that upon her request, her uncle made available two big bags of clothing saying that is all he had, but she was suspicious he was hiding more.

Gossip therefore becomes another factor shaping forms of circulation, involving in this case the circulation of information. Information about families receiving donated clothing works on the tension between connection and disconnection that Strathern (1996) points out in her critique of Latour and that I referred to in earlier chapters. On the one hand, through gossip other families monitor the more well-off families, and families with more resources can be forced to share even when they are trying to avoid doing it. On the other hand, gossip establishes a separation. If a family has not shared at one moment and the others find out about it, then the other families will not share either.

Secrecy keeps the movement of objects within certain relations, and gossip about some families keeping things for themselves may both create pressure to share or a social rupture. Rupture is what seems to have happened among several families in the barrio that used to work together. Thus, gossip both reproduces relations between networks and creates a potential disconnect between families that were previously connected through relations of sharing. The barrio, in sum, is not one unified assemblage but rather a point of convergence of different assemblages. Rather than collaborating together, these assemblages compete and may be in
tension with each other. Yet, the separation between assemblages is never absolute, as I have discussed in Chapter 4 families in the barrio continue to share valuable items as a lawn mower or a clothes spin dryer with each other. Here the notion of assemblage together with disconnection allows us to think about Toba villages and barrios not as homogeneous ethnically defined groups connected with each other, but rather as entangled nodes traversed by superposed (dis)connections. While Leandro’s and Martin’s specific assemblage connected them with their family in the Chaco, a widow and a shaman, it disconnected them with the rest of the barrio, as I saw no package being shared within the barrio.

An analysis of assemblages thus contributes to the literature on diasporas in that it traces associations that go beyond their ethnic specificity. The heterogeneity of relations, the lines of distribution of objects, and the ways different assemblages converge problematize the explanation of ethnicity as a default connecting force. In addition, when ethnicity is not the only component of one activity, the work of reconnecting people, keeping relations active, and creating new connections responds to political dynamics that are not guaranteed with the articulation of one identity. Another crucial relation reconnecting these assemblages together is the Iglesia Unida, the Toba Evangelical church. The religious encounters of this church are central in reconnecting assemblages’ elements together and in extending their connections in time and in space. In the next section I discuss these encounters.

The “Iglesia Unida” Encounters: (Re)creating Associations

The Iglesia Unida (Unida hereafter) has a central role in helping Toba people move between places located far from each other and getting people together several times a year (see Miller 1979). The Unida organizes large meetings in different Toba locations almost every month.
Meetings can be in a barrio in a big city like Rosario or in a small town, or it can be organized in a remote villages in the Chaco. Invitations are sent by text messaging and advertised at *El Mensajero*, a periodic newsletter that Mennonite missionaries, (who have worked in collaboration with the Toba Unida church for several decades) publish and distribute monthly to most Toba Churches.\(^{117}\) Unida churches are active in helping followers attend these encounters and helping people travel. For smaller meetings, a church’s commission may pay the bus tickets for one or a few members, and for bigger events they may rent a whole bus for people to travel together. Some big encounters are funded by international evangelical organizations and religious NGOs, who finance travel expenses. During my fieldwork, an extraordinary international encounter took place in the area of Bermejito, which brought together Indigenous People from Chaco with Indigenous People from New Caledonia. During regular encounters the buildings of Unida become accommodations for travelers and places where large meals are prepared and shared. The biggest encounter is the annual anniversary in the town of Saenz Peña, province of Chaco, where the church was founded.

At the end of my fieldwork, the Unida of the Barrio Toba organized a trip to this encounter. The church commission hired a charter bus so that people in the barrio could attend. I joined this group on the round trip from the Barrio Toba to Saenz Peña and back. In describing the travel and the encounter I want to highlight two dimensions. First, I want to extend further my point about the effort that is needed to connect and enfold different elements within an assemblage. In the first part of the description I highlight the frictions of the travel to Saenz Peña and the determination that was needed to get to our destination. Second, I want to show the ways in which church encounters, by bringing together heterogeneous relations in intense moments of

\(^{117}\) See Miller (1979) and Ceriani (2011) for analysis of Mennonite missionaries’ relations with the *Unida*.\(^{117}\)
connection, recreate associations, and, thus, recreate assemblages through time. The Unida is another component within assemblages that, along kinship relations, connects and reconnects elements and keeps them working through time. In addition, it partly works against gossiping and rivalry, bringing together families that do not usually cooperate or churches that may be in competition with each other.

When my colleague Mariana\textsuperscript{118} and I arrived in the preacher’s house in the Barrio Toba in the late afternoon, family members were involved in last-minute preparations for the trip: a woman was packing, older children were finishing handicrafts, a woman was feeding her baby, people came in and out of the house, while the preacher checked his cellphone constantly. “Juan just came out of work, he is having a shower and will be on his way,” was one of the updates he gave us. The charter bus was parked in a side street around 8 pm, but since many people were arriving from other barrios Toba and had a long commute, we only left after midnight. As we waited, we visited other friends, and we could see that the whole barrio was in the middle of active preparations. People walked with bags, boxes, pillows, and comforters. Children who would stay in the barrio hung out with the ones who would travel, and had their packs on hours in advance because they could not wait to board. This collective effervescence affecting the whole barrio anticipated the intensity of the encounter. At midnight everyone had arrived and we gathered around the bus anxious to start the trip.

The preacher and his assistant Emanuel had made all the travel arrangements. Through some of the women in the barrio who regularly go to the hugely popular clothes’ fair of La Salada in the Greater Buenos Aires,\textsuperscript{119} they rented a charter bus for the whole weekend. They had

\textsuperscript{118} Mariana is a colleague, who was doing her Doctoral field research at the same time I was doing mine.

\textsuperscript{119} A gigantic (meaning its sales surpasses legal shopping centre in amount and quantity) illegal clothing fair where
advertised the trip, asked passengers to pay a deposit in advance, and organized the departure through elaborate text messages. Text messaging, once again, was the main technology through which people coordinated how objects and people move from one place to the next. The tickets were very inexpensive: less than one-third of what commercial bus tickets would cost. When we gathered around the bus we could see why it was such a cheap trip: the bus was old and seemed to be poorly maintained. Emanuel and the preacher had a list of passengers from which they started to call out names and let people get on. The bus capacity was 40, but it was soon over 50. When we had all boarded, Emanuel gave us instructions: “Children have to sit on parent’s laps, make sure they aren’t standing on the aisle or we may have problems with the police.” I wondered how many transport rules we were transgressing when Emanuel sat on the floor in the aisle and told the drivers we could leave. He did not have a seat either.

When we left the barrio, Emanuel said he would message “the van” to let them know we were on our way. We learned “the van” was a group of 6 people from a middle class catholic parish that was traveling to the encounter with a vehicle full of items to be donated to the central church and for them to distribute around the area. One young woman from that group later explained to me: “We want to know the Chaco and the Toba’s reality firsthand, exchange experiences.” As soon as the bus moved, several people grabbed guitars and started singing religious songs. Everyone joined in an animated singing. Meanwhile the two drivers talked about what detour to take to avoid a police check (the preacher sat Mariana and myself on the first seats and we could hear most of the front bus conversations). An hour into our trip, we got stopped by the first police check. The officer requested the bus’ documents from the driver who stepped down from the bus and handed over a folder. When the officer read them, he started shaking his head. After people who work in sweatshops sell brand clothing they have produced, see Gago (2014).
a long conversation, inaudible from inside the bus, the driver came back and said he had to “arrange” things with the officer. He had paid some money so that the officer would oversee the bus’ illegal transportation of passengers and let us continue our trip. Soon we were on our way again.

At around 3 am the singing stopped and we all fell asleep. At 6 am the sun was coming up and we could see out the windows the fluorescent green fields of genetically modified soy, the crop that constitute the wealthy agribusiness of the province of Santa Fe. We arrived at the first Gendarmería checkpoint, right near the city of Rafaela. A female officer asked for the bus documents again and as she read them she also shook her head. She stepped into the bus and explained in a loud voice that there were many irregularities and the commercial license had expired. The drivers insisted they were taking “Toba people,” and donations of food and clothes to the Chaco, thereby implying that this was a worthwhile trip associated with charity for impoverished Indigenous People. The officer said we would have to go to the central office, and directed us. When we got to the station the preacher, Emanuel, and the bus drivers went to the office along with two men from the van that arrived shortly thereafter.

An hour later, we were all hanging out off the bus in the soccer field next to the Gendarmería’s station when a female officer called all of us, “the women” aside. She started asking general questions: where we were going, where we were coming from. Finally, she asked us if the men were taking us against our will. Were we going to work in cotton fields in the Chaco? Were the men taking us to Paraguay? We replied we were voluntarily going to a religious encounter and the officer relaxed. She explained that they were worried we “were being

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120 Gendarmería is the national force securing borders and routes; they have a reputation of being uncorrupted.
trafficked”, especially because so many women and children were on the bus. After two hours of waiting, the drivers, the preacher and the men from the van came back with the news that the main officer had given the bus a special permit, valid for three days only, to continue the trip and come back to Buenos Aires. They made an exception based on the fact we were going to a Unida church encounter and taking donations to the Chaco.

Traveling to the encounter was therefore not effortless. As I mentioned, in both Deleuze and Guattari’s and Latour’s work, the moments of connection in an assemblage are left unexamined. In their work it seems as if the elements of the assemblage drifted together at the right time and place: the bacteria, the microscope, and scientist; the nomad, the weapon, and the desert. However, most connections I observed in the field implied effort and a transformation of the elements in order for them to connect. The notion of friction points to the energy demanded by connecting but it is also indicative that movement needs not smooth surfaces but rather rough ones that create a grip. The grip necessary for an encounter implies an adjustment and a transformation of the elements so that they can work together. Friction implies surfaces transforming each other, and movement demands an investment of energy in order to generate traction (Moore 2005: 282). The frictions to travel to the Chaco were many and they originated in the access to means of transport and also in the legal regulation of transport. The trip to Saenz Peña, therefore implied a determined collective effort against the “roughness” of our trip that almost completely stopped us.

This trip to the Chaco, in that sense, resulted from a desire to travel and participate in the religious event and see relatives. However, desire (as I have described it above, as a drive to

121 When the officer left, women commented that she was a good officer, because she was taking care of women.
extend and connect) was not enough to get to the Chaco. There were frictions hiring a bus. We needed a bus cheap enough so that families could pay for it. And the only way to find this was to hire an old bus with out-dated permits. Travelling on a national road on an old bus created further frictions as we tried to advance farther and farther. The bus was in a noticeably bad shape and was visibly transgressing several regulations. This is why the driver tried to avoid police checkpoints. The friction of our movement stopped our trip and almost ended it halfway, when Gendarmería went over the permits again. We were only able to move again when we got an exception based on the donations we were carrying and that the bus was taking “Toba people” to the Chaco.

The visible excitement of all people traveling was not a secondary aspect of the travel, for this excitement shifted into a determination to continue the trip and allowed us to convince the Gendarmería officers to let us go. In negotiating the special permit, the determination of the people from the van was also fundamental. If they had not made phone calls to their parish, and affirmed that we were going to where drivers and preachers said we were, the permit would have probably not been issued. The determination was finally also intense enough to prevent anyone of us to quit and go back home. Women were also assertive and dissuaded any suspicion of being trafficked. The effort and determination necessary for this travel implied that desire as the connecting mechanism that Deleuze and Guattari identify at the centre of assemblages, is not completely “underneath” or prior to rationality, but able to work with it (Deleuze and Guattari 1984). It was not enough for people to desire to travel, for the bus to function, but there was a degree of wilful determination added to the desire that was necessary to get us to the Chaco. Of course determination was not the only element allowing us to continue. Determination was combined with the grip of the argument that we were going to the Chaco to donate food and
clothes to Toba people. *Gendarmería* officers found that our travel was worth supporting and thus made a big exception and did not apply transport regulations to us. In sum our humanitarian aims gave us the traction necessary to continue. Desire, determination and frictions both slowed down our movement and enabled our movement to continue.

Once *Gendarmería* gave the drivers the special permit we continued our trip. The landscape changed from soy farms with sophisticated machinery to more modest-looking cattle farms with pastures. By sunset, when we entered the Chaco province we started seeing the cotton fields out the window. Older people on the bus commented the harvest would start soon and recalled working in the cotton fields. When we arrived in Saenz Peña, a small city of 76,000 people, it was almost dark. The bus did not get to the city centre and instead turned into a dirt road that took us to the barrio Toba. This is one of the oldest Toba urban barrios in the province and the place where the first Iglesia Unida was founded.\(^{122}\) The bus stopped beside one of the Churches in the barrio and was immediately surrounded by relatives of the people on the bus. People greeted each other with hugs and glowing faces, while hosts started picking up bags and packages and walking them to their houses. People with no relatives in town, like us, stayed in other Evangelical Churches that hosted many people inside their buildings, and now were turned into fields of mattresses and sleeping bags. We were all staying a few blocks from each other.\(^{123}\)

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\(^{122}\) The church was created in the 1950s, and the first request of registry as a recognized “religion” was done in 1957, with aid of Mennonite missionaries.

\(^{123}\) There is no official number but some people calculated over 40 full buses had arrived, plus the local population and the people arriving on their own means it was probably an encounter of over 1500 people. The word used to refer to this meeting is “encuentro”, literally “encounter,” yet the best parallel in English is a revival meeting. I use this notion to make it clearer for the reader although it is not the ethnographic category.
There were religious services every day starting in the late afternoon outside the main church. On the first night and day, the encounter was more about music performances than about religious services. Religious music groups came one after the other for hours, with only brief introductions in between, no praying or preaching. Older men and women sat, adults and children and youth danced in homemade dance outfits: colourful jackets beat-weaved, and aprons with long strips of fabric. People danced for hours. The evenings were moments of intense joy and celebration, while mornings had quieter and more reflexive services happening inside the building of the Unida church. During music performances religious groups gave the best of their performances, people danced eagerly for hours, and in the morning preachers gave impassioned sermons which people responded to by praying in a loud voice in Toba language. On Sunday morning there was a debate about the possibility of splitting the church into two branches. The sermons calling to keep the unity made the audience respond even more energetically. People in the room uttered loud prayers and cheered “amén” in response to the
speakers. There was a lot of talk about unity, quotations from the Bible, and speeches by the sons and daughters of the deceased founding preacher of the first *Unida*. Religiosity, thus, made people feel intensely and intimately connected to their preachers, and to God who was directly addressed in people’s loud praying. People appeared to be renewing their engagement not only to God and the *Unida*, but also to one and other.  

The meeting also generated social intensity beyond the services and religious activities. All of us shared days of living in intense proximity with each other, something that created an unusual and intense sociability. The everyday rhythm was reorganized for locals too as their “homes” became crowded places. “Us” visitors went to sleep and woke up with people we had never met before. Hosts shared food and mate with us, and hosts and visitors alike lined up to use the washroom. There was hardly any space or moment to be alone. This intense and tactile coexistence generated chances to share stories, to make plans, or just to get to know each other. Homes had also turned into extroverted places as people came in and out, or sat on the doorway to chat. From the inside of the houses people invited people passing by to share mate, and every morning as we walked to the church people from the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires invited us to meet their relatives and chat. I met many of the people I knew from other travels to Toba *villages* and barrios, all of them not only active evangelicals but also community organizers or teachers.  

The spatial proximity, thus, created every possibility to reconnect with relatives and acquaintances. Apart from lively talk and catching up about life, joking and passing information about other family members, we saw people engaged in pragmatic activities, such as handing over big packages of handicrafts to be sold in Buenos Aires, engaging in updates about land

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124 The intensity seemed to have a role both keeping people and Churches together against dissolution and competition with each other. By intensity I mean the degree of transformation of capacities.
conflicts, plans for sending supplies to a remote village, among other activities. Being there physically, moving around randomly, being open to put aside plans, stop, say hi, and make new plans was a central part of the encounter and everyone was involved in this type of unplanned reconnecting. People who have been out of touch got back together and had time to catch up and make plans for future collaborations. This happened for example when Nicanor from the barrio in Buenos Aires made plans with his sister and schoolteacher Leticia to send second hand items to the school where she works in a rural village not far from Saenz Peña. People who had tensions with others had the possibility to drift apart and give some air to the relation and form new ones. This happened for example when Octavio, a musician from Rosario I met in my first trip and found again the first night of the encounter, dissolved one group and got invitations to join new music groups (interestingly all of these music groups joined people from different localities, which made travel to rehearse and play a basic dynamic). Further these meetings allowed for completely new connections to emerge. Meeting up is, in sum, an action recreating existing connections and creating new ones.

The meeting in Saenz Peña was not just a gathering of people, but also of several assemblages coming together. The families on the bus do not regularly work together and, in fact, compete with and gossip about each other. In addition, in the encounter there were several collaborators as the people from the van who traveled with us, Mennonite missionaries who have lived in the Chaco and worked with the Unida for decades, and even more, anthropologist such as Mariana and myself. In the intense sociability new relations could emerge between all of these groups. Furthermore, the encounter was effective because it joined heterogeneous elements and different assemblages in relatively horizontal relations, what Deleuze and Guattari call rhizomatic associations. There were no specific rules or agents coordinating the encounters. Each element
during the encounter could connect and reconnect with any other in the horizontal relations that
the intense life in common had created during those days. For example, there was no restricted or
exclusive use of places and everyone could walk in and out of all locations. Everybody circulated
on the same streets, and shared the same open places of the church, the soccer field and the
churches turned into accommodations. In addition, houses were not private spaces but open to
guests and any visitor who, for example, needed water or to use a washroom. The only forms of
separation were when, for example, preachers met with each other, or when musicians took turns
on the stage.

These new connections do not just recreate assemblages as stable formations performing the
same action through time. Rather by enfolding new elements or by changing the relations
between elements, they changed the type of activity an assemblage could perform. For example,
Nicacor and Leticia have always been in touch as siblings, but in this encounter they decided that
Nicanor would start sending second hand items from Buenos Aires to Leticia’s school, instead of
sending everything to their mother. Leticia offered, in turn, to take care of Nicanor’s teenage son,
Julian, in his home and school (I will describe this bellow). They were, thus, reshaping their
relationship as adult siblings into more complex forms of collaboration, and by doing so they
were reshaping the assemblage that is created when objects are distributed. Now Nicanor would
help children in Leticia’s school to have access to school supplies, and, thus, that meeting up in
the encounter would extend, among others, what the children in Leticia’s school could do by
having new pencils and books.

These (re)connections were also possible because the religious meeting garnered
heterogeneous and multiple forms of relations including religion, sociability, and also youth
socialization. I identified a new level of heterogeneity in the encounter when I found out that
many of the youth on our bus had not traveled to attend the religious event but rather to play and watch a soccer tournament. The tournament took place that same weekend, and just beside the church, and gathered a large number of teams composed of Toba youth and adult men coming each form different villages and barrios. The tournament further attracted a lot of fans who instead of attending the religious services hung out around the field watching the games. In each Toba village and barrio I have visited I have seen these soccer matches between local teams playing against neighbouring Toba teams. However, I had never seen a tournament joining several of these teams together in the same place. This called my attention for another issue too.

The Unida openly condemns soccer. Most evangelical people say that if you are creyente (“a believer”) you cannot play soccer because the sport is connected with vicios (“vices.”) Indeed, during most matches the people who gather around the field gamble, drink beer, and smoke, which are all activities that Unida members are supposed to avoid in order to be true Christians. Therefore, most people who are evangelical argue that soccer is a form of joda (“partying”), a transgression of religious life that no church member should participate in. Only a few people active in the Unida play soccer and explain they never engage in the after-sport activities, and thus make a distinction between the sport and the afterwards “partying.”

Yet the tournament seemed to be openly connected with the religious event, creating a peaceful tension between both events. We learned that this tournament was not new. Rather it is an ongoing, parallel event to the anniversary of the United Evangelical church. I call the relations a peaceful tension because on the one hand the soccer tournament was openly accepted, yet when I asked about this, nobody wanted to talk about it with me. The silence implied that while the

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125 Citro (2009) has pointed to the way the church services in eastern Chaco are a place of socialization of youth. She shows how especially through dance young men and women look to attract each other, and find a partner.
tournament was accepted (and was necessary to attract youth and non believers to the encounter), it was in tension with some fundamental religious ideas and created a contradiction religious people were not willing to discuss with me. Nobody remembered when it had started but most people agreed it had been going on for a long time and each year became bigger. When I discussed the tournament with youth they replied naturally and talked about how much fun the tournament was, what a competitive event it was and how great it was to meet players from all over in one spot.

During the weekend, the two events coexisted quite peacefully and were almost integrated into each other. The importance of the tournament as part of the encounter was manifested, for example, when adults and religious people from the barrio commented to me how important this tournament is, for it is the biggest encounter of soccer teams from Toba communities, and is one where you could watch famous (within the Toba teams) players in action. While the rest of the year Toba teams may travel regionally for different games, this was the only moment in which they all came together in one place and competed against one and other. One afternoon during the encounter I walked beside a match with religious people, and they made me stop to show me which were the best players. Other evangelical people commented on the fact that Toba players played barefoot and thus were tougher than ordinary ones. In addition, I learned that some families had been able to drag their teenage children to the religious encounter only because of the tournament. Parents were pleased with this coexistence of activities, and preferred that the youths were hanging out close by and under their attentive eyes. Parents did not stop the youth from getting drunk or “hooking up” with each other, and only intervened if there was a fight or a youth got too drunk. The soccer event, thus, did not create major spatial or social tensions with the church meeting, and in fact added to its social intensity by creating a parallel form of
socialization that was entangled with it.

But the subtle tensions were also expressed to me in small complaints about the amount of alcohol being sold and consumed around the field. Because many players were sleeping in the Churches turned into common sleeping-rooms around the main church and soccer field, players shared the space with families attending the religious meeting. A woman I met in the encounter explicitly told me that because the players were partying all night she had been unable to sleep. Players had woken up the children several times while drunk and speaking in a loud voice, and the children were scared. To avoid problems the lights in the church beside the soccer field had been kept on all night, which made families sleeping there feel safer but also made it harder to sleep (lights were off in the church I was sleeping at, which was a few blocks away from the field, and hosted no players).

The coexistence between the soccer tournament and the religious encounter was another indication that what was being reassembled in this event was not just the Unida church, or extended families, or a Toba ethnic identity, but also different assemblages and relations of collaboration across space. But while some forms of connectivity were relatively smooth, others could turn into what Deleuze and Guattari called lines of deterritorialization, that is, lines extending the action of an assemblage into new relations and activities. Yet, as these authors note these extensions can threaten an assemblage’s organization and unity (1987: 504). It was only because of this tournament, for example, that Julian, Nicanor’s son who was then 14 and a school dropout from the barrio in Buenos Aires, agreed to travel with his family. While he told me that he traveled “to party,” his parents used the trip to discuss with Leticia, his aunt (and the accomplished schoolteacher I mentioned earlier) the possibility of sending him to live with her in a rural village close to Saenz Peña, so he could go back to school. By letting him party around
during the religious meeting Julian was also mingling with other youth from Leticia’s village and getting to know his cousins better. Thus the soccer tournament was helping him to socialize and to be willing to move and live with his aunt. By enfolding la joda in to the religious encounters, the spatial and social traction of the religious encounter was extended. If the youths had been reprimanded for playing soccer, or prevented from hanging out, or disciplined for drinking alcohol, they would have likely not traveled, and the encounter would have probably missed a large part of the demographics of young people and non-believers. The soccer tournament between Toba teams allowed the reach of the encounter to extend and the multiplicity of relations converging in the encounter conversely allowed the spatiality and productivity of assemblages to extend too.

The extension and reconnection also had a temporal dimension. Temporalities, along with the effort needed to reproduce them, are aspects of assemblages that are left unexamined in Deleuze and Guattari’s work, but in the Unida encounter these dimensions were clear. By fuelling people’s determination to arrive in Saenz Peña, allowing people living apart to (re)connect, the assemblages created by Toba families extended in time and against the tendencies of dissolution. It did not matter if the people would continue to collaborate with the same people, or if they continued to work in the same way. What seems to matter is that the connections they create across space are recreated, that the Unida keeps adherence of people and remains as one institution joining multiple Churches across space, that families have members willing to help each other while living apart, that youth party and play soccer but close to adults, among others.

However, these spatial and temporal extensions created by bringing together heterogeneous elements, some of which are in tension with each other, also implied a risk. The line of deterritorialization created by the soccer tournament was also a threat to the encounters’ peaceful
and joyful atmosphere. As I mentioned some evangelical people were uncomfortable with the amount of alcohol being sold and the people getting drunk. The soccer tournament was also a potential threat to the commitment of evangelical people to avoid vices. Potentially, evangelical people could stay watching soccer all night long, miss the religious services and “fall” into la joda. Or soccer players could fight with each other and break the safe environment in which parents allowed older children (older than 6) to be up until late playing by themselves around the church. This coexistence, thus, had points of tension that could become a threat to connections and even imply their dissolution. If too many people get annoyed with the soccer tournament, or if drunk people start fighting with each other, the tournament could potentially be separated from the encounter. If the tournament was suspended, then youth and adults engaging in la joda would not be part of it.

The Unida church and the meetings it organizes, in sum, are a central component of assemblages, which works by (re)connecting people, objects, and relations, bringing them together and reproducing them through time. Intense and direct contact with God, but also a chance to see relatives, provided a strong motivation for people to attend every service and stay up at night. Yet, the encounter was intense because it was more than a religious activity; it was a time of intensity of sharing an everyday life, and socialization. The encounter’s intensity was also a result of the heterogeneous relations entangled in it, including the soccer games. The heterogeneous elements had more potentialities to (re)connect because they met up in one place organized around horizontal relations promoting unregulated meeting up of people. The recreation of relations was thus not an actualization of every single line of connection. Rather,
assemblages reconstituted through time with variations.\textsuperscript{126} The elements connected together and in some cases the activities changed in regards to specific needs and circumstances (as was the example of Nicanor, Leticia and Julian’s reconnections). What was maintained was a collaboration across space and across relations that link together Toba people and collaborators.

At the end of the religious meeting on Sunday afternoon, there was a sleepy atmosphere that revealed the physically demanding intensity of the encounter, and how tiring the process of reconnecting the elements of an assemblage is. By late afternoon on Sunday, we were ready to go back to Buenos Aires. We said good-bye to our hosts and headed to where the bus was parked. This time, there was no need to call people out as we got on the bus very slowly. Relatives waived good-bye as the bus drove out of the barrio. When the bus moved away from the barrio there was an immediate silence all around us. A few minutes later, most of us were murmuring prayers or asleep.\textsuperscript{127}

**Controlling Multiple Places: Extensive Associations**

Most of the connections created by people between the Toba villages, the urban barrios and the people who collaborate with them are temporary arrangements. They can be activated in regards to specific activities and situations, such as the distribution of donated items, and may then become inactive for some time. But some families try to keep a constant activity across space and across relations. They create networks through which people can access multiple places simultaneously. An example of this includes Andrea’s and Antonia’s extended family, which has

\textsuperscript{126} In my other trips with people form the barrio the church enabled our mobility too. For example, during Martin’s long visit to his relatives in the city of Castelli we stayed with his relatives who were also preachers.

\textsuperscript{127} The trip back was also marked by an unexpected tragedy. An 8 year old girl who had remained in Buenos Aires was begging for food on the streets when she was run over by a bus. People got the news through text messages. During our trip back many people were crying and took turns to pray for the girl.
created an assemblage organized around Gustavo and Laura, Andrea’s parents, and their eight adult children, who are spread across different places where they live or own properties. The spatial reach of this network includes several farms in the area of Bermejito, the town of Bermejito, the barrio Toba of Resistencia (all of them in the province of Chaco), the barrio Toba in Buenos Aires and for a few years also Brussels, when one of the brothers married a Belgium missionary and moved there with her. While I cannot thoroughly describe all the relations assembled from these places, in what follows I give an account of how this assemblage operated during a trip when I joined Andrea in a visit to her parents’ farm in Bermejito.

The trip from Buenos Aires to Bermejito started with last minute travel arrangements on my part. I was initially going to travel to Bermejito with Antonia and her husband, on a trip they had planned with a school from Buenos Aires to “help indigenous communities.” I would then stay with Andrea, who was also traveling that week to visit their family (it was school winter break and thus a popular time for travel). Because the middle class school cancelled at the last minute, I made my own travel arrangements and travelled with a colleague, Patricia, an Ethno-historian working in the area. While on the bus, I text messaged Andrea to tell her that our bus was arriving the next morning, and in a sequence of messages she told us what to do the next day. What I saw as an obstacle in my fieldwork, because I would not get to travel with people from the barrio, ended up being an enlightening experience, as I could see how they organized my trip to the farm. In her text messages, Andrea explained that when we arrived in Castelli, the destination of the long-distance bus, we would have to take a second bus to get to the town of Bermejito. But this bus only leaves in the late afternoon and arrives in Bermejito after sunset. Because traveling to the farm at night is very difficult, Andrea instructed us to spend the night at her parents’ house in town. One of her brothers would be waiting for us.
We did as told, and when we arrived in Bermejito we looked for the house (as she put it) “close to the Municipality” by asking around for her family’s name. Andreas’ brother, Javier and his wife were waiting for us and had everything organized for us. We had a bed to share; there was mate and bread for the evening and a bucket of water for a bath. Javier had also arranged with a remise driver to take us to the family farm the following day and had contacted one of his brothers who needed a ride to come with us. We had dinner, went to bed, and early the next day we were on our way to the farm. Since the start of my trip I was able to see the coordinated work of the family. Andrea did not just leave it up to me to get to the farm but calculated the timing of the buses and asked her brother to host us. Her brother was ready in advance and had also coordinated with another brother to get to the farm. They planned all this mobility very efficiently with detailed instructions to the remise driver, his brother, and myself through complex text messages.

![Figure 9: The central fire on the farm. Photo by the author.](image)

On the farm we were happy to meet Andrea, her partner, and their children, who told us with a huge smile in their face that they were “having an amazing time.” Her parent's farm was a plot of 4 hectares. The place has an small evangelical church, in the front and closer to a dirt road,
and four one-bedroom houses, each of them adobe-brick houses except for one made of red bricks (the one Andrea was living at). Andrea’s father is the preacher of this church. He built it with the help of his followers, and had its perimeter surrounded by a wire fence. Behind the church, the biggest house was an adobe house were Gustavo and Laura, Andrea's parents lived. “They could have a brick and cement house but prefer the mud one”, Andrea explained to me. As on most Toba farms, the kitchen was a separate and open construction consisting of a hay roof with no walls and a big table. Beside it, there was a big fire that was almost always on, heating water or cooking food for all people in the different houses. The fireplace, surrounded by chairs, was also the meeting place where we all socialized at the end of the day, engaged in conversations that lasted several hours. The rest of the farm was a bushy field with goats and a small vegetable garden for their own consumption that Laura took care of. The area where the farm is located is a semi-arid forest with sandy soil and low trees. The land is divided in a series of small farms organized around several dirt roads. Almost nobody on those farms owns a car and people move back and forth on bikes and motorcycles. Biking 15 minutes towards the Bermejito River everything became greener, and the bushes and trees were denser and higher. The sides of the river are open to everyone and have no farm division. People go to this area to hunt and fish.

That weekend Gustavo was waiting for the arrival of a big donation of used clothes from Buenos Aires that Antonia had coordinated (from the school that could not travel). On Saturday families from the area gathered around the church waiting for the arrival of the boxes. Gustavo was, thus, in charge of the other end of managing the “help” I discussed in the previous chapter, by distributing objects in rural Chaco arriving from middle class houses in Buenos Aires. But these were not the only actions they coordinated.
When we arrived on the farm, everything was organized for our visit too: a brother had moved out of his house into a bush house on the other side of the river to give the space to Andrea and her family. Patricia and I slept inside the church. Andrea’s mother, Laura, baked bread and asked one of her son’s to look for wild honey in the bush, which we had for breakfast every morning. A day later, Andrea’s brothers looked for one of their cows in the bush and butchered it so we all had fresh meat.

They gave us bikes for Patricia and myself to move around, and by drawing on the dusty ground they explained to us the location of places to visit during our stay. During the day we explored different places on the bikes: the bush, the high school founded by Belgian missionaries that Andrea and Antonia attended when they were young, and the river. Beto, Andrea’s 13 year old and youngest brother, guided us on his bike while other children (including Andrea’s son, who was a visitor from the city like us) joined us in exploring the area. In our explorations we followed some of the connections this family maintains to different places: a fire station where, Beto explained, Gustavo is a collaborator; the river that delimits one of the boundaries of the 140,000 hectares of land obtained after long struggles by the Toba Land Association\textsuperscript{128} Gustavo is a member of; the high-school built by Belgium missionaries that Andrea and Antonia attended; an area of forest where a cow belonging to one of Andrea’s brother had been lost and that everyone in the family helped to look for.

\textsuperscript{128} This is a pseudonym. I attended a meeting of the Land Association on an earlier trip and they explicitly requested I restricted my work to the families who had invited me. They were suspicious I wanted to extract a deep history of the communities without their permission.
Laura contacted another of her sons, Gregorio, living on the other shore of the Bermejito River so that we could visit what they called the *el monte* (“the bush”), see the goatherds, and learn about the history of that land\textsuperscript{129}. The day of our visit we left early in the morning and more children than usual joined us, most of them Andrea’s young cousins. Beto guided us to the point of the river where Gregorio was waiting for us with a small rowboat, and we crossed in three groups. On the other side of the river Gregorio and Julia, his wife were waiting for us, by a big and well-kept pen with over 30 goats. Beside it, there was a small shack, and an outside kitchen. Everything was recently built and the vegetation around the buildings was thick. On this other side of the river everything was “wilder”: there was no road, only trails. Construction tools had to be brought on the boats and then by foot. Houses were temporary shacks, and there was no presence of the state or any other institution (no school or church could be found).

While Gregorio took the herd for a feed, Julia and their daughters showed us around and

\textsuperscript{129} El monte is a relative category expressing degrees of rurality of a place. In my earlier work I found that Toba people living in the city talk about rural villages indistinctly as “monte” but when I travelled to these rural villages I found that the places where the houses and farms are located are distinguished from the wilder areas of forest, marshlands and riverside which constitute the “monte” from that location (see Vivaldi 2007).
walked with us to a second shack and pen deeper in the bush. The bush around the trail we walked was dense and at some points Julia had to use her machete to open up the path. On our way back we walked a different trail in the bush instead of by the river, and passed by a lagoon where the older children told me they usually fish. We finally walked past an old criollo settlement that was now abandoned and had an old pen and a decaying shack. The soil there had been much more eroded by the goats and people, showing a longer occupation in contrast to the newer structures Gregorio and Julia had built. The place had a ghostly atmosphere. The children told me about an old man who died there and insisted I take a photograph of them beside a goat skull hung on a spike that, they said, they found strange.

Figure 11: The children posing by a skull in the ruins of a criollo farm. Photo by the author.

Walking around that area and seeing the new homes and fences that Gregorio and another brother had built revealed how that place had been shaped and occupied by that family. In the small tour, Julia seemed to have made a point in showing us the criollo settlement in ruins, which contrasted to their lively pens. This place across the Bermejito River was therefore a spatial extension of the assemblage that family had created over several years, one extension they had only recently created but that they had very efficiently incorporated to their control. Also Laura
had made a strong case that we had to go there and see those lands. Gregorio and Julia were clearly proud of their work in them as they showed us around and highlighted what they had built. By walking around those paths, opening the trails with the machete, and showing the area to two PhD students from Buenos Aires they were also reclaiming that place as their own. They were also reaffirming their control over an extended spatiality as this nuclear family lives simultaneously in the town of Bermejito, the more settled farm, and in the shack in the bush.

We met with Gregorio back in the first pen to drink mate and chat. He explained the history of how the Toba Land Association obtained the titling of 140,000 hectares (including those lands across the river) back in the 1990s. During the land struggle, the indigenous leaders had made several agreements with the criollo population of the area. Both groups had agreed to fight for obtaining land titles together, but the criollo consented to relocate elsewhere so that the Toba could have one unified common land. However, the relocation of the criollo families had not been easy, for (as the ruins showed) they had lived in the area for many decades and these families on the other shore of the river did not want to leave. Gregorio was part of the people who were gradually occupying those lands by building pens and bringing their own cattle while they smoothly pressured the remaining criollos to move out. Only that year in 2010 and after almost 15 years of the land titling, the criollo families from the other shore had moved out.

Gregorio also gave us an overview of the Toba Land Association. The association has the legal status of an indigenous association and is the entity that owns the land, registered as indigenous in one communal land title. This legal figure is the same as the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires with the difference that this Association is registered in the province of Chaco and is a complex political unity managing a vast extension of land, and joining more than 20 Toba villages whose leaders have to administer this land together. All 20 leaders meet periodically to
decide, for example, whether to give permits to wood companies for forest exploitation, a topic that divided leaders who have different positions. Another topic he raised was the paradox of having communal indigenous land. On the one hand, that legal status guarantees the land will never be expropriated (by for example a bank reclaiming the payment of a loan), but this makes it impossible to get credit to make the lands productive.

The process of land titling in the early 1990s, had been possible thanks to the support of a catholic church related NGO and Belgium evangelical missionaries (see Carrasco and Briones 1996). These organizations helped in the legal negotiation with the state and in the measuring of the land for their titling, and had funded the school Andrea attended. These organizations were still connected and in the early 2000s the group of Belgian missionaries had developed a big education project with international funding that trained indigenous youth as journalists and created a local radio station. The activities had spurred collaborations, for example, in Bermejito I met a Toba young man who was receiving help from Belgium association to go and study medicine in Cuba to then come back to work as a doctor for the area. The group Toba Art that I mentioned in the previous chapter collaborated with young journalists trained during this project and who are now young leaders.

Carmen, one of the older sisters, liked to live on the farm and had a house and cattle across the river. But she also had a house in the town of Bermejito, where they spent the weekdays so that her children could go to school. Many days a week, her husband bikes for two hours to the plot on the other side of the river to take care of the goats, stays overnight and returns when he can take a break and some family member comes to cover for him. Other times he spends the week there and just waits for the weekend when his wife and children can join him. All of them, even the ones living in the city, have plots of land with pens and cattle in the area. The brothers
who live in the villages take turns to care for the plots and animals of all the siblings, including the ones living in the town that may not be able to attend to their cattle everyday. But also nuclear families such as Carmen and Gregorio live across different houses, moving on a daily bases between them. While Carmen and Julia live mostly in the town so children can attend school, they also spend many nights in the farm and in the shacks in the bush. During our visit we saw siblings and in laws coming and going on their motor bikes and bikes, text messaging, taking turns to caring for the herds, helping with lost cattle, or building a fence. They also coordinated taking everyone’s cellphones every two days to charge their batteries, given none of the farms has electricity. The men especially moved constantly between the town, the farms, and the bush. They were in constant communication and their work was coordinated with each other’s. The connections were constantly recreated and activated through meetings, text massages, and by sending siblings to help each other out.

A few days after our arrival, Antonia, her husband, and one of their teenage daughters arrived from Buenos Aires in their car. But after spending the day with us on the farm, they went back to sleep to their house in Bermejito (they own a house in the town that another of Andrea’s siblings occupies). When Antonia and her family were on the farm, they visibly presented themselves as urban people, wearing carefully ironed and very clean light-coloured clothes. Their embodied demeanour seemed to make clear that they would not engage in rural work, unlike Andrea and her husband who had “blended in” the farm and its rhythms and helped with cooking and the fire, helped with the cattle and had gone hunting. Andrea’s children were also happily integrated into the farm, carrying baby goats (and convincing their parents to let them sleep with them) and playing in the bushes with their cousins the whole time. In contrast, Antonia, her husband, and teenage daughter, seemed to embody a stereotypical urban subjectivity that rejected the idea of
getting dirty, working with animals, and smelling like firewood. However, none of this was a topic of conversation and, for example, Andrea and her mother Laura, never criticized her sister for being “urban”, nor did Antonia criticise the manners of farm life. When I asked why Antonia did not sleep in the farm, Andrea replied “Antonia prefers to sleep in town,” as if it was an obvious event.

Through my participation in the coordinated work of Andrea’s siblings in different places I began seeing how this assemblage was organized. The coordinated work is organized around the extended family that is spread out across rural Bermejito, towns and cities in the Chaco, and the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires. The assemblage also connects heterogeneous social relations such as missionary work from a Belgian NGO, Toba evangelical practice, farming, the educational system, and land struggles on the legal domain. It also includes a multiplicity of objects and non-human living forms such as cattle, the bush, the river, and second-hand clothes. On that weekend, the emergent actions this family managed was, among others, hosting Andrea’s and Antonia’s family (each of whom had different needs), hosting me and my colleague and making sure we had access to “research relevant” experiences, managing the boxes of donations arriving from Buenos Aires, making plans about the use of the “new” lands on the other side of the river, taking care of a number of groups of goats and cows and finding one of their cows which was lost in the bush, managing houses and adults so that school-aged children could move to town to attend school, and making it possible for older children to attend the mission high-school, in addition to other activities I probably missed. All these actions brought together an assemblage formed by adults and children: houses, shacks and fences; boats and goats; travelling boxes of second-hand clothes; motorcycles and bikes; cellphones; religious teaching, help from groups of the middle class in Buenos Aires, and land titles (among other elements). By connecting together
these elements, the diversity of actions I described was produced.

The assemblages did not just connect different places but also incorporated the simultaneous different relations coming together in each place. In Buenos Aires, Antonia and Andrea had linked to people of the middle class who approach the barrio “to help” and have worked with researchers. Further, Andrea was involved in multiple projects, and had been trained as a health assistant, as a Toba language workshop coordinator, and as an agrarian extension agent. Antonia was mostly dedicated to indigenous handicraft making and developing workshops in schools. In the Chaco, their father Gustavo was a preacher, a political leader in the Land Association, a fire department member, and a farmer.

The spatial organization of the assemblage, in this regard, extends over multiple relations and what Massey (2005) calls spatial multiplicities. These are the spatial arrangements that result from the multiple simultaneous relations unfolding over several places, shaping and being shaped by theses relations. Massey explains “we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of the contemporaneous plurality, as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space no multiplicity; without multiplicity no space” (2005: 9). This multiplicity is fundamental for the spatiality of this Toba assemblage and the assemblages discussed so far. One of the strengths of these connections is that Gustavo, Laura and their eight children owned many properties over different locations: houses in the town of Bermejito, forest lands with cattle, houses in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires. The relevance of these properties was not only about accumulating land in rural and urban spaces. While property is relevant in positioning this family as affluent in comparison to most other Toba families, these houses spread out in different locations were also about pooling resources and relations in each of these places. The activity of granting children
access to a better school was possible because they shared the houses they had in town.

Accessing and connecting these different places simultaneously and enfolding resources from each of them, was, thus, how this assemblage could generate activity in one place or domain by activating relations from another. And they did this as a constant activity.

The simultaneous access to a multiplicity of places increased the family members’ capacity to generate actions. Activities across space were not only happening because Gustavo was the mastermind behind it all. Rather, activities implied both careful organization but also leaving people and events unmanaged. Most of the time, siblings had not been forced to act in a specific direction and rather were allowed to follow what they wanted while they kept connected to the rest. The extension over multiple places and relations was, therefore, the result of these lines of deterritorialization created by some of the siblings moving far. For example, Diego is Andrea’s sibling and schoolteacher who fell in love and married a Belgium missionary woman while she was working in the Chaco. She asked him to come back to Brussels to live there, and they moved together in the early 2000s. While Diego’s family could have tried to make him stay, since he was a respected schoolteacher with a job who could, for example, help his nieces and nephews access education, or share his salary with the rest of the family, the family presented no opposition to him moving far away. During his time in Belgium their younger sibling Nicolas had done very well at high school and was motivated to go to University. From Brussels Diego helped him apply to the Agronomy Program at the city’s University. Nicolas moved with them, learned French and started to study but he did not settle down and, thus, returned before finishing his studies. Diego then divorced, moved back to Argentina, and now works in government education programs in Resistencia. Thus, while his move risked that the family would lose a valuable member, that siblings would spread out and lose touch with one and other, instead his
move extended their connections in Europe. The point made by Massey on the simultaneity of spatial multiplicity is relevant in this case as this family manages the multiplicity by creating and recreating connections. In this management there is not a given plan but rather a constant use of the possibilities present at each time. Heterogeneity is not a problem and rather used as a possibility. Spatial difference and distance between places was used as a form of extending the capacities of all people in the assemblage Andrea and Antonia integrated. Difference for example created with Diego’s move enabled Nicola’s access to University in another country, which is quite an unusual possibility for any Toba individual born in rural Chaco. Over the weekend, I met most of Andrea’s eight siblings, who converged in the parent’s farm for a visit. During those nights adults hung out chatting by the fire for several hours catching up. I was only able to understand the role of heterogeneity within assemblages when I met all of the members of this family together in the family farm in the Chaco and I saw all the simultaneous activities they were producing together.

During the conversations by the fire, Andrea and her partner insisted on what a good time they were having there, how happy the children were, and how much they miss the bush and the river when they are in Buenos Aires. She and her partner continuously expressed the desire to move back to Bermejito. A few days after my arrival Andrea told me her father was arranging to give them a title to a plot of land in the newly recovered area on the other shore of the river, “so that she could have a place to return.” Andrea and her husband were very excited. They planned to start spending the children’s school holidays there and move permanently when the children finished school (this was going to be in a long time given their younger child was only seven
months old). Again, in this case Andrea’s desire to move back would also make a contribution to the family, as it would extend their presence over the newly recovered lands. But if she moved back to the Chaco, the presence of the assemblage in Buenos Aires would maybe become weaker as she would not be coordinating help there and sending second-hand clothes anymore. Andrea was already anticipating some of her children would probably prefer to stay and could continue their work in Buenos Aires.

Andrea’s and Antonia’s family was therefore an example of an assemblage that is constantly generating actions, recreating its connections and extending over new relations and places. This assemblage connects all these relations, people and objects together and produces something that cannot be explained in terms of only one of these elements, one space alone, or one type of relation (either “subsistence economy”, religion, ethnicity, kinship or other). This assemblage has at the centre family relations and specifically the relations between adult siblings and their parents, yet the assemblage also enfolds the help of middle class groups, several educational institutions, a land association and their legal struggles over land, a fire department, and the relations created there. The networks connect heterogeneous relations and elements by generating a stable access to spatial multiplicities, on the farms, the bush, towns, and cities, but also across the specific forms of farming, their role in religion, and indigenous leadership. These connections allowed for the emergence of activity across relations and space and created a specific territoriality, constantly extended in actions such as Gregorio’s occupation of the other side of the river or Diego’s move to Brussels. The extension of Andrea’s siblings in space in sum was not orchestrated yet was not completely random either, for it followed the rhythm of specific

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130 This was also a good option for the Lands: Gregorio explained that it was hard to find people from the town wanting to move to those lands as there are no services there.
needs, desires and activities each time.

**The Spatiality of Assemblages**

The notion of assemblage allows us to think about the heterogeneity and emergent activities that these Toba families create across space, and also puts the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires into a new light. Rather than thinking of the barrio as a unified community or a dismembered group of families, the barrio can be thought of as a place where multiple assemblages are being activated in connection and disconnection from each other at the same time. Leandro and Martin’s musical performance I referred to in Chapter 4 cannot be fully understood as an isolated event or as a dual relation between them and the school who invited them. Rather, the performance was part of a larger set of connections located beyond the barrio and beyond Buenos Aires. And yet, their performance was explicitly separated from another set of connections or assemblages such as the one Andrea, Antonia and their families constitute back in the Chaco. The disconnection, however, is not permanent. Most assemblages need moments of reconnection to extend their activity in time. Church meetings bring together different assemblages and allow the recreation of connections and creation of new ones by recombining elements of different assemblages when fragments of one move to the other.

The connections are established in unexpected ways, and do not follow one single rationale. They do connect Toba families with each other, and, yet, they do more than recreate cultural practices elsewhere or create one translocal sociality. In particular, they extend through the evangelical church and a number of other interactions such as humanitarian aid, informal associations with bus drivers, and the partying life of *la joda*. But the fact that these connections are not one form of social relation does not mean that they are “organic” occurrences, or things
that “just happened”. In all cases, there were frictions to the connections, and, therefore, there was a necessary effort and some determination needed for the connection to take place. If one important form of connecting is the travel of people, objects and information, these were not effortless movements. Movement between Chaco, Buenos Aires, and other cities presented many forms of friction that threatened to stop the connecting movement completely. There were frictions also in the occupation of rural lands as the ones Gregorio had recently claimed on the opposite shore of the Bermejito river, and occupying them have implied an effort in building pens and taking cattle there.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, I analyzed how lines of deterritorialization extend assemblages in their capacities and in the spatial reach of their activities, and how assemblages also need to extend in time. But the tensions these lines of deterritorialization generated also threatened with the rupture or dissolution of the connections and the action they generate. For example, the extensions created in Buenos Aires with the groups of the middle class who want to help the Toba, were cyclically dissolving because the Toba were not productive in the way middle class groups expected. Another way in which assemblages were recreated was the flexibility to create new associations. Thus, family members could shift their associations and choose whether to emphasize collaboration with one or other members, and to also include people such as a neighbour and a shaman. The recreation of associations with variations was therefore one form in which assemblages were extended through time. Each new association changes the spatiality of the assemblage, by connecting different elements together that in their activity produce and entangle places in new ways. To go back to the same example when Diego moved to Brussels, he did not just leave but also affected the potentialities of his siblings back in rural Chaco. In sum, when assemblages are recreated new spatial multiplicities are connected
together and also produced. This also happens each time people in the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires contact a new school or when a new religious music group is created in the annual Unida revival meeting. But the extension over space happened also when relatives spread out across multiple places while keeping them constantly engaged in collaborations, as Andrea’s family did.

In all these cases assemblages were efficient because they did not have a prefigured aim and rather served to expand the possibilities of reproduction of families based in different places. The networks that allowed the circulation of packages do not only work at an economic level. The network created by Andrea’s family does not only connect relatives because of their kinship and ethnic relations. They spread out connections in space in order to access spatial multiplicities in regard to specific activities and needs. When Andrea’s younger sibling decided to go to Brussels to study she helped him with paperwork form Buenos Aires and hosted him for several weeks in her house as he prepared to travel there. The fact she was in Buenos Aires brought them closer together. Recreating a Toba identity or culture was not the main purpose of the exchange of goods, the religious encounter or the actions of the families, but rather to extend people’s actions in a given assemblage. Yet these actions as they are recreated between Toba people do contribute to recreating identities and cultural practices (that are always heterogeneous and in dialogue).

People’s capacities are extended within the assemblage by incorporating (enfolding) heterogeneous elements from different places (a farm in Bermejito, a barrio in Buenos Aires, a house in Resistencia), different institutions (school, religion, transport), and assembling heterogeneous practices (taking care of cattle and fields, helping children attend school, evangelical teachings and redistribution of donated items arriving from Buenos Aires).

The spatial connections created by these Toba assemblages do not form, therefore, a subaltern spatiality that is only external to dominant political regulation, and as an effect of being excluded...
from civil society (see Guha 1983). I have shown these assemblages are not inside/outside of
government institutions, discipline or governmental control and in them there is no “pure”
resistance, resilience, or escape. There are lines of subordination that transverse these
assemblages, such as Martin and Leandro’s position as part of an urban unemployed class that
pushes them to be very careful in administering the food they get as a donation. Assemblages
extract elements from those relations and turn them into something different, even if only
temporarily by making them work together. Thus they create a subaltern spatiality that
reconnects and redirects relations into new activities and purposes. This takes place in the
context of big social and political constraints such as unemployment, land displacement in the
Chaco, lack of resources to turn farms in the Chaco into productive enterprises beyond mere
subsistence, and institutional exclusion. Yet, Martin’s encounter with his neighbour after the
music performance put him in a position where he was able to help her, in a form of solidarity
that would be otherwise invisible and unreachable to the middle class people who donated the
second-hand clothes. The assemblages Toba people create do not resist or subvert power but
rather enfold resources, redirect relations and institutional practices, and spatialize them in new
productive ways.
Conclusion

One afternoon sitting in his yard in Buenos Aires, Lorenzo told me about one time when, as a teenager, he got lost in the bush in the area of Las Palmas, Chaco. He was looking for firewood and got disoriented. He knew that forest very well so he kept on walking and looking for a familiar landmark. He finally encountered the river, but when he reached the riverbank instead of finding a familiar shoreline he was confronted with something that made him shiver. Through a thick fog he saw a gigantic metal bridge crossing the river that was unlike anything he had seen before. It was also in the middle of nowhere, far from any roads or villages. “I could feel there was something wrong. … It was a phantom bridge!!” he explained. When he overcame the surprise, he walked away and somehow made it back home.

![Puente Transbordador Nicolás Avellaneda](image)

*Figure 12: Puente Transbordador Nicolás Avellaneda. By Richie Diesterheft from Chicago, IL. Creative Commons.*

He continued telling me that several years later, on one of his first days in Buenos Aires, he
went for a walk around Isla Maciel, near the villa where he was living. When he reached the Riachuelo River, he saw it again, “There it was! The bridge I had seen in the Chaco years earlier was there!” He was referring to the iconic bridge called the Transbordador Nicolás Avellaneda that connects the barrio of La Boca with Isla Maciel. While the bridge was shut down in the 1960s, its massive structure is still a salient feature of the barrio of La Boca and a postcard image of Buenos Aires. It is indeed an unusual engineering construction: a transporter bridge composed of two towers and a high connecting structure that holds a suspending cart (big enough to carry several buses and cars) that moved from one shore of the river to the other. It was inaugurated in 1914 and is one of the few bridges of this kind in the world. It was another attempt by the Argentinean elites to turn Buenos Aires into a European-like, civilized, modern and white city. For Lorenzo, the bridge was one of the amazing features of the city that soon became part of his experience, for he too had to cross the river everyday to go to work in the Port of Buenos Aires.

The apparition of the bridge many years earlier when he was in the Chaco was therefore anticipatory and part of shamanic forms of knowledge that shape the bush as a site of encounters with non human beings, encounters that have a specific intensity and can both harm or kill or empower the person experiencing it (see Tola 2012). It represented for Lorenzo, in the Chaco, an image of his future in Buenos Aires and revealed an entanglement of trajectories: Lorenzo searching for firewood, his uncle waiting for him to cook dinner in the village after a long day of work in the sugar plantation, the forest, the river and the bridge from Buenos Aires. In this apparition, space became a new multiplicity, bringing together the forest in which Toba people are still in relative control, and an industrial structure made to interconnect both sides of a river. But this was a ghostly bridge in the middle of the bush, with no roads or trails connecting it to other places, and as an apparition it was only available to Toba people like himself. The vision
disconnected the bridge from Buenos Aires and the mobility of *porteños* and anchored it in the Chaco; it suggests that in the Chaco, too, indigeneity is entangled with urban areas. The bridge creates, in a ghostly form, a spatial multiplicity and an assemblage that brings together very different types of objects producing a new activity.

Lorenzo’s memory of that apparition, in other words, condenses this dissertation’s three main themes: space as entanglement and multiplicity; the urban dimensions of indigeneity, and the productivity of subaltern spatialities that operate as assemblages.

In this dissertation, I have suggested that space is multiple not because the spatiality that the Toba create is a mosaic-like collection of discrete places to which people are connected by choice or by power. Rather space is multiple because multiple relations including both regulations and forms of a life in common unfold at the same time in different places. Places themselves are therefore shaped by multiple and superposed spatialities produced by patterns of mobility. Multiplicity means that there is always an excess of relations that remain outside the entangled and layered forms of regulation of people in space, as there is never one technology or one form of habits efficient in controlling all space simultaneously and any place completely. Thus, for example, while perceptions of “authenticity” have shaped how the Barrio Toba is perceived by middleclass people of European background, there is much in the barrio that escapes those relations. In space, therefore, relations overflow any attempt at macro or reticular regulation, but their inevitable entanglement also makes impossible any attempt to completely escape or create a “pure” alternative space.

The same way that it is not possible to understand places in isolation, I found that it is not possible to conceive of absolutely “free” or absolutely conditioned mobility. Historically the movements of Toba people have been regulated by their subordinations to the Argentinean State,
and by the evictions and displacements generated by the expansion of the agricultural frontier. But Toba people’s movement from one village to the other to visit relatives, to search for alternatives to exploitative jobs on sugar or cotton plantations, or escaping difficult personal situations was also a form of creating new possibilities: relative lines of flight to move away from difficult situations. As we have seen, the patterns of movement examined in this dissertation imply different forms of friction created by forms of exclusion that slowed down and/or prevented people’s access to particular places. But some of these frictions are also productive of new relations and collaborations. For instance, the trip on an old bus from Buenos Aires to a religious meeting in Saenz Peña faced interruptions that nonetheless led to productive collaborations between Toba people in the barrio, the bus drivers, police officers willing to be flexible with formal regulations, and people from the middle class that gained traction and enabled their movement to continue in spite of those obstacles. But friction was also created in the disruptions of those regulations, for instance when some Toba people, together with other residents, resisted evictions from shantytowns. Thus, movement implied effort, and there was always the possibility of being stopped. But slowing down or being stopped was never an equivalent to disempowerment, like movement and speed were not equal to major possibilities.

Thinking of Toba people’s aboriginality as produced through movements within and beyond the city of Buenos Aires has implied recognizing that Indigenous People have always already been part of Buenos Aires. While the Toba were not there since the beginning of the city, they did get entangled with the non-white trajectories shaping the city. The traces of a non-white Buenos Aires have not been difficult to find. This city, after all, was built on indigenous land and with indigenous labour, and autonomous Indigenous People lived in their own territories not far from Buenos Aires until the late 18th century (see for example Mandrini 1984). While the
presence of self-identified Indigenous People was largely erased in the twentieth century as a result of the efforts to Europeanize and whiten Buenos Aires, the migration of Toba people from the Chaco added yet another component to the presence of the non-white poor (the cabecitas and negros) in the spatial makeup of the city.

When the Toba arrived in Buenos Aires this was far from being white and was rather already an heterogeneous city made up of Afroargentines, Indigenous People, and mixed race populations also migrating from rural areas. The Toba’s presence became regulated in regards to the divisions between these groups and thus experience became immediately entangled with the forms of spatial organization of non-white bodies in Buenos Aires. They too became non-whites and “thrown together” in the villas. The racialization of Toba people, as I have argued, was not an accident, but the product of a racialized national project whose purpose was to erase these others and “whiten” the population (Ko 2009; Alberto and Elena 2015). By examining racialization as an entry point for understanding the aboriginality that these people created in the city, I have been able to explore the potentialities of thinking of Buenos Aires as a city also shaped by the non-white. While the Toba came from outside the city, their urban aboriginality got entangled with other non-whites experience, as well as with the traces of the past history of a non-white Buenos Aires that is evident across its urban space. For some Toba those connections became so significant that they chose to stay in a villa and inhabit that space of encounters and claim that as both Tobas and as people from the villa they, too, are part of Buenos Aires.

On the other hand, I have also shown in this thesis that Toba people sought to redefine how they were racialized by other actors, primarily by seeking to create what I have called “a different shade of non-whiteness”: i.e., using to their advantage exotic images of “Indians” cherished by the porteño middle-classes. In doing so, they fulfilled the expectations of a
neoliberal multiculturalism seeking to grant special rights to authentic groups. Toba families thus moved from being racialized as non-whites, a category including recognition of “traces of indigeneity” as constitutive, to an aboriginality of exemplary authenticity, that government and the middle class can and needs to save. It was in the interactions with teachers, professionals, researchers, the catholic church, and NGOs that the Toba shaped their porteño aboriginality. In these interactions, Toba men and women learned to select from their experience what was seen as constitutive of their authenticity as “Toba Indians.” They learned that their experience as workers in the port or as inhabitants of villas, or the desire of the youth to become professional soccer players like Carlos Tevez, was beyond the criteria of authenticity cultivated by the Buenos Aires middle-class and government recognition, and therefore tended to silence those dimensions in their public depictions of themselves. These interactions restricted the options of indigeneity available to them but also enabled new encounters and new ways of accessing the city.

Thinking about aboriginality from the city, as I proposed here, does not mean only considering the Chaco as the source of an indigenous essence that was then displaced and recreated in Buenos Aires. To consider the city itself as produced by non-white groups in which the Toba were entangled implies that the Toba’s experience was also shaped by their connection to forms of indigeneity already present in the city.

For the Toba people, developing a porteño aboriginality implied creating a new conviviality with “people from everywhere” in the villas, a process that in fact created an urban subjectivity at odds with notions of authenticity that restrict indigeneity to the recreation of connections to the Chaco. For the Toba youth, their urban indigeneity was shaped in new original ways by their engagement with youth culture in the villas, in the experience of young women developing
entrepreneurial practices through the sale and resale of clothes, and by some young men’s embrace of hip hop, among other new developments.

To regard Buenos Aires as a site of indigeneity implies thinking about how people at the Barrio Toba shape the space of the Chaco too, and problematizing the notions that continue to take for granted rurality as a source of indigenous identity, organization and cultural creativity. People who ended up in the city were moved by chance, but also by a desire to be part of the vibrant and rich city they had heard about. Later, through the flow of donated second-hand clothes that reach villages in rural areas, the city also contributed to the recreation of life and the extension of consumption habits in the Chaco, as well as the idea that Buenos Aires overflows with consumption objects. The interactions with middle-class people, in turn, also affected the latter’s perceptions of themselves as white subjects and agents of humanitarianism helping out indigenous “others.” The making and recognition of Toba urban aboriginality is in sum, not a side product or an acculturated version of indigeneity, but rather relevant to the understanding of larger racial and ethnic formations in the country, the city, and in Argentina.

This dissertation has also highlighted that the experience of these Toba people in and beyond Buenos Aires is not reducible to their indigeneity, as it has components that I have explored through the notion of subalternity. Their positioning as subaltern actors reveals forms of domination and subordination that also involve other marginalized populations. In particular, I have drawn on the concept of “subaltern assemblages” to examine from a spatial perspective the way that people living within multiple forms of constraints recreate life out of seemingly disjointed objects, relations, and places. The notion of subaltern assemblages helps explain how people connect heterogeneous elements and places in ways that are not reducible to the logic of aboriginality or ethnicity, as diaspora studies tend to imply. While many connections I have
examined are indeed part of a Toba diaspora that connects Toba women and men across space, these connections transcended the boundaries of an ethnic specificity and a circumscribed cultural productivity. The notion of assemblages enabled me to trace the work emerging out of this heterogeneity. In this way, assemblages created from the Barrio Toba extracted elements from their original uses and settings and put them to work in new relations elsewhere. This “elsewhere” often involved other Toba places in the Chaco, but also included places mobilized by the Unida church which is itself linked to a transnational evangelical association of churches, or places such as the schools where the children of the middle class porteños go. A spatial analysis and the notion of assemblage allow us to observe the emergence of new configurations producing a “newness” within, but also beyond, the constraints faced by Toba families.

As Donald Moore suggests, the concept of assemblage has been criticized for “flattening out” asymmetrical relations of power, however the notion of assemblages can actually contribute to understanding the multiple dimensions and layers in which subordination is (re)created and to understanding its complexity (Moore 2005). In my analysis of assemblages, I placed the forces that connect, orient, and regulate those connections at the centre of my investigation. The notion of subaltern assemblages I have suggested takes into consideration the layers and entangled forms of subordination that shapes the practice of Toba families. It also traces the extensions and connectivities through which these people overflow and can in some situations move past their subordination. Subaltern assemblages superimpose new multiplicities that open up new forms of life in common (including conviviality and the encounters of trajectories) and allow new capacities and variations in the making of subjectivities.

The phantom bridge that appeared in the Chaco is therefore not just a manifestation of a Toba cosmology that extends reality into visions about the future, or a metaphor of the advancement of
capitalist relations over the Chaco. From a spatial perspective, the vision can also be seen as a spatial reconnection: the opening of a potentially different future. To summarize, this dissertation has contributed to the understanding of subaltern spatialities and the creation of urban indigeneities in Latin America. This work has also showed how people in a subaltern position produce extended and multisited spatialities as a way of recreating their life across space within and in spite of multiple constraints. The action of assemblages produced from these subaltern positions, show that forces identified as “inevitable”, such as the economy and systems recreating matrixes of inequality, have effects that overflow this recreation and can rather be redirected to other locations and connected to other relations. Assemblages, thus, is another way of challenging one-dimensional explanation of the social.

Inspired by Doreen Massey’s understanding of space as a multiplicity, my analysis of the people at the Barrio Toba in Buenos Aires shows that there is always something that falls outside of forms of domination and structural inequalities. The patterns of mobility and connectivity created by the people I worked with reveal that there are always multiple forms of conviviality emerging from unplanned encounters that have not been completely enveloped within the layers of spatialized governmental regulations of bodies within space, bodies with themselves and bodies with things (Moore 2005). My ethnographic fieldwork has shown the specificity and variations within this multiplicity. Ethnography not only allows us to “test” concepts and explanations but is also generative of new forms of understanding that illuminate larger configurations. In this dissertation, I have engaged with theoretical approaches not to create self-contained intellectual conversations but, rather, to produce the best possible map of the subaltern spatialities I was tracing in the field. I expect this map to offer potential points of entry for engagement in the unfolding of these and other subaltern entanglements.
If there is a political message in this dissertation, it is not just a call for the acceptance of Indigenous People’s presence and mobility within the city. As I have shown, shantytowns and barrios Toba are already a part of the city and are already creating forms of relating that are beyond divisions and regulations. The political sensibility that this dissertation advocates is one that engages more radically with the extension of spatialities that recreate forms of horizontal conviviality. I am therefore not suggesting the idea that in order to oppose forms of power and domination the Toba people should create places of resistance that are opposed to places of domination, for both are already interconnected and are mutually constituted. This dissertation suggests that the Toba people’s shifting subaltern assemblages may bring to light forms of extension of capacities and mobilities that challenge the private appropriation of what was previously shared freely. Understanding these assemblages and patterns of mobility can hopefully help all of us create and extend forms of life in common.
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