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# Struggles over the Use of Public Space: Exploring Moralities and Narratives of Inequality. *Cartoneros* and *Vecinos* in Buenos Aires

NATALIA COSACOV *and* MARIANO D. PERELMAN\*

*Abstract.* Based on extensive and long-term ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2002 and 2009, and by analysing the presence, use and struggles over public space of *cartoneros* and *vecinos* in middle-class and central neighbourhoods of the city of Buenos Aires, this article examines practices, moralities and narratives operating in the production and maintenance of social inequalities. Concentrating on spatialised interactions, it shows how class inequalities are reproduced and social distances are generated in the struggle over public space. For this, two social situations are addressed. First, we explore the way in which *cartoneros* build routes in middle-class neighbourhoods in order to carry out their task. Second, we present an analysis of the eviction process of a *cartonero* settlement in the city.

*Keywords:* Argentina, inequality, urban poverty, social segregation, public space

## *Introduction*

Friday, 8.30 pm: it is night-time in Buenos Aires. Luis, a *cartonero* in his forties, pushes his half empty cart among the cars in a street in the posh neighbourhood of Belgrano. With both hands pushing the cart, a cigarette dangles from his mouth as the ashes drop between his legs. He arrives at the door of a large building and leaves the cart next to a parked car. He drops the cigarette on the floor and approaches Walter, the doorman. The men greet each other and Luis offers Walter a cigarette, which he accepts and puts in his pocket. In just a few days, on Sunday, River and Boca will play the Argentine classic football match.

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Sunday is the night Luis will return and the two men start talking about the game. One of them supports Boca, the other supports River. They tease each other and make their bets. Then Walter fetches several black bags full of garbage. Luis takes them, opens them carefully, pulls out what he needs and loads it onto the cart. He then closes the bags and leaves them next to a tree. In a while, the municipal garbage truck will pick them up. The men say goodbye. A little further on, Luis parks his cart and asks a 'neighbour' if he 'has something to give him'. The young man, about 35 years old, says no, but tells him that there is some cardboard in the bag. Luis thanks him and takes the bag. As soon as the *neighbour* enters his home, Luis glances quickly inside the bag and pulls out a recently used pizza box, some mozzarella cheese still glued to it. He drops the box onto his cart and continues on his way. He still has 12 blocks to go to complete his route.

Just like Luis, thousands of people live off informal waste collection in Buenos Aires, an activity known as *cartoneo*. Although this activity is not a 'novelty', it became unusually visible in the late 1990s. Many cartoneros come into the city from the second, third and even fourth ring of Greater Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup> They travel into the city by train, truck, horse or by foot. Many others live in the city's slums, *villas*, or in what today are known as New Precarious Settlements (*Nuevos Asentamientos Urbanos*).

By analysing the presence, use and struggles over public space of cartoneros and *vecinos*<sup>2</sup> in middle-class and central neighbourhoods of the city of Buenos Aires, this article examines practices, moralities and narratives operating in the production and maintenance of social inequalities. Concentrating on spatialised interactions, it shows how class inequalities are reproduced and social distances are generated in the struggle over public space. We focus on interactions to account for the tolerance and the limits to possible spatial appropriations. We also highlight the role of the state, as a multiple and contradictory agent, in the production and maintenance of class inequalities.

The article looks at two social situations. First, we explore the way in which cartoneros build routes in middle-class neighbourhoods in order to carry out their work. Second, we present an analysis of the eviction process of a cartonero settlement in the city. The joint consideration of these two social situations shows that cartoneros manage to carry out their activity by adopting *ways of doing* that involve negotiating with moralities present in those neighbourhoods. These negotiations enable the construction of relationships between vecinos and cartoneros. In addition, through different agencies, the state

<sup>1</sup> The city of Buenos Aires is the core of the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires. See Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC). *¿Qué es el gran Buenos Aires?* (Buenos Aires: Publicaciones del INDEC, 2003), available at [www.indec.gov.ar/glosario/folletoGBA.pdf](http://www.indec.gov.ar/glosario/folletoGBA.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Vecino*, 'neighbour' in English, is used as a native category when it appears in Spanish.

also contributes to build these relationships. The state carries out strategic actions to transform cartoneros into ‘urban recyclers’ (*recuperadores urbanos*). However, the cases examined show that although cartoneros can legitimately use those spaces, their presence is accepted when conceived as urban recyclers, things change when they decide to settle in the city. The difference between passing through the city and inhabiting it sets a limit on the cartoneros’ legitimised use of space.<sup>3</sup> They are accepted as workers but not as inhabitants. In Buenos Aires, middle-class neighbourhood cartoneros cannot become vecinos (neighbours). Here, once again the state operates by sealing with public strength the moral and aesthetic contestation of the cartonero’s presence as inhabitants of this space.

The article is based on extensive and long-term ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2002 and 2009 in different middle-class neighbourhoods of the city. It is framed within a larger project exploring popular sectors’ webs of access to Buenos Aires and the ways in which social inequalities are reproduced. As Goldman points out, ethnography’s central aim is to build a model of understanding.<sup>4</sup> For this, one of the most useful tools is to let people speak freely, while the ethnographer observes and is part of the situation. During our fieldwork, we mostly let people speak freely. Being there allowed us to comprehend and construct a model for understanding. When we deemed it necessary we asked cartoneros and vecinos to participate in more formal interviews, which were recorded.

Long-term fieldwork was conducted when the activity of waste collecting (cartoneo) was being (re)configured, which proved to be an advantageous moment in the study of the transformation processes that took place in the city.<sup>5</sup> We were able to understand how cartoneros and vecinos negotiated the place of the cartonero in the city. We followed the way cartoneros adapted to the prevailing moralities in different spaces and the way these changes impacted upon their activity and the *cartoneros’* identity. In sum, those seven years of work enabled us to understand how tolerance and limits to the use of the city were constructed. It has been an ethnography of processes and interconnection, to follow Mallki, where interactions have been one of the necessary dimensions to understand the ways in which relations (and limits) to the stability and access to the city are generated.<sup>6</sup>

During the seven years of fieldwork, we carried out observations in different Buenos Aires neighbourhoods. We regularly walked with cartoneros to and

<sup>3</sup> In short, inhabiting goes beyond the idea of habitat or housing. It implies a relationship with the city, a specific way of living, imaging and appropriating the city.

<sup>4</sup> Marcio Goldman, *Como funciona a democracia: uma teoria etnográfica da política* (Rio de Janeiro: 7 LETRAS, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Mariano D. Perelman, ‘La estabilización en el cirujeo de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Una aproximación desde la antropología’, *Desarrollo Económico*, 51: 2 (2011), pp. 35–57.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

from their homes, travelling with them into the city and through it. We participated in their collection routes, witnessing their everyday contacts and interactions with vecinos, doormen, police, and other actors. We also carried out observations in cartoneros' homes, as well as in the places where they sold the collected goods.

The article is divided in four sections. The first section explains the emergence of cartoneros in middle-class neighbourhoods, as well as certain structural changes that took place in the city of Buenos Aires. The second presents the significance of understanding the construction of inequalities in interactions. The third section focuses on the tolerated presence of cartoneros in middle-class neighbourhoods. Finally, the fourth section highlights the limits of tolerance by addressing the eviction of a cartonero settlement.

### *Recent Transformations in Buenos Aires*

Among the recent transformations of the Latin American metropolis, many studies have highlighted the increase of urban poverty, the widening of social gaps and how this is expressed in the form of land occupation. Certain scholars refer to the emergence of a new urban setting of 'fragmented metropolises' or an urbanism of 'isolated worlds'.<sup>7</sup> These concepts have been coined to account for a *lack of unity and social integration* in the cities.<sup>8</sup>

In line with these diagnoses, some authors argue that in Buenos Aires processes of social polarisation are expressing a new spatial redistribution leading to *new urban forms with a marked insular character*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, research has focused on studying the rise of urban poverty and its new forms, as well as

<sup>7</sup> Marie France Prevot-Schapiro, 'Fragmentación espacial y social: conceptos y realidades', *Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 19 (2001): 33–56; Marie France Prevot-Schapiro y Rodrigo Cattaneo Pineda, 'Buenos Aires: la fragmentación en los intersticios de una sociedad polarizada', *Eure*, 34: 103 (2008), pp. 73–92. Gonzalo Saraví, 'Mundos aislados: segregación urbana y desigualdad en la ciudad de México', *Eure*, 34: 103 (2008), pp. 93–110.

<sup>8</sup> Emilio Duhau, 'Las megaciudades en el siglo XXI. De la modernidad inconclusa a la crisis del espacio público', in Patricia Ramírez Kuri (ed.), *Espacio público y reconstrucción de ciudadanía*, (Mexico: Flasco-Porrúa, 2003); Daniel Hiernaux Nicolas, 'Los frutos amargos de la globalización: expansión y reestructuración metropolitana de la Ciudad De México', *EURE (Santiago)*, 25: 76 (December 1999), pp. 57–78. Gonzalo Saraví, 'Mundos aislados: segregación urbana y desigualdad en la Ciudad De México', *Eure*, 34: 103 (2008), pp. 93–110.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Janoschka, 'El nuevo modelo de la ciudad Latinoamericana: fragmentación y privatización', *EURE (Santiago)*, 28: 85 (December 2002), pp. 11–20; Daniela Soldano, 'Vivir en territorios desmembrados. Un estudio sobre la fragmentación socio-espacial y las políticas sociales en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires (1990–2005)', in *Proceso de urbanización de la pobreza y nuevas formas de exclusión social* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre editores/Clacso-Crop, 2008), pp. 37–69.

the uses of 'their space';<sup>10</sup> other investigations focus on new residential strategies<sup>11</sup> and consumption forms of the middle classes and elites.<sup>12</sup> As poverty is mostly concentrated outside the city, studies that tend to problematise the territorial dimension often focus on life in poor suburban neighbourhoods or the city's slums.<sup>13</sup>

These lines of investigation have contributed, even without intending to do so, to the idea of a decrease in interactions between social groups: large cities are going through a process of urban 'decay', inhabitants are increasingly unable to 'live together' and the city as a place of meetings and exchanges is 'dissolving'. In addition, and as important, another line of research refers to the 'crisis' of public space, abandoned by the middle classes, and the emergence of a new 'safe, secure' private-run public space ensuring sociability for middle sectors.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, two processes also contributed to bringing poverty closer to the city. One of these was the appearance of the activity of cartoneo. As unemployment and poverty soared during the 1990s, thousands of people turned to informal activities to make a living. With the implementation of neoliberal policies since the last civil-military dictatorship (1976–83) and intensified during the governments of Carlos Menem (1989–99), unemployment reached unprecedented levels in a few years: from 2.4 per cent in 1975 to 21.5 per cent in 2002.

The end of the fixed one-to-one parity between the Argentine peso and the US dollar and the devaluation of the peso caused the price of certain recyclable materials (such as cardboard) to rise over 100 per cent. It became increasingly frequent to see people surrounded by piles of collected cardboard in the streets.

<sup>10</sup> See Natalia Da Representação and Daniela Soldano, 'Espacios comunes, sociabilidad y estado. Aportes para pensar los procesos culturales metropolitanos', *Apuntes De Investigación Del CECYP*, 17 (6 October 2010), pp. 79–96.

<sup>11</sup> As Maristella Svampa, *Los que ganaron. La vida en los countries y barrios privados* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2001); Cecilia Arizaga, *El mito de comunidad en la ciudad mundializada. Estilos de vida y nuevas clases medias en urbanizaciones cerradas* (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2005); Janoschka, 'El nuevo modelo de la ciudad latinoamericana'.

<sup>12</sup> Emanuela Guano, 'The Denial of Citizenship: "Barbaric" Buenos Aires and the Middle-class Imaginary', *City and Society*, 16: 1 (2004), pp. 69–97; Emanuela Guano, 'Of Modernity: Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires', *Cultural Anthropology*, 17: 2 (2002), pp. 181–209.

<sup>13</sup> On the former see Alejandro Grimson, M. Cecilia Ferraudi Curto and Ramiro Segura, *La vida política en los barrios populares de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2009); Denis Merklen, *Pobres ciudadanos: las clases populares en la era democrática, Argentina, 1983–2003* (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Argentina: Gorla, 2005). María Cristina Cravino, *Las villas de la ciudad: mercado e informalidad urbana* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Sennet, *El declive del hombre público (The Fall of Public Man)* (Barcelona: Península, 2002); Setha Low, 'Transformaciones del espacio público en la ciudad latinoamericana', *Bifurcaciones*, 5 (2005); Zygmunt Bauman, *Comunidad: en busca de seguridad en un mundo hostil (Community: Seeking Safety in a Hostile World)* ([Madrid]: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 2003).

The Spanish word for cardboard, *cartón*, led to the denomination of people carrying out this activity as *cartoneros*. These *cartoneros* collect from city streets, especially in the richest neighbourhoods where the amount of waste and its quality are high. Collection is mostly a nocturnal activity: according to the formal collecting system, waste must be taken out on the street between 8.00 and 9.00 pm. The garbage truck then picks up the bags, compacts them and takes them to be buried in sanitary landfills outside the city.

This way of collecting differs significantly from the waste management system in force until 1977, when open dumps were shut down. Until then, *cirujas* (name by which waste collectors were known at the time) gathered and sold the collected materials in dumps located at the city margins. With the change of waste management system, collectors were compelled to look for waste in the streets instead of waiting for it. During the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, *cirujeo* was a barely visible activity. However, at the dawn of the twenty-first century it became a massive phenomenon: men, women and children were seen walking the city streets pulling carts and going through garbage bags, searching for any recyclable material.<sup>15</sup> For the middle class, the presence of *cartoneros* represented the manifestation of poverty in their daily lives: on their doorsteps and on their way to work. The presence of *cartoneros* questioned the imagined city free of poverty (or with territorially segregated poverty in *villas miserias* (slums)). It was seen as a new flood of '*cabecitas negras*' (black faces) in a white city.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For a history of informal collection and its relation with the formal collection system see Verónica Paiva and Mariano D. Perelman, 'Aproximación histórica a la recolección formal e informal en la ciudad de Buenos Aires: la "quemada" de Parque Patricios (1860–1917) y la del Bajo Flores (1920–1977)', in *Theomai*, 21: first semester (2010), pp. 134–49; Verónica Paiva, *Cartoneros y cooperativas de recuperadores: una mirada sobre la recolección informal de residuos. Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires, 1999–2007* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2008); Mariano D. Perelman, 'Caracterizando la recolección informal en la ciudad de Buenos Aires', *Latin American Research Review*, 47: Special Issue (2012).

<sup>16</sup> *Cabecitas negras* can be literally translated as 'little blackheads' and refers to the hair and complexion colour of migrants from the provinces to the city of Buenos Aires. It is used as a pejorative and disqualifying label. During the first Peronist government, many people opposing Peron spoke of the 'zoological flood', a derogatory expression referring to the migrant population as if they were animals entering the city. It is notable that the adjective 'black' is used to distinguish the inhabitants of Buenos Aires from the 'others'. See Hugo Ratier, *El cabecita negra* (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1971); Rosana Guber, 'El cabecita negra o las categorías de investigación etnográfica en la Argentina', in Sergio Eduardo Visacovsky y Rosana Guber (eds.), *Historia y estilos de trabajo de campo en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Antropofagia, 2002), pp. 347–74; Natalia Milanessio, 'Peronists and Cabecitas. Stereotypes and Anxieties at the Peak of Social Change', in Matthew B Karush and Oscar Chamosa (eds.), *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 53–84. For the ways in which 'ethnic' questions are used as a mode of exclusion in Buenos Aires see Sonia Álvarez Leguizamón, María Ángela Aguilar and Mariano D. Perelman, 'Desigualdad urbana, pobreza y racismo: las recientes tomas de tierra en Argentina', in Carlos Fidel y Enrique Valencia Lomelí (eds.), (*Des*)*Encuentros entre reformas*



Another process that took place was the growth of the villas (slums) and increase in the number of settlements in the centre of the city. Since 2001, in the context of a deep social and economic crisis, the number of occupations of public and private properties located in central areas soared. These settlements were denominated New Urban Settlements (NAU, for its Spanish initials) to distinguish them from villas (the name for historical settlements of poor people in the city). Most villas are located in the south of the city, have a more or less stable frame, some basic infrastructure services and are recognised on official maps. The New Urban Settlements by contrast, are forms of poor urban settlement with a marked interstitial character and distributed in different parts of the city.<sup>17</sup> Their location generates physical proximity between socially distant groups. Moreover, it reinforces a ‘blurring of the *villa* – *barrio* [neighbourhood] opposition as main organizer of the frontiers between safety [the *barrio*] and dangerousness [the *villa*]’.<sup>18</sup> While middle-class neighbourhood residents experience villas as dangerous but distant places. NAUs emerge as an otherness that is all too close and dangerous.

Taking into account this context, it is necessary to complicate the previously mentioned diagnosis of the city as fragmented and ‘dissolved’ into unconnected worlds, where different social groups would hardly interact, exchange or meet.<sup>19</sup>

### *Urban Space and Social Inequalities*

Interactions and encounters do not speak directly of a more ‘open’ or more egalitarian society. Rather than an exercise of measurement, our proposal is to consider how social inequalities are (re)produced in certain territories. According to this perspective, and in line with previous research concerned with accounting for popular sectors’ differential access to the city of Buenos Aires,<sup>20</sup> we aim to understand how inequalities are produced and examine the strategies that agents deploy in their use of urban space.

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*sociales, salud, pobreza y desigualdad en América Latina*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Bernal, Pcia. de Buenos Aires: CLACSO-ASDI-Unqui, 2012), pp. 196–231.

<sup>17</sup> Florencia Rodríguez, ‘Notas sobre los conceptos de los “Nuevos Asentamientos Urbanos (NAUs)” en la ciudad de Buenos Aires’, *Revista Interuniversitaria de Estudios Territoriales PAMPA*, 5: (2009), pp. 197–217.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Kessler, *El sentimiento de inseguridad. Sociología del temor al delito* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2009), p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Although there is abundant research on the presence of the poor in the city, only some problematise the construction of territory. Among them, María Victoria Pita et al., ‘Formas de sociabilidad en las fronteras porosas entre lo legal y lo ilegal en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires’ (presented at the 10th Argentine Social Anthropology Conference, Buenos Aires, 2011); Ariel Wilkis, ‘Os usos sociais do dinheiro em circuitos filantrópicos: o caso das “Publicações De Rua”, *Mana*, 14: 1 (April 2008), pp. 205–34.

<sup>20</sup> Alejandro Grimson, ‘Introducción: clasificaciones espaciales y territorialización en la política de Buenos Aires’, in Alejandro Grimson, María Cecilia Ferraudi Curto and Ramiro Segura



Focusing on the construction of social inequalities entails thinking of processes as relational, complex and as products of long-term historical development. According to Tilly, inequalities are persistent and translate into pairs of social categories that in turn reproduce and reinforce social inequality.<sup>21</sup> In a recent book, and drawing from Tilly's contributions, Gootenberg and Reygadas affirm that inequalities are 'indelible' in Latin America: they are based on long-term processes and produced multicategorically.<sup>22</sup> According to Reygadas inequality is also (re)constructed upon a network of disadvantages, a 'network' with a long-standing structural basis.<sup>23</sup>

To understand how inequalities are produced it is necessary to focus on the relational level and observe interactions as well as narratives legitimising these relationships. Narratives are often based on 'individual' attributes of the agents. By examining interactions it is possible to appreciate the moments where these narratives are brought into play. Above all, analysis of interactions *in* the territory is key to understanding the role of space in the production of inequality.

The asymmetric distribution of territory, among other valuable assets, is at the centre of social conflicts and of the (re)production of urban inequalities. Territories and space are both socially constructed by power relations<sup>24</sup> and are contested areas in terms of historical tensions and experiences. Space is the result of spatially materialised and embodied social relations.<sup>25</sup>

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(eds.), *La vida política en los barrios populares de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2009), pp. 221–48. For cartoneros, see Débora Gorbán, 'La construcción social del espacio y la movilización colectiva. Las formas de organización espacial de los sectores populares en Buenos Aires. (Salir a cartonear, desentrañando prácticas y sentidos del trabajo entre quienes se dedican a la recolección de materiales recuperables)', unpubl. PhD diss. Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2009; Mariano D. Perelman, Martín Boy and Natalia Brutto, 'La pobreza expuesta: el cirujeo en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (2002–2007)', *Universitas Humanística*, 69: (enero de 2010), pp. 83–100; Mariano D. Perelman and Martín Boy, 'Cartoneros en Buenos Aires: nuevas modalidades de encuentro', *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 72: 3 (septiembre de 2010), pp. 393–418; Perelman, 'La estabilización en el cirujeo de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Una aproximación desde la antropología'.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Tilly, *La desigualdad persistente (Durable Inequality)* (Buenos Aires: Manatí, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Gootenberg and Luis Reygadas, *Indelible Inequalities in Latin America: Insights from History, Politics, and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Luis Reygadas, *La apropiación: destejendo las redes de la desigualdad* (Barcelona: Rubí y México, D.F.: Anthropos; UAM, Unidad Iztapalapa, División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (London: Routledge, 2001); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Pierre Bourdieu, 'Efectos de lugar', ('Site Effects') in Pierre Bourdieu (ed.), *La miseria del mundo (The Weight of the World)* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), pp. 119–24; Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (eds.), 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7: 1 (1992), pp. 6–23.

<sup>25</sup> Gastón Gordillo, *Lugares del diablo. Tensiones del espacio y la memoria* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010).

Spaces are constructed by discourses that construct inequality. However, space also plays a central role in the production of subjects and identities. Cartoneros are cartoneros in a given space, while they might be vecinos in another.<sup>26</sup> The same is true for vecinos. Thus, mutual recognition in a given space is what produces identifications that in turn produce inequities. Hence, it is necessary to examine the practices and technologies through which given social groups materialise their legitimate presence in space. In this process, behaviour, based on moral values, becomes central.

A perspective attentive to territory as a contested space and a producer of meanings and subjects leads to the examination of negotiation processes regarding access to the city. Furthermore, it enables the visibilisation of the strategies deployed by subaltern sectors to become part of the city.

### *Tolerated Presence: Cartoneros as Workers*

This section focuses on how cartoneros build routes through neighbourhoods in order to carry out their activity. We want to emphasise that their presence is possible through everyday arrangements that in turn are the result of actions, manoeuvres and negotiations over the use of public space.<sup>27</sup> Cartoneros are poor and live in what can be considered segregated neighbourhoods and travel into the city on a daily basis in search of their means of subsistence.

One afternoon, Pedro, a 45-year-old cartonero, told us 'It is not easy to walk down the street. People look at you with contempt, they move over when they see you, they avoid you or cross the street, and when you want to talk to them they hurry on'. In certain areas of the city, while walking through the streets, cartoneros are often challenged due to their status of 'foreigners'. Although this is not always the norm, it seems to be a burden they carry with them as soon as they leave their homes and that is exposed daily on the streets.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In these contacts, *vecinos* and *cartoneros* are moral people. We will expand on this in the next section.

<sup>27</sup> Gilberto Velho, *Projeto e metamorfose. Antropologia das sociedades complexas* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> In previous work we show that shame is a central emotion, constitutive of the activity for the *cartoneros* who started collecting after the Argentine crisis. Mariano D. Perelman, 'La construcción de la idea de trabajo digno en los cirujas de la ciudad de Buenos Aires', *Intersecciones en Antropología*, 12: 1 (julio de 2011), pp. 69–81; Mariano D. Perelman, 'Vergüenza y dignidad. Resignificaciones sobre el sentido del trabajo en los nuevos cirujas', in Pablo Schamber y Francisco Suárez (eds.), *Recicloscopio 2. Miradas sobre recuperadores, políticas públicas y subjetividades en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: UNLA/UNGS/CICCUS, 2011), pp. 223–38.

Another afternoon as we were walking through Florida Street (the city's main pedestrian street and which once represented an icon of Argentine progress), Osvaldo told us:

I wanted to undergo training and I completed secondary school; if I could now continue studying I would do it. I'd train in any field; I no longer want to be labelled as 'negro' (literally, black). Because, in truth, you are branded as *negro*. It's even worse when you are *provinciano* like myself.<sup>29</sup> I was so happy when a friend of mine my same age finished her studies. She made me see the difference. Before having a degree, people used to shut the door in her face. Now she has a bachelor's degree. So everybody calls her *Licenciada* (graduate) this, *Licenciada* that ... So if it is necessary to gain a degree in order to stop being a *negrito*... so be it. They say there is no discrimination, but this is false. When you drop to the level that I am at now, I can see that there is discrimination.

Osvaldo refers to being 'negro', 'provinciano', 'poor', and to 'not having a degree'. Discrimination is constructed upon these categories in Buenos Aires. They are powerful narratives that construct inequality categorically: the condensation of an 'other' that is out of place in the city.

Many cartoneros wish to go unnoticed. However, there is no place for anonymity in the city. First, because cartoneros pull huge carts full of garbage through the streets. Second, because personal relationships are essential to guarantee that they are able to carry out their work. Thus, although it has been said that streets are the place of anonymity, for cartoneros they are the place of contact and recognition.<sup>30</sup> Because recognition takes place in specific ways, during interactions it is possible to see the way that boundaries are produced. In the city's urban space it is possible to recognise the existence of *symbolic boundaries* produced by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices and space itself. Boundaries create order in urban space, generating distinctions and classifications.<sup>31</sup> These categorisations, based on moral values, produce identification within a group and differentiation from 'others'.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> He is referring to the provinces of Argentina. Differentiation and discrimination of *porteños* (inhabitants of the city of Buenos Aires) towards the people from the provinces is common.

<sup>30</sup> We use the idea of recognition in a generic way. There is recognition in moments of affinity as well as in conflictive moments.

<sup>31</sup> Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, 'The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28: 1 (2002), pp. 167–95.

<sup>32</sup> Fernando Balbi, *De leales, desleales y traidores. Valor moral y concepción de política en el peronismo* (Buenos Aires: GIAPER- Antropofagia, 2007), 76 argues that referring to behaviour related to moral values is to talk about actions that consistently reveal the preference of particular courses of action in terms of their desirability and obligation. This preference is conceptually formulated and the choice in favour of an action is stimulated through an emotional weight attached to its conceptual formulation. Adriana de Resende B Vianna, 'Derechos, moralidades y desigualdades: consideraciones a partir de procesos de guarda de niños', en Carla Villalta (ed.), *Infancia, justicia y derechos humanos* (Bernal, Pcia. de Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2010), pp. 21–72, says that

There is nothing new in saying that people behave differently according to context. What we wish to emphasise is that by analysing people's different ways of behaving it is possible to understand spatially symbolic universes, moralities and power relations. Cartoneros are accepted in middle-class neighbourhoods so long as they are recognised as potential 'workers' and they 'behave properly' according to what is considered 'appropriate' in those spaces. Waste pickers need to access these spaces in order to obtain garbage, a resource they transform into merchandise. Cartoneros' 'appropriate' behaviour is not understood as such in terms of a personal assessment (of the researcher). Rather, we reconstruct the idea of correct behaviour through our ethnographic fieldwork.

The transformation of the poor-cartonero stigma into a worker was favoured by the Buenos Aires city government with its implementation of a series of policies aimed at transforming, at least discursively, the cartoneros into *recuperadores urbanos* (urban recyclers).<sup>33</sup> However, since garbage seems to belong elsewhere,<sup>34</sup> and cartoneros seem to be out of place, acceptance of waste pickers is only guaranteed if they comply with spatially proper behaviour.

In hostile territory, cartoneros must transform stigma into trust, paradoxically, by making themselves visible. By creating established collection routes, they are able to enter a circle of trust that depends largely on 'being there'. The need to obtain a certain degree of material security, required in activities that are so unpredictable, can only be achieved through reversing anonymity. Cartoneros' activity of moving through the city that causes rejection by part of its population also enables forms of affinity with other subjects. However, the production and maintenance of personal relationships also depends on the behaviour displayed by both actors (cartoneros and vecinos) that show mutual acceptance; this generally takes place when and if the 'foreigner' respects the social and spatial codes of the territory through which they circulate.

In order to build trust, cartoneros must accept the behaviour code that they acknowledge when walking through a space that is alien to them. It is in this space where these people searching through garbage bags for something to collect become cartoneros.

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morality cannot be taken as a clearly defined and watertight set of behaviour and values; moralities are a dynamic field of construction and transmission never completely closed in advance and dependent on specific experiences which are invoked and made explicit.

<sup>33</sup> Manuel Trufro and Luis M. Sanjurjo, 'Cuerpos precarios. La construcción discursiva de los "cartoneros", entre la invasión del espacio público y la gestión biopolítica', *Question*, 1: 28 (2010), s/p.

<sup>34</sup> Risa Whitson, 'Negotiating Place and Value: Geographies of Waste and Scavenging in Buenos Aires', *Antipode*, 43: 4 (2011), pp. 1404–1433.

In the relations that the collectors construct with others they distinguish *vecinos* from *clientes* (clients).<sup>35</sup> This distinction also shows the varied acceptance of *cartoneros* by city inhabitants. In an interview, Julio (a 68-year-old collector) highlighted the significance of being known, where

People must know that you are well-meaning, correct, that you're not a thief, nor a drunk, that you're not a drug addict or a rapist. You must meet all these conditions or you cannot walk the streets. Then, a moment arrives when people know that you're a guy just trying to make a living and that you're not a thief. So people start separating and saving bottles, glass, newspapers, magazines, cloth and mattresses for you [...] Walking these streets you have to be clean, shaved [...] and above all, you should respect women, because there are ten witches on each block, and if a beautiful girl passes by and you just say hello, there will be 9 or 10 women asking her, 'What did he say?'; [Then he laughs, and goes on] they're gossips, but in a good way. And if you cross the line, then you're crap and not a *cartonero* [...] and although you walk those blocks, the *vecinos* close the curtain on you and say 'there goes that slime'.

From Julio's point of view, trust emerges in personal recognition. *Vecinos* 'saving' materials is proof of this as well as of the fact that he is seen as a 'worker'. As it is impossible for Julio to go unnoticed, he attempts to treat *vecinos* kindly, making the unfamiliar place a more familiar one. As already mentioned, trust is based on reciprocal acts.

For *vecinos*, trust is made possible through the daily presence of people that should not be there. When faced with otherness, poverty, the fear of being robbed or raped appears; however, the personalisation of the relationship enables trust and the certainty that 'nothing will happen to them', because *cartoneros* are 'good people'. Trust is also constructed in everyday gestures on the street. Maintaining stable relationships requires specific behaviour such as 'not getting drunk', 'not being stoned', as Julio noted. In short, *cartoneros* must not behave in ways that can be perceived as unacceptable in the context where they collect.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the relations established between *cartoneros* and *clientes* implies that *cartoneros* acknowledge the existence of boundaries based on moral grounds that should not be crossed.

*Cartoneros* return the good disposition of certain neighbourhood residents by behaving properly in the street: cleaning up after collecting, not occupying spaces with their carts that might annoy people and treating people cordially. This behaviour is highly valued by *vecinos*.

<sup>35</sup> While first category *cartoneros* refers to all the people present in the collecting zone, the second category defines certain people: *vecinos* that keep merchandise to themselves. For an analysis of the construction and maintenance of *clientes* see: Perelman, 'La estabilización en el cirujeo de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Una aproximación desde la antropología'.

<sup>36</sup> Our fieldwork in both the neighbourhoods where *cartoneros* live as well as where they collect allowed us to observe differential forms of behaviour. While discretion seems to be the goal in the latter, boasting is often present in the former.

When we asked Fernando, a resident of the middle-class neighbourhood of Caballito, why he separated bags of waste for Fortunato, a cartonero, he responded that Fortunato's behaviour was key: he left everything clean and he parked his cart in a place where it did not interfere with anything. Fernando also referred to Fortunato as a working person and that he was not 'lazy' like other cartoneros that 'neighbours hate' because they do not care about 'hygiene', who 'leave dirty mess behind' and 'shout profanities in front of the kids'.

We oftentimes heard vecinos complain of cartoneros. Most complaints were based on arguments regarding the danger of collectors and their cleanliness (or lack thereof).<sup>37</sup> Whitson has pointed out that the (geography of) waste visibilises power relations, the construction of identities and meanings.<sup>38</sup> The increased presence of waste pickers in these middle-class neighbourhoods of the city intensified the idea that trash, as well as certain social actors associated with it, belong elsewhere.

Many vecinos complained of the mere presence of cartoneros in the neighbourhoods and blamed them of an increase in robberies: '*Cartoneros* are looking at the cars; when they see a chance to steal a stereo, they go for it', 'they come to steal', 'they carry stolen goods in their carts', these were some of the phrases we often heard from neighbours.

Other neighbours blamed cartoneros for the streets' increasing filth: 'they tear the garbage bags, leave trash all over the sidewalk, they don't care about anything'. 'They are dirty, look at the state of the sidewalks! This is a disaster', others complained. Carts were also a matter of dispute. Some vecinos complained of obstructions to driveways or crosswalks. Conversely, the cartoneros complained about the vecinos' lack of respect for their activity. Collectors said, for example, that while they are pushing their carts in the streets, many drivers 'just drive their cars into us'.

Thus, we can distinguish between neighbours with whom cartoneros generate good relations, from those with which they establish conflicting relationships (that frequently remain only at the level of complaints), and the ones that try to exclude them from their territory, an issue that will be examined in the next section.

Complaints express behaviour imagined as appropriate by both groups. Once, a cartonero called Manuel showed us a page where he had written a series of 'rules' about how cartoneros should behave. According to him,

<sup>37</sup> The discourse of dangerousness refers to criminalisation of poverty and fear of the poor. We understand fear not as a natural reaction, but as a construction of meaning. From this position, fear is a factor that explains the behaviour of people. In fear it is possible to recognise instituted social forms (rather than individual ones) of action. Fear must not be thought of as 'rational' or 'irrational' but rather we should focus on the ways an object of fear is constructed.

<sup>38</sup> Whitson, 'Negotiating Place and Value', op. cit.

many collectors were not acting properly and that had implications for all cartoneros. Manuel said that some of them 'left everything dirty, they were drunk or poorly dressed'. Thus, Manuel was recognising that collectors needed to 'behave properly' in city streets and how space imposes behaviour. In their actions, cartoneros recognise this history of exclusion and stigmatisation in moral territories.

During fieldwork, we noticed that cartoneros behave differently when collecting (in middle-class neighbourhood streets) compared with the neighbourhoods where they lived, when they sold the collected materials or when they were travelling to or returning from the city by train.

While yelling, smoking, loud music and insults were common practices during these second moments, during collection cartoneros tried to behave less antagonistically: they avoided foul language; music was replaced by conversations with vecinos and cordiality prevailed. Our interpretation is that while streets appear as the territory of 'the other', the other places emerge as familiar territory or territory of their own.

Differential patterns of behaviour express symbolic boundaries that waste pickers experience in their everyday routes. Space embodies hegemonic moralities that govern the territory and guide ways of acting. But above all, these different ways of acting account for how subjects construct territories and territorialised identities.

Gloria, for example, is well known in the neighbourhood where she lives for being a social activist. She takes care of her neighbours, who go to her for help in solving problems. However, dealing with vecinos in middle-class neighbourhoods Gloria is a cartonera. While in her neighbourhood Gloria has a name, is well known, manages resources and has the ability to give orders, in middle-class neighbourhoods she adapts her behaviour according to the moralities and relationships prevailing in those spaces.

During fieldwork, we asked the vecinos how they saw Gloria. Most commonly we heard that she is 'a working woman', 'friendly' and that she 'leaves everything clean'. However, her fellow neighbours did not refer to her as a cartonera or related in any way to garbage collection. Instead, she was seen by them as a *referente barrial* (neighbourhood leader). For these people the central characteristic was her ability to solve problems.

By understanding the ways in which people 'behave' it is possible to see the images, both explicit and implicit, groups have of each other, negotiations and adaptations of behaviour in terms of establishing and maintaining relationships.

With this, we do not intend to imply that agents have a rational idea of the way they should behave. Instead, there is a sort of internalisation and conscious practices of the way of acting. Additionally, we do not mean that vecinos or cartoneros are per se a homogeneous class or group. But surely their everyday



lives, and their experiences are different. On the one hand, *vecinos* and *cartoneros* when they interact are moral people. Thus, collectors are compelled to transform anonymity into trust. Anonymity works for neighbours, but not for *cartoneros*: they must be recognised individually and not as part of an ‘out of place’<sup>39</sup> collective.

These processes account for the mutual recognition of the presence of an ‘other’ with different capabilities for imposing meaning and appropriating space. The analysis of interactions in space enabled us to see how people collecting garbage are constructed as or become *cartoneros* and people living in the collecting territory, *vecinos*. Analysis of social relations enabled us to see *vecinos*’ ability to control *cartoneros*’ access to the territory in two ways: first, recognising the collectors (allowing them walk through, ignoring them or establishing a personal relationship with them) and second, by giving them material resources. Because the activity of *cartoneo* is an economic one, generating the possibility of collecting, either by granting the possibility of moving through the territory or by saving materials for them, is a very powerful form of control.

#### *The Limits of Tolerance: The Morixé Settlement and Its Eviction*

So far, we have analysed the ways in which waste pickers, as long as they are seen as ‘workers’, can deploy strategies that can reverse or curb the *stigma* they carry, thus enabling them to walk through the streets and collect garbage. In the interactions between *cartoneros* and *vecinos* we saw that the former seek to adjust their behaviour according to a hegemonic morality of the territory where they perform their activity. In this ‘imposition’ there is a space for negotiation.

This section focuses on a situation that illustrates the limits of tolerance to the presence of *cartoneros* in a middle-class neighbourhood. We will refer to the way in which *vecinos*, including those that are considered *clientes*, contested the presence of collectors when they became residents of the neighbourhood. When *cartoneros* as workers appropriate public space temporarily, they adopt specific *ways of doing* that allow them to negotiate. But when they become inhabitants of the neighbourhood and attempt a permanent and visible appropriation of space, their presence is contested by *vecinos*. We will address this question by analysing the case of the Morixé *cartonero* settlement.

The settlement was located in Caballito, a middle- and upper-middle class neighbourhood, located in the geographic centre of the city of Buenos Aires. Despite being a well-established neighbourhood, within it there is a vacant

<sup>39</sup> Although these groups are not homogeneous, we believe that experiences (as understood by Thompson) unify and differentiate *cartoneros* and *vecinos*, E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Vintage, 1966). By analysing everyday experiences, it is possible to build an interpretive perspective that privileges class perspective. Claudia Fonseca, ‘La clase social y su recusación etnográfica’, *Etnografías Contemporáneas*, 1: (2005): 133.

space, land owned by the federal government and that prior to the privatisations of the 1990s, was the goods yard for the Sarmiento railway. The Morixé cartonero settlement grew on a portion of this abandoned space. Cartoneros built their precarious homes on one side of the railway and on the other side they established a place to gather recyclable materials (bottles, tin, wood, or cardboard) collected on their daily routes.

The settlement had been there for several years when the problem became public.<sup>40</sup> In 2007, the construction of a bridge made the settlement visible; two years later, contending that it involved sanitary risk and a ‘public health and life hazard’ the city government issued ‘the immediate evacuation of the precarious houses’<sup>41</sup> and proceeded to evict the settlement. The bridge had been built for road and pedestrian traffic. However, as an unexpected effect, it made visible the settlement that until then had remained invisible because of the morphology of the area. The bridge created a contact zone, in Geertz’s phrase, between different and unequal subjects.<sup>42</sup> It worked as an artefact that linked what was different and differentiated what was linked.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike what happened in the streets where the presence of cartoneros was tolerated, the creation of the bridge activated a series of discourses and practices that allowed us to understand the limits of the relationship between cartoneros and vecinos. The local residents organised demonstrations, met with public officials and made several claims and complaints to the Ministry of Environment and Public Space in order to get the settlement evicted.

In this case, territory was also a key component in the construction of subjects. While collectors circulating through neighbourhoods were constructed as cartoneros-workers, the inhabitants of the settlement were seen as cartoneros-encroachers, which produced a delegitimation of their presence.<sup>44</sup> During fieldwork in the settlement, we noted that the inhabitants’ behaviour was different from when they were collecting. These ways of acting referred to distinct modes of appropriation of space. In the settlement, for vecinos of Caballito not only hegemonic morality was at stake but also the possibility

<sup>40</sup> According the Housing Commission of the City Legislature (CVL, for its initials in Spanish), when it was evicted the settlement was 11 years old and there were between 40 and 50 families living there.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. Res.N°713 –SSEMERG/08 (B. O. N°3048 del 3/11/08).

<sup>42</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Reflexiones antropológicas sobre temas filosóficos (Anthropological Issues on Philosophical Topics)* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> We follow Simmel’s idea of the bridge as metaphor. Georg Simmel, *Ensayos sobre el individuo y la libertad* (Barcelona: Península, 1986).

<sup>44</sup> The delegitimation and the eviction of the *cartoneros* when they settled happened in other middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods as well, such as Belgrano. See Mariano D. Perelman, ‘Asentamientos cartoneros y conflictos en el espacio público porteño: el caso de la ocupación de un playón en Barrancas de Belgrano’, in Verónica Paiva (ed.) *Nuevas formas precarias de habitar la ciudad de Buenos Aires. 1990–2010* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones DADU-Nobuko, 2011), pp. 47–63.

of controlling and dominating the space and the people. The settlement thus emerged as an 'other' moral territory, but within the neighbourhood. The cartonero settlement was then perceived as a *threatening otherness* that reinforced the imaginary construction of a sense of community of neighbours,<sup>45</sup> which was expressed in public demonstrations in favour of the settlement's eviction. What the public presence of the settlement produced, then, was the (re) construction of an 'us' and of an 'other'. *Vecinos* began to identify and define themselves as residents, as a group that not only identifies in terms of their physical proximity, but also of their social and moral likeness.

Whitson's vision in relation to the geography of waste, as an organiser of social relations and where garbage is out of place, allows the understanding of the two cases we are analysing together. Both cases show how an acceptable relationship between space, people and garbage is constructed, as well as the limits that reposition garbage and people that deal with it as 'out of place' again. In the eviction process, the narratives produced constructed cartoneros as 'invaders', 'dangerous' and 'polluters', in addition to misusing public space. Although many of these collectors were constructed as cartoneros-workers by vecinos while they circulated, when they were seen as inhabitants of the settlement they became squatters.

A vecina wrote, 'When the bridge was completed, it revealed a lot of precarious houses [...] which were growing incessantly. Together with this precarious housing, burglaries, robberies in homes, markets, cars and passers-by began to appear [...]' (Letter from a vecina to one of the neighbourhood organisations, 14 January 2008).

As in this case and many others, cartoneros become thieves and illegal squatters. For neighbourhood residents 'insecurity' refers to the danger of damage to property, goods and people. The settlement was categorised as 'source of crime'. This discourse is sustained and constructed not only by residents but also by the media.<sup>46</sup> In fact, several articles were published in the press that presented the settlement as linked to an increase in the number of robberies in the area.<sup>47</sup> In the narratives of neighbours, insecurity is explained in the transformation of the poor into a 'dangerous class'.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Ellis Horwood Ltd. and Tavistock Publications, 1985); Mary Douglas, *Como piensan las instituciones (How Institutions Think)* (Madrid: Alianza, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Trufó and Sanjurjo, 'Cuerpos precarios. La construcción discursiva de los "cartoneros", entre la invasión del espacio público y la gestión biopolítica'.

<sup>47</sup> 'Caballito: denuncian que la zona del nuevo puente es muy insegura. Las miradas apuntan a un asentamiento ubicado entre las vías' (*Clarín*, 25 Oct. 2007); 'La inseguridad golpea al nuevo puente de Caballito' (*Infobae*, 25 Oct. 2007); 'Crece la ocupación de un terreno ferroviario en la zona de la cancha de Ferro. Pelea entre vecinos y cartoneros por una asentamiento en Caballito' (*Clarín*, 28 June 2008); 'Vecinos de Caballito exigen la erradicación de asentamiento' (*Infobae*, 29 June 2008).

There were several meetings between vecinos and public officials to achieve the evacuation of the settlement. During meetings, vecinos resorted to their own plebeian or immigrant origin to justify their objection to the cartonero settlement in the neighbourhood. They made a distinction between their European ancestors-immigrants who arrived in Argentina having ‘nothing’, and today’s poor, which they linked to migration from bordering countries. As expressed by Rita, a resident of Caballito for more than 30 years: ‘my ancestors were also immigrants and were very poor; there is nothing wrong with being poor, but my grandparents worked hard, they struggled and were able to move upwards’. In the discourses of vecinos, the current poor have not incorporated the ‘culture of work and effort’, a narrative that has constituted Argentine middle classes.<sup>48</sup> To this ‘lack of effort’, middle-class residents oppose their own effort and the investments they have made to live in that neighbourhood.

The cartonero settlement, thus, represented a threatening otherness for vecinos; they perceived it as a ‘source of crime’ exposing them to potential dangers. Moreover, it was a threatening otherness experienced as illegitimate and illegal in that public space was being ‘usurped’ by people that ‘make no effort’ and ‘do not pay taxes’. For vecinos disorder in public space refers to disorder in social hierarchies. They distinguish themselves from the ‘encroachers’ as they consider themselves ‘taxpaying citizens’. As Enrique (who was completing his university degree) told us ‘we pay taxes, we move forward; it is not right that we should have to protect ourselves from squatters’. According to the discourses of the vecinos, they are the ones contributing to the maintenance of the community by ‘paying taxes and respecting the law’.

Complaints and upsets of the neighbours also referred to the changes in the neighbourhood environment brought about by the presence of the settlement. During the multiple meetings we attended, vecinos showed the government agents pictures and videos, to denounce that cartoneros living in the settlement generated ‘filth’ and ‘contamination’. In processes of urban segregation, as highlighted by Carmen,<sup>49</sup> contamination involves different meanings and always works intertwined with broader discourses such as the notion of citizenship, the appropriate ways of occupying spaces and interacting with the rest of the subjects in the territory, and so on. In one of the meetings, a neighbour, who a few months later won the Participatory Neighbour 2009 prize, said that

for months we, the neighbours of Caballito, have observed with great concern a new illegal settlement next to the new bridge and under it [...]; this conglomeration is a source of infection and a settlement for rodents and vermin. Besides, it is obviously not a nice sight for those of us who comply with municipal ordinances [...]. This

<sup>48</sup> Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina: apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919–2003*, 1<sup>a</sup> ed. (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> María Carman, *Las trampas de la naturaleza. Medio ambiente y segregación en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011).

new source of infection presents another set of potential precarious houses within only 50 metres from our homes [...]. Caballito is a residential area and for its status as such we pay high taxes. These illegal and precarious settlements, as well as all the practices that come with them, lead us residents to see with displeasure these types of visual and environmental invasions that harm the place where we have chosen to live. [...]. In this illegal settlement [...] we see significant consequences regarding insecurity in the area as well as environmental damage.

Many vecinos shared this representation of the settlement as illegal, a producer of insecurity and pollution. As residents of the settlement, the cartoneros could no longer be seen as workers. While they walked through the streets looking for materials their effort was valued, as well as the idea that they were earning a living 'working'; however, when they become 'residents' the notion of cartoneros *as workers* is totally abandoned. The different ways of using space, from momentary to permanent appropriation, took place in the same neighbourhood space, and produced different subjects: from cartonero-worker when they only collected to cartonero-invader when they settle.

State agencies also contributed to the production of this difference. In the previous section we mentioned that the state, through various actions, operated in the construction of cartoneros as workers (as 'urban recyclers'). This attempt to manage otherness enabled the legitimate presence of cartoneros while they were doing their job. The settlement shows, however, the limits of state tolerance. On 8 October 2008, in one of the ten meetings that neighbours had with public officials, Pablo Fornieles, the general director of recycling policy, was in charge of explaining to the neighbours the legal process and timetables for the settlement's eviction. The public officer's intervention started with a phrase that guaranteed resident's attention for quite a long time without interruptions. Fornieles began his presentation by saying that he was there to 'explain the plan regarding the Caballito eviction'. His audience listened carefully. 'The Government's position is [the residents of the settlement] can no longer be there – in the *barrio* – they must leave. Public space is non-negotiable. We will get them out on good terms or we will apply the law. Public space should be used and enjoyed by residents, not usurped'.

Both cases show that a geography of waste creates social relations based on the notion that garbage is 'out of place': but they also show that 'the place' can be negotiated. Cartoneros and garbage are out of place. Nevertheless this 'out' territorially includes and excludes cartoneros simultaneously. In addition, it is possible to say that the exclusionary inclusion has its limits. As in the second case analysed there is no possible negotiation. Although it can be said that the settlement is part of the geography of waste there is a process of narrative shift to other geographies that makes cartoneros undesirable invaders. The eviction thus put cartoneros 'in their place' as legitimate users of the neighbourhood only when circulating, but not as full residents, as vecinos.

*Conclusions: Tolerance, Inequality and Public Space*

During recent decades the growth of urban poverty and social inequalities along with the implementation of new forms of urban policy and promotion of certain discourses regarding ‘violence’, ‘insecurity’ or ‘environment’, merged with old discourses of segregation to produce new ways for popular sectors to access the city. These same processes also produced new ways for popular sectors to be denied access.

In the same way as in other cities, socio-territorial inequalities have increased in Buenos Aires. These processes are deeply rooted in specific historical processes. Access to space produces social inequalities; however, due to specific historical processes that have occurred in Argentina, its analysis should not be approached from the perspective of citizenship.<sup>50</sup> For the case of Buenos Aires, this approach allows us to understand how social belonging is also spatial and how this creates privileges and rights. However, citizenship and citizenship rights in Argentina are linked to a series of processes that overlap with the right to the city. Although some (few) actors might refer to this category, as was the case with some residents of Caballito, it is not anchored in spatial relationships nor does it always produce expulsion. The actors’ rhetoric tends to be more linked to ‘work’ (given the Argentine historical conditions in relation to citizenship) than to citizenship, as both residents of the city or of the nation (among other inscriptions).

Furthermore, the city of Buenos Aires is still dominated by the presence of ‘open’ neighbourhoods.<sup>51</sup> The article seeks to contribute and complicate the existing literature on the production processes of inequality and how they generate social segregation. As we stated, many articles account for the increased production of social and urban inequality in Buenos Aires. Much of this work has focused on studying the processes of socio-spatial segregation and exclusion in segregated neighbourhoods. This research has contributed to the understanding of processes that occurred during the last decades: social inequality that took the shape of socio-spatial segregation. Our article focuses on less studied processes: the analysis of the constant and everyday production processes of inequalities through interactions between territorialised social groups.

<sup>50</sup> James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Ryan Centner, ‘Microcitizenships: Fractious Forms of Urban Belonging after Argentine Neoliberalism’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 36: (2012), pp. 336–62.

<sup>51</sup> Natalia Cosacov, ‘Habitar la centralidad. Trayectorias residenciales y usos cotidianos de espacio urbano de residentes en Caballito, Buenos Aires’, unpubl. PhD diss., University of Buenos Aires, 2014.

The analysis of two parallel situations allowed us to show how relationships are built daily in a given territory. We focus on relationships that are produced around garbage but that go beyond it, anchored in broader processes. Whitson analysed the existence of a geography of waste, where garbage and the cartoneros are 'out of place' in certain areas of the city. While this is a starting point for behaviour, we show it is possible to negotiate that place. Everyday interactions and negotiations are what enable cartoneros to use the territory (as workers). Analysis of interactions allows us to account for the negotiable character of space and the production of actors' multiple identities. In any case, ethnographic analysis clarifies how place is negotiated and identity is not defined only by the activity itself. This is why we focused on practices and narratives and the efficacy they have for influencing cartoneros' behaviour when passing through the neighbourhood or for excluding them from it when they attempt to stay permanently.

We were able to account for the limits of the presence of cartoneros who are not always seen only as *cartoneros*. Identities do not precede practices, nor do they precede relationships in the territory. Cartoneros can be 'urban recyclers' (meaning, precarious workers) or invaders, according to the moment and to the ways of using the territory. Nevertheless, cartoneros' access, even as workers, to the territory is problematic and unequal. This is precisely what led us to examine the case, to show how inequality is produced on a daily basis. Thus, investigating the processes of exclusion in open neighbourhoods not only enables complicating the construction of social inequality but also illuminates processes that otherwise cannot be understood. Interactions, moments of contact, are fertile ground to show how inequalities are constructed and reproduced. It is in the territories delimited by symbolic and moral boundaries where discourses and narratives of inequality make sense. In this line, we were interested in showing the historical character of territories and the daily process of production and (re)production of power relations in the territory.

### *Spanish and Portuguese abstracts*

*Spanish abstract.* Basado en el trabajo de campo realizado entre 2002 y 2010 en este artículo mostramos cómo en la pugna por el uso del espacio público se generan distancias sociales y se reproducen las desigualdades de clase a partir de indagar en la presencia de personas dedicadas a la recolección informal de residuos en los barrios centrales de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Argumentamos que ello no sólo se produce a partir de una segregación espacial sino también en las interacciones cotidianas. Se abordan dos situaciones: el modo en que los cartoneros construyen recorridos en los barrios para poder realizar su tarea y el proceso de desalojo de un asentamiento de cirujas.

*Spanish keywords:* Argentina, desigualdad, pobreza urbana, segregación social, espacio público



*Portuguese abstract.* Com base em trabalhos de campo abrangendo áreas e períodos extensivos (entre 2002 e 2009) este artigo analisa a presença, uso e disputas pelo espaço público entre *cartoneros* e *vecinos* em bairros de classe média e da região central da cidade de Buenos Aires, examinando práticas, moralidades e narrativas que operam na produção e manutenção de desigualdades sociais. Concentrando-se em interações espacializadas, o artigo mostra como as desigualdades de classe são reproduzidas e as distâncias sociais são geradas nas disputas pelo espaço público. Para tal, duas situações sociais são abordadas. Primeiro, exploramos a maneira pela qual cartoneros constroem caminhos em bairros de classe média para poderem desempenhar suas tarefas. Segundo, apresentamos uma análise do processo de despejo de um assentamento cartonero na cidade.

*Portuguese keywords:* Argentina, desigualdade, pobreza urbana, segregação social, espaço público