

## Violence and the State at the Urban Margins

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In *The Civilizing Process* (1994), Norbert Elias posits the existence of a mutually reinforcing relationship between the pacification of daily life in a given region and the actions (or inactions) of the state that rules over that area. The “civilizing process” means, above all, the removal of violence from social life and its relocation under the control of the state.<sup>1</sup> Elias’ insight is particularly pertinent to understand and explain the diverse forms of criminal and interpersonal violence that are ravaging the lives of the urban poor in contemporary Latin America (Imbusch, Misse, and Carrión 2011; Perlman 2011; Koonings and Kruijt 2007). Taking heed of Elias’ general proposition, and confronted with the intensification of urban violence in the sub-continent, we ask: *When, how, and to what effect does the state police poor people’s disputes in the places they live?*

Based on 30 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a violence-ridden, low-income district located in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (known as the *Conurbano Bonaerense*), this article examines the state’s presence at the urban margins and its relationships to widespread depacification of poor people’s daily life.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to descriptions of destitute urban areas in the Americas as either “governance voids” deserted by the state (Williams 1992; Anderson 1999; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Venkatesh 2008) or militarized spaces firmly controlled by the state’s iron fist (Goffman 2009; Rios 2010; Müller 2011), we argue, by way of empirical demonstration, that law enforcement in Buenos Aires’ high-poverty zones is *intermittent, selective, and contradictory*. By putting the state’s fractured presence at the urban margins under the ethnographic microscope, we reveal its key role in the perpetuation of the violence it is presumed to prevent.

Social scientific and journalistic descriptions of violence in what Loïc Wacquant (2004) calls “territories of urban relegation” abound in the Americas (Harding 2010; Wilding 2010;; Alarcón 2009; Castillo Berthier and Jones 2009; Pine 2008; Venkatesh 2008; Rodgers 2007; Gay 2005; Aricapa 2005; Goldstein 2003, 1998; Anderson 1999; Friday 1995). Studies consistently show that lack of economic opportunities coupled with geographic isolation foster “a climate where crime and interpersonal violence...become pervasive” (Popkin et al. 2010:721) in inner-cities, black ghettos, *favelas*, *villas*, *comunas*, *poblaciones*, and *colonias populares*, just a few of the terms used to describe the urban areas where multiple forms of deprivation accumulate. Research in psychology and community studies reveal the litany of violence to which the poor are subjected and show that different kinds of violence typically “pile up” (Farrell et al. 2007:446). Although many studies highlight the high rates of co-occurrence (between, for example, community violence and interfamilial violence) and demonstrate that exposure to

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<sup>1</sup> For elaborations and criticisms of the notion of “civilizing process,” see Aya (1978); Mennel (1990); Burkitt (1996); De Swaan (2001). For its application to the case of the African-American ghetto, see Wacquant (2004).

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, we adopt a restrictive definition of violence as including the actions of persons against persons that intentionally threaten, attempt, or actually inflict physical harm (Reiss and Roth 1993; Jackman 2002).

violence seldom take place in unalloyed ways (Margolin and Gordis 2000; see also, Walton et al. 2009; Guerra et al. 2003; Garbarino 1993), our understanding of precisely how different kinds of violence associate with one another in real time and space is quite limited (see Bourgois 1995 and LeBlanc 2004 for exceptions). When the concatenation of violence involves the actions or inactions of state agents, our understanding is even more obscure. This article seeks to fill this void.

This article begins with an overview of the kinds of violence emerging in Latin America and then provides a description of our field sites and methodology. The article is then divided in two main sections. In the first, we examine the different types of violence currently affecting poor neighborhoods in Buenos Aires. Informed by scholarship that asserts that “exposure to violence does not occur in pure forms” (Margolin and Gordis 2000:452) and that distinctions between private and public forms of brutality often have “permeable boundaries” (Korbin 2003:433), we demonstrate that different types of violence (drug-related, criminal, domestic; private and public) concatenate with one another and form what we call a “chain of violence.” The second section examines the nature of state presence in the area and shows the key role played by law enforcement in the reproduction of daily violence. Only ethnographic work, research that – to slightly modify Robert Zussman’s (2004) phrase – follows people in and through places, in real time and space, can uncover these hard to see connections. Accordingly, our close inspection of the links between the various instances of physical harm that affect the poor intermingled with the actions and inactions of the lower echelons of the state apparatus.

## **New Forms of Violence**

Although violence has had a continual presence in the history of Latin America (Imbusch, Misse and Carrión 2011), during the last decade a new kind of violence has been emerging in the region (Koonings 2001; Briceño-León 1999; Koonings and Kruijt 2007) and is now besieging many of the new democracies in the sub-continent (Arias and Goldstein, 2010; Rodgers and Jones 2009; Caldeira 2000). This violence is “increasingly available to a variety of social actors,” is no longer an exclusive “resource of elites or security forces,” and includes “everyday criminal and street violence, riots, social cleansing, private account selling, police arbitrariness, paramilitary activities, post-Cold War guerrillas, etc.” (Koonings 2001:403). Although the “newness” of violence has been the subject of much scholarly debate among academics (see, for example, Wilding 2010), most agree in that there has been a significant change in the forms of prevalent violence since the early 1990s.<sup>3</sup> As Imbusch, Misse, and Carrión (2011:95) assert in their comprehensive review of violence research in the region, political violence “has now receded significantly in most countries of the continent” and it has been “replaced by other forms, mainly

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<sup>3</sup> As Polly Wilding (2010:725) points out: “Whether a perceived shift in actors and motives (from predominantly political to predominantly criminal) reflects a significant shift in the lived experiences of violence and insecurity is debatable. Arguably, actors have mutated but not changed; in some instances uniformed police officers are less likely to be involved in overt violence, but the same individuals may be functioning under the remit of death squads or militia groups. In any case, state violence against particular social groups, including poor, marginalized communities, as a form or result of exclusion and oppression, is an enduring, rather than new, aspect of modern society...”

social [i.e. interpersonal violence, domestic abuse, child abuse, and sexual assault], but also criminal” (our emphasis). These forms of violence are thus quite varied and, different from the past, they are now located mostly in urban areas. Moreover, this new urban violence affects the most disadvantage populations in disproportionate ways (Gay 2005; Brinks 2008; CELS 2009), particularly adolescents and young adults (Imbusch, Misse, and Carrión 2011) – both as victims and as perpetrators.

In the case of Argentina, and particularly the Buenos Aires metropolitan area), the increase of social and criminal violence is beyond dispute (ODSA, 2011).<sup>4</sup> Official data for the province of Buenos Aires show a doubling of crime rates between 1995 and 2008, from 1,114 to 2,010 criminal episodes per 100,000 residents and from 206 crimes against persons to 535 per 100,000 residents.<sup>5</sup> These numbers, however, represent only a slice of the actual violence that, as we will see shortly, suffuses everyday life in the economically deprived area where we conducted our fieldwork.

In contemporary Argentina, state violence against the poor takes the form of persistent arbitrary police violence, swelling prison rates, novel territorial sieges of marginalized communities, and increasing forceful evictions (Auyero 2010; Brinks 2008; CELS 2009; Daroqui et al. 2009). Nevertheless, in our fieldsite, most of the rampant daily violence is perpetrated by its residents against each other. In its target, intensity, and variety, this is a new kind of violence.

Across the social sciences, research on diverse forms of violence remains “specialized and balkanized” (Jackman 2002:387): students of “family violence” (Tolan et al. 2006; Kurst-Swanger and Petcosky 2003; Gelles 1985), for example, rarely engage in conversations with researchers on street or gang violence (Jones 2010; Harding 2010; Venkatesh 2008; McCart et al. 2007; Bourgois 1995), even when the latter do recurrently detect the mutual influence between private and public forms of brutality – ethnographic and journalistic descriptions attest to the fact that violence outside the home usually travels inside and viceversa (see, for example, Bourgois 1995; LeBlanc 2004; Kotlowitz 1991). The study of violence is also highly compartmentalized in psychological studies where “very little crossover” defines the examination of violence in its multiple incarnations (Tolan et al. 2006:558).<sup>6</sup>

Although analyses of diverse types of violence have remained siloed, a number of scholars have begun to highlight their interconnection. Mary Jackman (2002) and Elijah Anderson (1999), for example, have pointed out the shared origins or similar outcomes of a wide

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<sup>4</sup> On the diverse forms of violence experienced by the Argentine poor, see Bonaldi and del Cueto (2009); on fear of crime and perceptions of “inseguridad,” see Kessler (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Sexual and domestic abuse has also been on the rise during the last two decades (La Nación, February 24, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Many theoretical and empirical reasons have been put forward to justify this compartmentalization. As Tolan et al. (2006) argue, “family violence” should be distinguished from other forms in that, for example, “it presupposes a relationship between those involved” (559). “Violence in the home” – to echo the title of Kurst-Swanger and Petcosky’s (2003) collection – has a private character that makes it analytically different from the public nature of street violence and that, as Gelles (1985:359) points out, “requires its own body of theory” to be explained.

variety of private and public, interpersonal and collective, violence. Jackman (2002:404) notes that violence is a “genus of behaviors, made up of diverse class of injurious actions, involving a variety of behaviors, injuries, motivations, agents, victims, and observers.” According to her, “the sole thread connecting [this diversity] is the threat or outcome of injury” (404, our emphasis). Anderson (1999), in turn, underlines the common source shared by many instances of violence. In Anderson’s rendition of U.S. inner-city life, the “code of the street” diffuses from the street into homes, schools, parks, and commercial establishments, permeates face-to-face relations, feeds predatory crime and the drug trade, exacerbates interpersonal violence, and even warps practices of courtship, mating, and intimacy. Diverse forms of violence, according to Anderson, can be traced back to the pernicious influence of a bellicose mindset.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, Randal Collins (2008) has highlighted the theoretical connections between a vast array of seemingly unrelated violent interactions. “[A]ll types of violence,” he writes (2008:8), “fit a small number of patterns for circumventing the barrier of tension and fear that rises up whenever people come into antagonistic confrontation” (8). In other words, distinct types of violence share a “situational dynamic” (7):

“If we zero in on the situation of interaction – the angry boyfriend with the crying baby, the armed robber squeezing the trigger on the holdup victim, the cop beating up the suspect – we can see patterns of confrontation, tension, and emotional flow which are at the heart of the situation where violence is carried out...[T]he situation of fear and tension gets resolved into a minority who ride the wave of fear, and a majority who are swept along by it” (2-57).

Although inspired by the literature that underscores (empirical) commonalities and (theoretical) analogies, the focus of this article lies neither in the ways in which different forms of violence originate from some shared source (or result in a similar outcome) nor in the theoretical associations between them – relationships whose close inspection lead, in Collins’ approach, to a general theory of violence. We are mainly concerned with the concatenations that diverse forms of violence – traditionally studied as separate entities – establish in real time and space, and with the ways in which they define everyday life in poor communities. In this sense, our analysis draws more heavily upon another recent strand of social scientific scholarship that calls for analyzing “peace time crimes” or “little violences” that form a “continuum” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; see also Bourgois 2009; Scheper-Hughes 1996; 1997; and Bourgois and Schonberg 2009).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For uses and criticisms of Anderson’s notion of “code of the street,” see Jones (2010), Harding (2010), and Wacquant (2002).

<sup>8</sup> Bourgois (2009) and Scheper-Hughes (1996; 1997) focus attention on the typically obscure links between visible forms of violence – “whether criminal, delinquent, or self-inflicted” (Bourgois 2009: 18) – and less visible ones – “structural, symbolic, and/or normalized” (2009:18). Bourgois’ and Schonberg’s (2009) adaptation of Primo Levi’s notion of “the gray zone” (1986) is a case in point in that serves as a conceptual tool to examine precisely those connections: between structural violence, gender and/or political oppression and abusive interpersonal behavior, or between “structurally imposed everyday suffering” and “violent and destructive subjectivities” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:19).

Emphasizing more the showing than telling, we demonstrate how different kinds of violence are linked in a chain that encircles poor people's daily lives at the urban margins. This chain not only connects forms of violence usually conceived of as discreet and distinct, but also, and just as importantly, links them with the actions and inactions of the state. If we are to understand and explain the existence and persistence of violence among the urban poor, the contradictory, selective, and intermittent state actions in marginalized urban areas are a key piece of the puzzle. After a description of the field sites and the method, our narrative reproduces the progress of our research. Halfway into the course of our fieldwork, we started to realize the different kinds of violence affecting the people in the district were, in fact, connected to one another. Detective-like ethnographic fieldwork, and careful triangulation of a variety of data-sources, including interviews with people currently imprisoned and residents involved in criminal activities, led us to focus on the links between violence in the neighborhood and the illicit activities of the police in the area.

### **Sites and Methods**

Ingeniero Budge (pop. 15,000) sits in the southern part of the *Conurbano Bonaerense* in the municipality of Lomas de Zamora. Located adjacent to the banks of the highly polluted *Riachuelo* river, this poverty-stricken area is comprised of several historically working class neighborhoods, squatter settlements and shantytowns. The streets and blocks in neighborhoods and squatter settlements follow the pattern of urban zoning (known as the "*forma damero*" or checkerboard), while the shantytowns' winding alleyways and passages do not. Residents in the working class neighborhoods are property owners and generally better off compared to shantytown-dwellers and squatters, both of whom have still-unresolved land tenure.

The following pictures (taken by children and adolescents from the local school) provide a visual portrait of the extreme levels of infrastructural deprivation – or what Braun and McCarthy (2005) would term the material dimension of state abandonment – that characterized most of the area (unpaved streets, open air sewages, and random garbage collection, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

### **INSERT PICTURES 1-4 HERE**

But Ingeniero Budge is not totally deserted by the state. The *Asignación Universal por Hijo* (AUH), as the Argentine conditional cash transfer program effective since 2008 is known, and many other welfare programs (*Argentina Trabaja*; *Plan Vida*) provide assistance to most of its inhabitants. Our survey shows that 54% of adults in the area are beneficiaries of at least one program in 2011. Clientelist networks (Auyero 2000) and soup-kitchens funded by Catholic charities are also a source of assistance of those in need in the area, providing crucial resources

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<sup>9</sup> As part of our fieldwork, we replicated a methodological strategy – based on photography – that one of us had successfully applied in the study of environmental suffering (Auyero and Swistun, 2009). We organized a workshop with elementary school children (6<sup>th</sup> grade) at one of the local public schools where Flavia Bellomi works. Agustín Burbano de Lara taught students the basics of photography. As their final project, the students divided themselves into groups of two or three and took pictures of their neighborhood with disposable, 27-exposure cameras. Once the pictures were all taken and developed, we talked with the students and asked them about what they had intended to portray and how they felt about the images.

such as food and medicine. Finally, the informal labor market contributes to many households in the area and surveyed residents most frequently report jobs including those in construction, domestic service and scavenging.

Together with state assistance, charity and informal jobs, the other main source of income for the population is the largest street fair in the country located in northeast of the district bordering with the city of Buenos Aires. Known by the general name of *La Salada*, the fair consists of four different markets (Urkupiña, Ocean, Punta Mogote, and La Ribera) where, twice a week, thousands of shoppers attend to buy apparel, small electronics, and food.<sup>10</sup> According to the Economic Commission of the European Union (*La Nación*, March 10, 2009), *La Salada* is the “world’s emblem of the production and commercialization of falsified brand merchandise.” Either as owners or employees of one of the thousands of stalls or as workers in one of the hundreds of sweatshops that manufacture goods sold there, many residents from the neighborhood benefit from the presence of this huge street market (D’Angiolillo et al. 2010). According to our survey, 22% of the population regularly works at the market.<sup>11</sup>

This article is based on twenty formal, in-depth interviews with residents of a shantytown, a squatter settlement, and a working class neighborhood located in Ingeniero Budge and, perhaps more importantly, innumerable informal conversations and direct observations carried out over a two and a half year period of team ethnographic fieldwork (June 2009 to December 2011). We conducted half of the interviews with the residents of the squatter settlement and the shantytown and half with the inhabitants of the working class neighborhood. Both groups are split evenly along gender lines. During this period, one of the authors, Flavia Bellomi, also worked in the area as an elementary school. The article draws on the detailed ethnographic notes she took based on her students’ activities inside and outside of the school and on dozens of conversations with school teachers and parents. Finally, descriptive data are culled from a survey (n=100) we conducted in the area in order to identify residential patterns, sources of employment, levels of education, and most common problems identified by the population under investigation.

We tape-recorded, transcribed, and systematically analyzed our in-depth interviews for their content. We coded and analyzed our field notes using open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Applying the evidentiary criteria normally used for ethnographic research (Becker 1958, 1970; Katz 1982, 2001, 2002), we assigned higher evidentiary value to individual acts or patterns of conduct recounted by many observers than to those recounted by only one observer. Although particular in their details, the testimonies, fieldnotes, and vignettes

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<sup>10</sup> For insightful accounts of the history and workings of these fairs, see Hacher (2011) and Girón (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Although largely unregulated, the state makes random impromptu appearances in *La Salada*. As Scarfi and Di Peco write (2011: 9), the state can appear in the form of the state agency “demanding property taxes; then it might appear as the Judiciary, investigating violations of international copyright laws; it can also take the share of the Department of Health, demanding sewage systems that do not pollute the Riachuelo” (see also, Hacher 2011; Girón 2011).

selected below represent behavior observed or heard about with consistent regularity during the course of our fieldwork.

Our fieldwork began at the local elementary school where we intended to replicate the study of environmental suffering one of us conducted in Flammable shantytown (Auyero and Swistun 2009). We wanted to examine residents' experiences of toxic assault when its source is not as visible as the petrochemical compound adjacent to Flammable. Flavia took dozens of fieldnotes on the ways in which her students think and feel about the grounds in which they live, the air they breathe, and the water they drink. We also organized a photography workshop in which they express their views about their environment. As in Flammable, children in the area see themselves as living surrounded by garbage and other hazards (Auyero and Burbano de Lara 2012).

But early on, Flavia's students began to express their concerns with the surrounding violence. As we will see in the next section of this paper, her notes are filled with occasions of physical harm experienced by her students: a street fight early in the morning, gunshots at night, a domestic dispute, a murder, a rape. As their succinct descriptions of the violence that was going on outside their school multiplied, we decided to expand the empirical focus of our research.

After the first nine months of fieldwork, we moved outside the walls of the school in order to inspect more closely some of the episodes of violence reported by the students. Our approximation to violence was very much informed by scholarship in sociology and psychology that treats diverse forms of violence as distinct phenomena (domestic, drug-related, criminal, sexual, etc.). Early on, we tried to understand and explain a domestic fight as separate and unrelated to, say, a clash between a drug dealer and a consumer. The literature on the subject provides a plethora of good reasons to preserve this analytical distinction (Brush 2011; Tolan et al. 2006; Gelles 1985). However, one case of vigilante violence against a neighbor accused of attempted rape alerted us to the potential relationships between diverse forms of physical harm. What if, we asked ourselves, some the episodes of violence that Flavia's students were routinely talking about were, in fact, connected? Our interviews with adult residents began to zoom in on the continuities between seemingly unrelated violent episodes. Later on, interviews with residents involved in crimes like car-theft and drug-dealing made us aware that some forms of local violence are linked to the state's (illicit) activities. In what follows, we report on both the horizontal and vertical connections between multiple forms of violence that bombard these communities.

### **The Chain of Violence**

During the two years and a half of fieldwork, Flavia worked with three different groups of students (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders aged 8 to 13). Among them, shoot-outs, armed robberies, and street fights are habitual topics of conversation – regularly present in their daily lives. In other words, violence does not need not be “brought up” by the ethnographer as a “theme” to be discussed and analyzed. During our fieldwork, not a week went by without one or more of the 60 elementary school children describing one or more episode involving one or more forms of violence.

More or less trivial occasions inside the classroom – as the mentioning of a relative’s birthday – become opportunities to talk about the latest violent episode in the neighborhood. In what follows we present a series of fieldnotes and vignettes that seek to depict the daily and quite public character of violence – both inside and outside the home. We have re-organized them according to the type of violence portrayed although, phenomenologically speaking, they appear together in the life-world of children and adolescents.

March 30, 2010: “Marita (age 9) asks me if I know Naria’s father. I tell her that I don’t. ‘He is in heaven, he was shot in the head.’”

April 8, 2010: “Samantha (age 11) tells me that her neighbor, Carlitos, was turning 17 this past Sunday: ‘A friend of his came to pick him up to go around the neighborhood. Carlitos didn’t want to go, because it was his birthday. But his friend persuaded him and off they went.’ Samantha tells me that she thinks they were armed. Carlitos was killed. ‘Once dead, his friends carried him around the block [as in a procession]. I went to the funeral. His eyes were still open and his house [where the funeral was taking place] was full of his friends. Carlitos had many friends. The bullet came into his chest, and made a tiny little hole there. But the bullet went out through his back, the hole there was huge.’”

August 20, 2009: “Victor (age 11) tells me that yesterday, a little kid was killed close to his home: ‘They were a band of thugs (*chorros*)... or maybe dealers (*transas*).’ Samantha intercedes and says that she heard the shooting. Minutes before it happened, she was hanging out on the sidewalk.”

In addition to the verbal accounts of daily violence that students discussed in school, encounters with violence pervade other classroom activities. The following drawings, made as part of an exercise in which third and fourth graders were asked to describe the positive and negative aspects of their neighborhood, further illustrate a shared feeling among Flavia’s students: They see themselves as growing up in a crossfire – a sentiment shared by the anonymous author of the graffiti, sprayed on one of the walls outside of their school, who wrote: “I was born amid bullets, I was raised among thieves” [*Entre balas he nacido, entre chorros me he criado*]. In the first drawing, a third grade student portrays his *barrio* as defined by the “*se tiran tiro*” [“they shoot at each other”] and the lone presence of a police car. A year later, two fourth graders depict their neighborhood along similar terms. Drawings two and three encapsulate a common viewpoint among Flavia’s students. Most of them like “playing soccer,” and dislike “the gunshots” and “the fights.”

### INSERT DRAWINGS 1-3 HERE

May 5, 2010. “In May 1810,” Flavia reads out loud from the social science textbook to 4th graders, “the King of Spain was deposed by Napoleon Bonaparte. Jailed in France...” “Teacher, teacher...” Carlos (age 9) interrupts, “my uncle is also in jail... I think he is in for robbery.” Another student, Matu (age 9), then adds: “Right around my house, there’s one guy who is a thief, but never went to jail... he has a new car.” Suddenly, the lesson on the May Revolution becomes a collective report on the latest events in the neighborhood:



Johny (age 10): Do you know that Savalita was killed? Seven shots... some dealers wanted to steal his motorcycle...

Tatiana (age 9): No, it wasn't like that. Savalita was the one who wanted the motorcycle. He tried to steal it from a drug dealer. Word, I knew him!

Johny: No, it was his motorcycle...

Mario (age 9): My neighbor is a drug dealer. The cops come and never do anything...

Tatiana: Cops like to use drugs!

Children and adolescents growing up in this neighborhood not only encounter criminal and drug-related violence, but intimate and sexual violence frequently put their lives in severe danger as well.

October 13, 2009: "Julio's mother called the school today. She wanted to talk to her son. During the break, I spoke with Julio (age 8). He told me that his mom had to leave their house over the weekend and described why: 'my dad had been drinking and he beat the shit out of her. My dad is a slacker, he doesn't have a job. My mom gives him money and he spends it on wine. On Saturday, my mom asked him to turn the volume of the music down and he slapped her in the face, and then he grabbed her hair and dragged her through the house. He also destroyed all the things in the house.'"

October 15, 2009: "Julio's mother came to the school today. She confirmed to me what happened a few days ago. She asked me to observe Julio to make sure he has not been beaten by his dad. In my presence, she also asked her son, Julio, to take good care of his sister because she is afraid her dad will sexually abuse her."

One specific risk is more likely to affect girls than boys in these neighborhoods: sexual violence. Referring to the presence of "*violines*" (those who "*violan*," i.e. rapists) and suggesting one of the ways in which different kinds of violence relate to each other, Noelia (age 9) tells Flavia that "my cousin was almost raped yesterday [a few blocks from the school]. Neighbors went to the home of those "*violines*," and kicked their door down." "What are the '*violines*'?" Flavia innocently asks the class. "Those who make you babies," eight year-old Josiana answers matter-of-factly. This was hardly an isolated episode.

As illustrated in the following testimony, vigilante violence against sexual predators is a common feature in the area. Mabel, a mother, explains to Flavia the origins of the bullet that her daughter, Melanie (age 10), has lodged in her leg.

December 9, 2010: "See, that son of a bitch wanted to rape her. It was on December 24th. We have a big family; so we had asked a neighbor to roast some meat for us. This is a neighbor I've known all my life. My brother-in-law brought home some of the food, but some was missing so I sent Melanie and my niece to pick it up. When they got to the neighbor's house, he was drunk, and had a knife in his hand. He wanted to rape them. He

told Melanie and my niece that if they didn't suck his dick, he was going to kill one, and then rape and kill the other one. Luckily, they were able to push him aside – maybe because he was really smashed – and they escaped. They ran home and told us what had just happened. My husband, my brothers-in-law, my brother and some other neighbors went to his house and beat the shit out of him (*lo recagaron a palos*). They beat his face to a pulp, he was full of blood. They left him there, lying on the floor, and came back home. After dinner, around midnight, that son of a bitch came to my house, and shot at Melanie. Luckily, the bullet hit her in the leg. All the men in my house went back to his house and beat the shit out of him again. I had to run to the Gandulfo (local hospital 30 minutes away). I spend the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> there. They checked her out very well, to see if she had been raped. Luckily, the guy didn't get to do anything to her.”

Interpersonal violence in the neighborhood, as the above fieldnotes and testimonies attest, has an ordinary, routine character. Different forms of violence (or what community psychologists call “stressors” [Farrell et al. 2007]) are part of residents’ daily lives and concatenate with one another. The following vignette further illustrates a fact first hinted in the above story: diverse forms of violence oftentimes merge, reducing the distinction between private and public, domestic and street, inside or outside the home, to fuzzy and porous divides (Margolin and Gordis 2000; Korbin 2003; Farrell et al. 2007). Far from unique or idiosyncratic, the following story, reconstructed over a period of three months, illuminates many of the empirical relationships between the different forms of violence that we uncovered during two and a half years of fieldwork. Violence, this reconstruction shows, form a “continuum” (Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2004) – a chain that encircles the lives of the most vulnerable populations.

María (age 45) lives in a precarious house made of bricks, wood and metal sheets for a roof. The house bears the marks of her son, Ezequiel’s (age 17), addiction to the smokable cocaine residue locally known as *paco*.<sup>12</sup> A big wood panel covers a hole Ezequiel made when, in desperate need of cash to buy his next dose of *paco*, he broke into his own house and stole Maria’s clothes. Clothes are not the only thing that Ezequiel has stolen from her mother and siblings. The list, María tells us, is quite long. It includes a TV set, brand new sneakers, plates, pot, pans, and a new portable washing machine.

Just a few blocks from their house there is a shop that specializes in buying items from desperate addicts and then re-sells them to either their original owners or anyone interested for a higher, oftentimes double, price. These days, María seldom leaves the house (she stopped taking his little son to day care and she failed to show up at the local hospital to give her two little children mandatory vaccines) because she is afraid Ezequiel will take whatever items of value remain – “the little TV antenna... he broke it, he uses it as a pipe to smoke.” But Ezequiel doesn't just steal from María. Recently, he has begun to take clothes from one of her other sons, Carlos. Carlos is an alcoholic and last time he discovered Ezequiel’s robberies, a huge bloody fight broke between them. “They threw rocks and bottles at each other...” María tells us. And

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<sup>12</sup> For journalistic reports on the effects of this drug among the marginalized youth, see “Lost in an Abyss of Drugs, and Entangled by Poverty,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2009; “Perderse en la garras de la muerte,” *La Nación*, September 20, 2008; “A New Scourge Sweeps through Argentine Ghettos: ‘Paco.’” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 5, 2006. For an ethnographic account, see Epele (2010).

many of her neighbors agree: the fights between the two sick brothers are infamous on their block. Impotent but hardly passive in the face of that violence (many times we witnessed how María makes sure that there are no glass bottles or big rocks handy in their backyard so that the brothers cannot severely hurt each other), she is very scared (*vivo con miedo*) at the prospect of one of them killing the other. In the following dialogue, María recounts one recent episode:

María: Ezequiel spent last night in the precinct.

Agustín: What happened?

María: He stole our bathroom's toilet... and when he was carrying it through the streets, the police stopped him. The cops thought he had stolen it from a local depot. They arrested him...

Agustín: Did you at least get the toilet back?

María: No...I don't have the money to bring it back from the precinct (she needs to pay a car service). And that's not all. Carlos beat Ezequiel really bad for stealing the toilet. Today, in vengeance, Ezequiel threw a huge paving stone in his foot, to hurt him...

Agustín: How did Ezequiel do that? Was Carlos asleep?

María: Carlos has been drunk for the past 3 days, drinking wine, beer and whisky... [crying] My life is not a life... Sometimes, I want to leave them all here and run away...

Violence between the drug-addicted son and the alcoholic one is not the only violence that threatens María household where seven other children, ranging from 4 to 21, live with her. "I couldn't sleep yesterday," she tells us as we are walking towards the local soup-kitchen on a Friday morning. "Ezequiel stole a bicycle from a neighbor, who is a friend of Mario, my other son. Ezequiel exchanged it for 20 pesos to buy drugs. At night, the owner of the bicycle came to my home and asked me for the bicycle. I told him that I'll get paid on Tuesday. But he doesn't want the money. He showed me a gun and told me that, 'if the bicycle is not here soon, I'll kill your son.'" María and the rest of her family didn't sleep that night.

Earlier that same week, she, with her two little children in tow, had to travel one hour and a half to a precinct in the city of Buenos Aires where Ezequiel had been detained for drug possession. Ezequiel is not only addicted to *paco* but, lately, he has also been purchasing drugs for other youngsters in the neighborhood – acting as a courier of sorts. One night, a group of youth stormed into María's house angrily looking for Ezequiel. They had given him money earlier in the day and by late afternoon he had not returned with the drugs (or the money). "They looked for him everywhere and they had weapons," María said. "They threatened me and told me that they would kill him because he had kept their money. I told them that I'd pay them. I told them that he didn't know what he was doing, I asked them to please not hurt him."

The constant – and, as far as we were able to see, increasingly dangerous – fights between brothers can, in part, be understood as the *psychopharmacological* product of the consumption of drugs and alcohol. As research has shown (Reinarman and Levine 1997; Parker and Auerhahn 1998) the ingestion of alcohol and drugs can irritate, excite, enrage or embolden people; these emotional states can eventually translate into violent behavior. Ezequiel's petty

thievery, compelled by his craving for drugs, illustrates yet another individual-level relationship between drugs and violence – what Goldstein (1985) labels *economic compulsive* (see also, Goldstein et al. 1997).

Until the proliferation of crack use in the United States, most of the research attributed the violence triggered by drugs either to “the physical or psychological effects of drug ingestion or to the attempts of drug addicts to acquire economic resources that are needed to support the habit” (Ousey and Lee 2002:74-5). Since the mid-1980s, research has uncovered a third way in which drugs and violence are coupled. *Systemic* violence refers to the violence that can develop “from the exigencies of working or doing business in an illicit market – a context in which the monetary stakes can be enormous but where the economic actors have no recourse to the legal system to resolve disputes” (Goldstein 1985:116). In this third way, which accounts for most of what is known as “drug-related” violence, violent interactions are “an outcome of attempts at informal social control carried out by drug market participants who are unable to rely on formal social control agents (e.g. the police) to handle their grievances” (Ousey and Lee 2002:75). Disputes between rival dealers, punishment for stealing or failing to pay for drugs or for selling adulterated products, are commonly cited examples (Reinarman and Levine 1997; Ousey and Lee 2002; Bourgois 1995; Venkatesh 2008; Reding 2009). María’s family also had first-hand experience with this violence; and so do most of Flavia’s students as attested by the many times in which they report night shoot-outs between neighborhood dealers: “In the neighborhood, every night, dealers shoot at each other.”

But the above story not only illustrates the co-existence, in real time and space, of the three forms in which drugs and violence are related. When, in his attempt to finance his habit and/or pay back his debts, Ezequiel steals from his family members and ends up in a fight with his brother, or when young addicts terrorize María and her family over missing drugs, we also see how the diverse forms of violence that have traditionally been examined as separate and distinct phenomena (interpersonal, domestic, criminal) become entangled. As drug dealers, couriers, and consumers fight over payments, thefts, or quality of drugs, their public violence – a violence that is inherent to the structure of the market for illicit goods – may migrate inside homes and become a private, sometimes brutal, quarrel between family members.

The violence that Flavia registers in her notes (the gun fire, the street clashes, an attempted rape, a fight within the household) are not discrete phenomena but, as the above stories show well, intricately associated ones. Different forms of violence concatenate forming a chain that connects (and blurs the lines between) street and home, domestic and public spheres. We will now inspect the typically obscured relationship between this chain of violence and the actions of the state.

### **State (Mis)presence**

Collective life in these neighborhoods is, it should be clear by now, anything but peaceful. Violence abounds in the social spaces in which residents interact daily. It is either experienced first-hand, witnessed, or talked about in homes, schools, and streets. And it oftentimes occurs in tightly connected ways, one form of violence as the direct consequence of another. In the face of a violence that is neither tamed nor “behind the scenes” (Elias 1978), we ask, together with the author of *The Civilizing Process*: What is the state doing to regulate poor people’s interpersonal conflicts? The state is both an abstract, macro-level structure and a concrete, micro-level set of

institutions with which the urban poor interact in direct and immediate ways. In this section we concentrate on this second level, on the level of *state practice* (Haney 1996; Gupta 2005; Secor 2007), by focusing on poor people's routine, but not always licit, encounters with law enforcement officials.

As stated above, the working class neighborhood, the squatter settlement, and the shantytown where we conducted our fieldwork sit adjacent to the biggest street market in the country. Twice a week, thousands of shoppers (mostly from lower and lower-middle classes from metropolitan Buenos Aires but also traders from the rest of the country) come to the market to purchase (mostly) apparel and small electronics; hundreds of thousands pesos in cash and merchandise traverse through the streets of Ingeniero Budge.<sup>13</sup> Military-style, federal, forces known as the National Guard (*Gendarmería Nacional*) patrol the streets hours before and during these “*días de feria*.” Numerous and heavily armed with state-of-the-art equipment, the officers' imposing presence transform the area into a militarized space.<sup>14</sup> But this militarization of marginality does not last for long – once the markets close, the officers disappear from view until the next market day.<sup>15</sup> Poorly paid, trained, and equipped, the state police (known as *La Bonaerense*) patrol the streets when the National Guard is gone. Thirty months of observation, and innumerable conversations with residents (young and old), reveal a highly skewed and contradictory character of this intermittent law enforcement. In what follows we rely on a series of vignettes to depict the presence of the repressive arm of the state in the area.

### *The Cop's Son*

Julián (age 13) is in 6th grade, his father is a policeman who works for *La Bonaerense*. During the first recess, he asks his teacher, Flavia, to hold his brand new, high-tech, cell phone while he runs around the playground with his friends. Flavia has only seen them on TV and praises the object, “what a nice cell phone you've got!”

“My father gave it to me. He took it away from the thieves,” Julián tells her. “Have you seen when the cops put the thieves against the wall and pat them? Well, that's when my dad takes away their cell phones, money, drugs... he never returns them. He keeps everything for himself. And he gave this one (pointing to the new cell phone) to me as a present. It's nice, isn't it?”

The natural, unaffected, way in which Julián told Flavia about the cell phone's origins suggests that he believes that there's nothing wrong in his father's actions; but this is not the place to speculate about the kind of ethical lesson learned by Julián every time he hears about his dad's exploits. Instead, we are concerned not with the crafting of children's moral judgment, but with what the story can tell us about the contradictory

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<sup>13</sup> Estimates oscillate between US\$ 125 million (D'Angiolillo et al 2010) to US\$ 4,000 (Girón 2011) in annual sales.

<sup>14</sup> For an account of their presence in another poor neighborhood, see Alarcón (2011).

<sup>15</sup> The reader should note the paradox: La Salada is an informal and (to a great extent) illegal market but its operation is “protected” by the state's most effective punitive arm. Commercial transactions there, however, are largely unregulated and so are labor practices.

way in which the state insinuates itself in poor people's lives. Although extreme, Julián's story points toward one prominent way in which law enforcement operates in the neighborhood: the police acts as the repressive arm of the state against criminals but also as the perpetrator of crime. This is hardly a secret for Flavia's students and adults residents. As they repeatedly state: "they (the cops) are all addicts [*drogones*]," "They (the cops) are all thieves [*chorros*]."

### ***The Dealer***

"I was a thief and a dealer (*fui chorro y transa*)," Jorge tells us. He is now in his 40s, and he is still reluctant to talk about his recent past. But we took advantage of what his close friends later described as a rare moment of "opening up" to inquire about the risks involved in his criminal activities (that, in his own words, included "almost everything" – from car theft to drug dealing). He is now "retired" from crime; and has not touched a "joint or a beer... for many, many years." The kind of things he did and the tragic end of many of his friends would merit an entire book: "We were a group of eleven kids... only three of us are still around. The rest are either in jail or dead – one killed by the police, another one by a store owner when he was trying to break in, and another one died of AIDS." What concerns us, however, is something more specific: his group's relationship with the police and the National Guard.

"We had an understanding ("*un código*"): you always need your neighbor. Many times I escaped from the police by hiding at a neighbor's house. He (the neighbor) knew I'd never ever touch any of his things." Neighbors, he believes, "felt protected. Now, all these *códigos* are broken." And, like most people in the neighborhood, he attributes this change to the new drugs that are now being consumed by the local youth: "It used to be only marijuana and cocaine, and now is *paco*, free base. Now they'd do anything for drugs – [*hacen cualquiera*]."

The antagonistic relationship that, when robbing, Jorge's group had with the state repressive forces turns into illicit collaboration when this group engages in drug dealing. In Jorge's recollections both the police and the gendarmes are described as equally involved in "the business" (*el negocio*):

"When we first started dealing, in Las Violetas (a nearby poor neighborhood), we had an arrangement with the police. Every weekend they would come to "pick up the envelope" (i.e. to receive their cut). The cops knew we were selling drugs, but they didn't bother us. They would release the area for us (*liberaban la zona*). Now, if you don't pay them every weekend, you are in trouble. You'd end up in jail. Then we move to another neighborhood. We were selling cocaine, lots of it, there. But there, the gendarmes protected us. The cops had someone in a different neighborhood. We were with the gendarmes. See...it's all about (different) territories, some for the cops, some others for the National Guard."

### ***The Car Thief***

"At that time," says Amelia referring to the late 1990s and early 2000s, "there were not many things a single mother with three kids and no job could do. I've done everything:

stealing cars, selling drugs, robbing people in the streets... you name it, I did everything.” Pointing at the different Tramontina knives that hang from the wall of her kitchen, she then adds: “See these blades? With this one, you can open up many cars... and with this little one, the whole dashboard comes apart.” Amelia tells us that she worked with a group of very young kids who stole cars in the city and brought them to a big garage located a few blocks from her house. There, she and a small group of associates took the cars apart and sold the parts to traders from the city of Buenos Aires. “We use to disassemble the cars super fast. The next morning, traders would come and buy from us. It was easy, and the police would not bother. We would arrange with them beforehand and they would release the area from interference (*liberaban la zona*).”<sup>16</sup>

When after some petty neighborhood drug dealers policemen would employ shock and awe tactics, inundating a certain area of the neighborhood with police cars. In cases such as these, sirens, loud orders, and the usual shoot-out mark its fast and furious presence in the neighborhood. The two parents and one uncle of Malena, a 10 year-old student of Flavia, were arrested in such fashion during the course of our fieldwork. As the testimonies above illustrate (and many more that reasons of space prevent us from presenting) and as described in other poverty enclaves throughout Latin America (notably, in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas [Gay 2005; Arias 2008]), the local police protect some dealers or thieves and go, publicly and aggressively, after others – becoming an integral part of the crime they (say they) seek to combat. “It is easy to make a deal with the police... they come to you for their commission. Every night, you need to give them \$500 or \$600 and they leave you alone,” two women involved in petty drug dealing told us. The police is also a key participant in the black market of guns and bullets – many people we talked to in Ingeniero Budge know that they can buy a gun or bullets from off-duty members of *La Bonaerense*.

Law enforcement is not only intermittent and contradictory (in the sense of doing mutually opposed or inconsistent things) but also as highly selective. Police chase and incarcerate some petty drug dealers or thieves but it is slow and hesitant when it has to go after violent partners, and virtually absent when it comes to intervene around widespread, illegal child labor. We repeatedly heard stories about domestic violence in which the police was nowhere to be found (“the cops always come late, after they rape you, after they beat you... they come to pick up the dead body, or to stich you if you’ve been raped”), and cases of infant labor that go unsanctioned – many of Flavia’s students (all of them below 13 years old) work in the nearby street market, either transporting, selling, and/or manufacturing goods in unmonitored sweatshops.

Law enforcement is fast and sluggish, watchful and neglectful, depending on the kind of wrongdoing and the parties involved. As a result, residents suffer all sorts of victimization but are unwilling to resort to the police because they intuitively know that agents will not act on their claims or they suspect that they are either the perpetrators of crime or in close association with criminals. One last ethnographic vignette illustrates the relationship between violence and this particular type of state presence in boldfaced relief.

### ***Sexual Violence and the Police***

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<sup>16</sup> On the relationship between the *Bonaerense* police and car-theft, see Dewey (2010).

Responses to sexual violence do not always take the form of the vigilante violence we described in Melanie's case. The following episode portrays a less communal but equally brutal reaction. Reconstructed over a period of several days and after long and jagged conversations with some of the participants involved, the episode further illustrates the porous boundaries between private and public violence. The more we dig into the seemingly anecdotal details and twists of these events, the more we realize that the episode illuminates a dimension of violence that we never suspected at the beginning of this research: Some of the links in the chain of violence, here connecting street and sexual violence, reach all the way to the actions of law enforcers themselves. Once unearthed, these connections also help us to understand why residents rarely appeal to the police in cases of sexual violence.

Lucía and her friend, Soledad, are both thirteen years old. They live on the same block. Lucía's mother, Matilde, is a single mother. Soledad's father, Juan, is a well-known drug dealer in this area of the neighborhood, "*un poronga pesado*" (a "heavy dick," would be the literal translation, meaning someone "nobody messes up with"). Soledad's mom, "La Tana," also has a reputation for being tough. As a neighbor told us: "He is a *transa*, and he is loaded with guns and has no problems if he has to shoot at someone. And his wife, I worked with her (robbing trucks going in and out of the street market), and I know what she is capable of doing..."

One Monday morning in early September, neighbors woke up to the sounds of Juan's and "La Tana's" screams. "She (Soledad) was raped because of you! You will see!" Right after publicly and loudly accusing Lucía for their daughter's plight, they grabbed her by the arms, punched her in the face, and kicked her in the stomach and lower back. Lucía could not fight back when they pulled her inside their home. Inside, Juan held her firmly while "La Tana" swiftly cut her long hair. Lucía sprinted back to her house. When Matilde heard Lucía hysterically crying under her bed in fetal position, she ran out to the sidewalk to see what had happened. Outside, she was confronted by "La Tana" and Juan: "You better keep this to yourself or you'll be in trouble," they told her. Amanda, Matilde's friend, later told us that she believes that Matilde does not have much of an option to counter the couple's cruelty towards her daughter: "She can't do anything. If she says something, they'll kill her."

Everybody in the block talked about the public punishment but the offense was not immediately obvious. What happened? Why did Juan and "La Tana" publicly and viciously scold Lucía? It took us a while to find out. That morning, Lucía and Soledad had come back home at 6 AM after spending the night out with no more than a single phone call to their parents to tell them they were "on their way [home]." When they showed up in the morning, Soledad's neck was "filled with *chupones* [hickies]." It didn't take long for Juan and "La Tana" to realize that their daughter had sex and, equating a first-time sexual encounter with rape, they blamed her friend Lucía for their daughter's "loss of her virginity" – though, as Matilde confided to us later, "Soledad was no virgin, no way." The equivalence between a first sexual encounter and rape is not, we believe, far-fetched. Given Soledad's age and the generalized fear of sexual violence that is widespread in the neighborhood the dreadful comparison make more sense.



“Lucía didn’t force Soledad to do anything she didn’t want,” Matilde told us. But Juan and “La Tana” blamed her for their daughter’s condition – the attribution of blame took the form of harsh physical punishment carried out by those who see themselves as the *de facto* authority in this part of the neighborhood. “You will learn a lesson,” Soledad’s parents screamed at Lucía as they were punching and kicking her adolescent body. Although many of the specifics do not concern us here, the stories that neighbors told us about the whereabouts of Lucía and Soledad the night before the public chastisement revealed a heretofore unanticipated link between the parental suspicions about pre-adolescent (whether forced or not) sex and the hidden actions of police agents in the area. Lucía and Soledad had spent part of the night at Lucía’s boyfriend, Carlos’ house. But after midnight, they went with a group of friends to La Salada market. The details of what happened that night remain obscure – to us, at least. But many residents believe – and told us so in quite explicit ways – that during the nights before the fair opens to the public, the buses that bring shoppers from the provinces become makeshift brothels. Inside the empty buses that await the shoppers, neighborhood adolescents exchange sexual services – and according to many, blowjobs in particular – for money. Long-distance drivers and, to our surprise, the cops that patrol the area, are the girls’ main clients. We knew that all sorts of things were for sale at “la feria.” We did not expect “petes” – the vernacular word of blowjobs – to be among those things.

We were never able to authenticate stories about what one neighbor calls “la policía patera” – the “blowjob police” (we do have plenty of evidence of their involvement in drug trade, in theft and extortion, and in the provision of arms and bullets to criminals). However, the shared understanding about police agents’ illicit relationships with a few adolescents in the neighborhood is important because it accounts for why residents often hesitate and seldom resort to the police to denounce episodes of sexual violence. Why, we could ask, would anybody in the community seek the help of a local cop when they are believed to be doing “that” with adolescents in the parking lots adjacent to the market? We could argue, with W.I. Thomas, that if people in the neighborhood define the existence of a “blowjob police” as real, then it is real in its consequences. For residents, their definition guides their lack of trust in the police to address sexual crimes.<sup>17</sup>

A few days after the brutal aggression, Lucía, with one of her eyes still swollen, was still in shock and seldom ventured outside of her home. “At least, she is going out a bit. The other day, I sent her to the corner store,” Matilde told us and added, “She went with her brothers... she’s still scared, but she can’t stay inside all day, she needs to go out.” In its simplicity and frankness, Matilde encapsulated a feeling shared by those encircled by the chain of violence: despite the fear, despite the very real possibility of being victimized, they “still need to go out.”

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<sup>17</sup> In this sense, it is important to remind the reader that, in the analysis of the experiences of violence, it is not simply a matter of what this or that actor really is or does (though, as we hope it is clear by now, we took great care in establishing the very basic facts of violence) but how they are perceived to be and to behave. Ultimately, it determines whom people trust and when they reach out for help.

## Conclusions

In the now classic “On Transformations of Aggressiveness,” Norbert Elias writes that, in the Middle Ages, “[r]obbing, fighting, hunting men and animals – all this formed part and parcel of everyday life” (1978:237). Only gradually, as a “central power strong enough to compel restraint” begins to grow, people feel constrained to “live in peace with one another.” Relative restraint and “consideration of people for one another” increase in everyday life, and “not just anyone who chances to be strong can enjoy the pleasure of physical aggression” (238). In other words, for Elias (1994; 1978), the relatively peaceful collective life of large masses of people in a given territory is, in good part, based on the actions of a state that consistently pacifies the social spaces in which people interact and polices their disputes. What we have shown is the exact opposite of the “civilizing process” that Elias describes. The intermittent, contradictory, and selective way in which law enforcement works at the urban margins reinforces the chain of violence that regularly puts the poor in harm’s way. The Janus-faced character of the Argentine state is well known. The state partakes in crime and in its repression. The Buenos Aires state police, for example, have been involved in gambling and prostitution for decades, and have recently entered the drug-dealing business and become involved in kidnappings and car theft (Isla and Miguez 2003; Dewey 2010; Verbitsky 2011). All the while, rates of incarceration in federal prisons have grown almost 400% in the past 20 years, to a great extent, by the imprisonment of petty drug-dealers and consumers (CELS 2009). What we lack – and what this article has sought to provide – is an on-the-ground account of the ways in which this kind of paradoxical law enforcement relates to the widespread interpersonal violence that is currently wreaking havoc on the urban poor.

Violence is the effect of a complex causal chain whose origin certainly lies in the actions and inactions of the state but also in the economy (Burkitt 1996; Menel 1990; Rodgers 2007). The processes of deproletarianization, informalization, and general degradation in living conditions that Argentina endured as the result of what we could call, borrowing from Karl Polanyi, the “great neoliberal transformation” (Auyero 2010; Portes and Roberts 2005; Segura 2009; Bonaldi and del Cueto 2009) are, together with state (mis)interventions, crucial explanatory dimensions of the “whys” of the extensive violence among the poor. And so is the increasing reliance of economically marginalized and vulnerable people on the destructive drug trade. As numerous studies have shown (for the U.S., see Bourgois 1995; Reding 2009; for Argentina, see Alarcón 2009), the drug economy is a double-edged sword: while it sustains poor communities, it simultaneously tears them apart. Further research should scrutinize the concrete ways in which political and economic dynamics interact and fuel the “chain of violence” in poor people’s daily life.

Most Latin American governments are experiencing a “left turn” (Weyland et al. 2010; Levitsky and Roberst 2011) and are placing the reduction of inequality and the alleviation of poverty at the center of public discourse and policy-making. The novel progressive consensus seems to suggest that citizenship (and democracy) cannot survive without the “social inclusion” of the masses of marginalized individuals that, according to the new dominant diagnosis, were cast aside by decades of neoliberal economic policies. Addressing what both moderate and radical governments in the sub-continent call the “drama of social exclusion” mandates the confrontation of the daily violence that has become a defining feature of the “texture of hardship” (Newman and Massengill 2006) among the urban poor. Without the pacification of everyday life in marginalized communities, “social inclusion” is at risk of becoming an empty panacea.

Images



Picture ONE



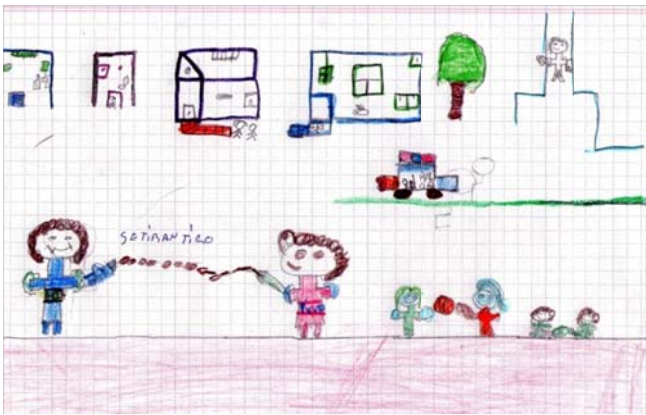
Picture TWO



Picture THREE



Picture FOUR



Drawing ONE



Drawing TWO



Drawing THREE

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