THE UNEMPLOYED IN MOVEMENT:
STRUGGLES FOR A COMMON TERRITORY IN THE BUENOS AIRES
URBAN PERIPHERY

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ABSTRACT

Liz Mason-Deese: The Unemployed in Movement: Struggles for a Common Territory in the Buenos Aires Urban Periphery
(Under the direction of Altha Cravey)

In 2001, after years of increasing unemployment and neoliberal austerity measures, a massive uprising shook the streets of Buenos Aires and forced the neoliberal government out of office. The movements that led and emerged from this insurrection were notable for the new form of politics that they practiced: aiming not to take the power of the state but to create counter-power from below. This dissertation analyzes the experiences of one of the key social movements during this period: the unemployed workers' movements. Never a nationally unified movement, autonomous organizations of unemployed workers emerged throughout the country, conducting massive roadblocks to demand unemployment benefits and creating their own forms of “work with dignity.” Drawing on two years of ethnographic fieldwork along with the rich theoretical production of the movements themselves, the dissertation focuses on two such organizations in the urban periphery of Buenos Aires.

The dissertation shows how the unemployed workers' organizations expand the definition of labor in order to recognize crucial reproductive labor and other forms of feminized labor that are often marginalized, highlighting the productivity of the poor and the unemployed. This has crucial implications for understanding the contemporary capitalist economy, especially in its neo-extractivist form currently dominant in Latin America and the continued prevalence of
precarious and informal labor. In order to organize around this expanded notion of labor, the unemployed workers' movements engage in “territorial organizing,” in which each organization works in a specific neighborhood or territory, drawing its membership primarily from that geographic space, addressing the most pressing needs of its residents, and establishing a physical presence there. The unemployed workers' organizations enacted alternative economic practices in their territories, such as worker-controlled cooperatives and other enterprises, as well as autonomous forms of social reproduction, such as schools and health clinics. These alternative practices allowed the poor and unemployed to survive the worst of Argentina's economic crisis, while laying the foundations for an alternative society. Ultimately, this dissertation shows how the unemployed workers' movements center their practices around collectively producing and controlling the common and creating new forms of life.
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Nada de lo que yo tengo; nada de lo que soy; ni nada de lo que pienso es mío.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS...........................................................................................................................................xii

Chapter 1: Introduction..................................................................................................................................................1

The Insurrection of December 2001..............................................................................................................................1

Unemployed Workers’ Movements.................................................................................................................................4

Origins of Project..........................................................................................................................................................8

Methods and Knowledge Production..............................................................................................................................12

Three Moments in Argentinean History........................................................................................................................21

Ten Years of 2001..........................................................................................................................................................24

Central Arguments.......................................................................................................................................................28

Dissertation Structure..................................................................................................................................................31

Chapter 2: Labor and Unemployment from Neoliberalism to Neo-Extractivism.........................................................34

Neoliberalism: Argentina in the Global Context..............................................................................................................36

New Forms of Labor: Life Put to Work..........................................................................................................................40

The Contemporary Neo-extractive Economy..................................................................................................................44

The Productivity of the Unemployed.............................................................................................................................48

Reproductive and Care Work.......................................................................................................................................59

Financialization in the Urban Periphery........................................................................................................................63

Diversification and Precaritization of Labor in Argentina.............................................................................................69

Conclusion.......................................................................................................................................................................77
Chapter 3: Recomposition – Organizing the Unemployed and Precarious

Limits to Traditional Modes of Organizing

Emergence and Composition of the Organizations of the Unemployed

Women’s Participation in the MTDs

Youth Participation

Migrant Participation

Experiences and Expectations of (Un)Employment

Constructing a Collective Identity

Challenging Divisions, Finding Commonalities

Demands around work

The Demand for Unemployment Benefits

Demand for Genuine Work

Work with Dignity

Challenging the Culture of Work

Moving Beyond Work

Chapter 4: Struggles over the Political – Autonomy and Counter-Power in the MTDs

Neoliberal Governmentality

Emergence of New Social Subjects in Resistance to Neoliberalism

Human Rights Organizations

Unemployed Workers’ Movements

Re-theorizing Power and Enacting Counter-Power

Autonomy and the State

Internal Organization: Direct Democracy and Horizontality
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5: Return to the Neighborhood – Reterritorialization of Struggle</th>
<th>174</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deterritorialization under Neoliberalism and Post-Fordism</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reterritorialization through Struggle</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial Practices of the MTDs</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography of the Piquete</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Organizing</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of Territorial Organizing</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Territorial Conflicts</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Social Conflict</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 6: Constructing the Common and Creating New Forms of Life | 219 |

Theorizing the Common                                          | 221 |
| Self-Management of Space                                      | 224 |
| Solidarity Economy                                            | 228 |
| Buen Vivir                                                    | 230 |

Commoning During 2001                                          | 232 |
| Barter Clubs and Alternative Currency Networks                | 233 |
| Recuperated Workplaces                                        | 236 |
| Other Commoning Practices                                     | 240 |
Commoning Practices of the MTDs ................................................................. 242
Cooperative Production .................................................................................. 243
Food Production and Struggles for Food Sovereignty .................................. 248
Health ............................................................................................................. 250
Housing ......................................................................................................... 252
Education and Knowledge Production .......................................................... 257
Conclusions: Caring for a Life in Common ....................................................... 266
Productivity of the Unemployed: Expanding our notions of labor and exploitation 269
Organizing around Reproduction .................................................................... 272
Territory beyond the State ............................................................................. 275
Non-state-centric Politics .............................................................................. 278
New Forms of Life .......................................................................................... 281
REFERENCES ............................................................................................... 287
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUH (Asignación Universal del Hijo): Universal Per Child Allowance

CEFFOC (Centro por la Educación y Formación de Cultura Comunitaria) Center for Education and Formation of Communitarian Culture, Social Center of the MTD La Matanza

CCC (Corriente Clasista Combativa): Classist Combative Current, unemployed workers organization with a Maoist orientation

CGT (Confederación General de Trabajadores): General Confederation of Labor

CTA (Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina): Argentine Workers' Central

CTD Aníbal Verón (Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón): Aníbal Verón Coordinator of Unemployed Workers

FPDS (Frente Popular Darío Santillán): Darío Santillán Popular Front

FTV (Federación Tierra y Vivienda): Land and Housing Federation

HIJOS (Hijos y Hijas por la Justicia y contra el Olvido y el Silencio): Sons and Daughters for Justice and against Forgetting and Silence

IIEP (Instituto de Investigación y Experimentación Política): Institute for Political Investigation and Experimentation

MDC (Movimiento de Colectivos Maximiliano Kosteki): Maximiliano Kosteki Movement of Collectives, formerly the MTD de Solano

MTD (Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados): Unemployed Workers' Movement

PCR (Partido Comunista Revolucionario): Revolutionary Communist Party

PJ (Partido Justicialista): Justicialist Party, official Peronist political party

PO (Partido Obrero): Workers' Party

PROCELAC (La Procuraduría de Criminalidad Económica y Lavado de Activos): Office of Economic Crime and Money Laundering

YSP (Yo Sí Puedo): Yes I Can, High school initiated started by the MTD La Matanza that split off to become its own organization in 2009
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Insurrection of December 2001

*Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo* [Out with them all, not one can stay]. An expression of desperation: *ya basta*, we've had enough, get rid of them all. A slogan accompanied by the sounds of pots and pans banging in protest throughout Argentina. The call that came to characterize the Argentine popular uprising of December 2001 as thousands upon thousands of people took to the streets, defying a state of siege, resisting violent oppression, until the President stepped down. This cry resonated around the world, resonating with all of those struggling against neoliberalism and austerity measures, with all of those insisting *another world is possible*. Those words – *que se vayan todos* – came to define an entire generation of Argentinean activists and political movements that were marked by this experience of insurrection, the rejection of state power, the struggle for popular autonomy, and the construction of counter-power from below. As the country fell deeper into economic crisis, alternatives would emerge from the very populations that had been violently marginalized for decades; these innovations include alternative forms of social and political organization, diverse economic practices, different values and types of social relations, new forms of life.

One starting point: on the night of December 19, 2001 after a week of escalating tensions, protests and looting, after years of growing unemployment and poverty, the people of Argentina decided they had finally had enough. Defying a state of siege declared by (then) President Fernando de la Rúa, people began going outside: first banging pots and pans on their balconies,
then emerging onto the streets, meeting up with neighbors on nearby street corners and then slowly converging on the Plaza de Mayo from all points of the city. There was no official call to march, no unified demands, no visible leaders. People were drawn out by the sound of their friends and neighbors and motivated by their exhaustion with neoliberal policies. At first it was largely unorganized individuals, families and groups of neighbors, marching throughout the night. The following day, those spontaneous marchers were joined by numerous social and political organizations, from human rights groups and labor unions to unemployed workers' and youth movements. The government dispatched military police to quell the protests: thirty-eight people were killed and hundreds injured. Yet, protests intensified and persisted, as marchers fought the police on hundreds of neighborhoods throughout the city while more and more people streamed in from the city's outskirts. Eventually, President De la Rúa abandoned his office, forced to flee the city by helicopter and, for some, signaling the beginning of the end of purely neoliberal governance in Argentina.

That popular uprising, those days of unrest in Argentina's hot summer, which came to be known as the Argentinazo, marked a turning point for the country. On the surface, the protests were directed against a decade of neoliberal policies and a corrupt government, which had produced social violence: increasing inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Stories were circulating in the news about children dying from hunger in what was once the wealthiest South American country. Before the uprising, unemployment had risen to 25% nationally and was even higher than 25% for young people and in certain deindustrialized zones. The protests also highlighted a deeper dissatisfaction: despite nearly twenty years since the return to formal democracy, it seemed that many of the same political and economic elites were still in charge, that there was still little popular participation in decision-making and the allocation of resources.
The 19th and 20th of December also marked an opening toward something unexpected:

The joy and excitement overflow. They are the protagonists. Members of generations marked by primary education during the dictatorship, that grew up and were devoured by unemployment. That never managed to have a “formal” job and, yet, watched many others become rich. That could not participate in changing things, but who felt that it had to explode, for once in life. It was explosion and revolt, color, struggle, and also death. (Barrientos and Isaía 2011, 17).

The protests – the forms of social organization and new subjectivities contained in them – contained the seeds for important transformations that would forever change Argentinean society.

In the following weeks, continued protests forced three interim presidents out of office, but perhaps more important than what was happening in the Casa Rosada was what was happening in the neighborhood, what those new social protagonists were doing. The interim governments defaulted on the country’s public debt and ended peso-dollar parity leading to a rapid devaluation of the peso, and even with these measures were unable to bring the political and economic situation under control. Yet, after December 19th and 20th, rather than attempting to take over the state apparatus, or to occupy the Casa Rosada, protesters went back to their neighborhoods and started building alternative social and economic organizations: worker-managed factories and cooperatives, barter clubs, alternative currencies, community kitchens, popular schools, health clinics, and social centers. Vast sectors of the population participated in, and helped to create small- and medium-scale initiatives, remaking their daily lives and practices, as they did so. It was at this point that the social movement ceased “to be a sum of sectoral movements, as the classical movements were, to become the movement of Argentinean society or a society in movement” (Zibechi 2003, 187 emphasis added). Protests overflowed existing institutional forms to create new ways of acting and being together that continued to

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1 In 1991, the government of Carlos Menem had pegged the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar in an attempt to control inflation.
shape the country long after that December, presenting new forms of political action that decentered the state as the primary site of struggle and granter of rights.

**Unemployed Workers' Movements**

This dissertation focuses on one of the most important social movements during this period: the movements of the unemployed. The unemployed began self-organizing in different towns and cities across Argentina in 1996 in response to increasing unemployment and cuts to social programs to assist the poor. In urban areas, these movements formed as unemployed people came together in different neighborhoods around problems in their daily lives: skyrocketing food and utility costs, inadequate health care and education, and increasing crime and violence. In other words, they were directly concerned with questions of *social reproduction*. These movements organized under the slogan “the neighborhood is the new factory,” organizing territorially, by neighborhood or town, in the spaces of everyday life where reproduction occurs. The organized unemployed became known as *piqueteros* for their preferred tactic: the *piquete* or roadblock, with which they would blockade major roads and highways, disrupting the flow of goods and commerce. Roadblocks were extremely effective in forcing first local (municipal and provincial) governments and then the federal government to begin providing certain benefits to the poor and unemployed, including food assistance, new jobs programs, and direct monetary aid to the unemployed. Piquetes continued growing in size and frequency in both urban and rural parts of the country throughout the second half of the 1990s and the movements of the unemployed played an important role in the December 2001 protests that forced De la Rúa out of office.

Along with the widespread use of the roadblock as tactic, the piquetero movement reimagined and reworked their own internal relationships, garnering attention for innovative
organizing strategies. That is, piqueteros created decentralized and horizontal forms of organization and coordination, prioritized direct democracy in their own practices, and organized themselves in terms of the spaces and rhythms of everyday life. This form of organizing values diversity, recognizing the heterogeneity of experiences of unemployment and the diverse composition of the unemployed themselves. Women and youth were often at the forefront of the organizations of the unemployed, providing a stark contrast with male-dominated labor unions and Peronist party organizations (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). The movements of the unemployed never formed a unified national organization, but rather, distinct organizations formed in different towns or neighborhoods, which would sometimes coordinate events and actions while maintaining their own independence.

While many different types of organizations of the unemployed formed in Argentina in the late 1990s, my dissertation focuses on the experience of the Movements of Unemployed Workers (Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados, MTDs). While other groups of the unemployed formed as wings of other, larger organizations, such as labor unions, the MTDs organized independently and explicitly as movements of unemployed workers. The first MTDs formed in the peripheries of major cities, where the unemployed, informally and precariously employed make up a significant portion of the population, all with diverse experiences and expectations of work and histories of political organizing. Of all the movements of the unemployed, the MTDs are the most committed to internal practices of horizontality and direct democracy, and institutional autonomy. The MTDs are based in specific “territories,” the spaces where the unemployed spend their time, and adopted the name of those sites. My dissertation focuses on two such MTDs – the MTD Solano and the MTD La Matanza – based in different parts of the Buenos Aires urban periphery.
The MTDs operate on a territorial base: drawing their membership from and creating dense networks of social relationships in a specific geographic area and establishing a physical presence through social centers, hosting cultural and educational events, schools, health clinics and other services. The MTDs' projects usually include some forms of generating income, such as worker-managed cooperatives or other small enterprises, but producing profit is not the movements' goal. The wealth produced through these activities is shared by participants and collectively invested in the movement's other projects (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002). Equally important for these organizations is the immaterial production responsible for creating new knowledges, social relations, and subjectivities. An essential element of their organizing is a focus on, and struggle for, more democratic and autonomous control of the territories where they operate in order to be able to create ways of life beyond the state and capital, necessitating the creation of a space that is neither public nor private, but common. This territorial organizing prioritizes the spaces of reproduction and care (e.g., the neighborhood, the household, the school) and seeks to create more just and sustainable forms of reproduction. Key to all of the MTDs' claims is a call for dignity, meaning freedom from infantilizing social relations (with the state, employers, political parties, NGOs, etc.) and the autonomy to make decisions over their own lives and control their own spaces (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002; Flores 2005). The MTDs understand this capacity to intervene and to create new forms of life as counter-power, a form of power from below that does not seek to become a hegemonic, centralized power (Colectivo Situaciones 2001).

The election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003 marks the beginning of a new phase for the piquetero movements. Despite having previously defined themselves by their autonomy from state institutions and an initial skepticism, many of the piquetero organizations came to support
the government of Néstor Kirchner and subsequently Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, president after 2007. Some of the leaders and activists from these organizations have been incorporated into various government agencies and many piquetero organizations and other social movements receive financial support from the state. On the other hand, other movements of the unemployed decided either to align with opposition political parties or start their own parties or electoral coalitions. It is important to note, however that a few groups refuse to engage in electoral concerns. While these groups may endorse a specific candidate or party in a particular race, they maintain autonomy from formal politics and political parties.

The organizations of unemployed workers, were a driving force behind the 2001 protests, both materially and symbolically. Their trajectory since 2001 is also paradigmatic of the wave of social movements that emerged at that time: a combination of growth in participation and force, as well as subsequent fragmentation, co-optation, and incorporation into the governing Kirchner project. The piquetero movement continues to be important for its success in organizing the unemployed, a sector that has been notoriously difficult to organize, excluded from the traditional labor movements and other forms of political organizing, and often considered too fragmented, conservative or weak to form a movement of its own. The unemployed workers' movements also led the drive towards territorial organizing, which continues to be a hallmark of the wave of anti-neoliberal social movements in Argentina. The movement provides insights into how the unemployed, and the precariously and informally employed, might collectively organize for improved living conditions, as well as deeper structural changes. The autonomous MTDs, the focus of this dissertation, have proven to be the most committed to challenging traditional ways of doing politics, to organizing democratically and territorially, and to creating alternative forms of social and economic organization.
Origins of Project

My direct engagement with Argentina's unemployed workers' movements began a few years after 2001, in 2003 when women from two MTDs – the MTD La Matanza and the MTD Solano – visited Chapel Hill as part of a speaking tour of North America. I, of course, had been following events in Argentina since 2001, when the uprising and the country's debt default made international news. At the time, I was involved in global justice movement in the U.S. and had attended various protests against the International Monetary Fund and other institutions of global “free trade.” The Argentine experience inspired: a mass uprising had successfully overthrown a neoliberal government and a wave of movements promised something different. Movements in Argentina did not want to take state power and challenged the very way of doing politics by enacting different social relations in the present.

The women from the MTDs discussed the effects of neoliberalism in Argentina, the history of the piquetero movement, and their specific organizations and projects. What immediately struck me about the piquetero organizations was their emphasis not only on protesting neoliberal institutions and policies, but also on creating alternatives in the present. I remember Soledad Bordegaray from the MTD La Matanza discussing their project of creating a “popular preschool” where the goal was to teach children the values of solidarity and cooperation, rather than how to obey and behave in an authoritarian school setting. Bordegaray described how this project emerged from the organization's attempt to establish a cooperative textile workshop. The group realized that the subjectivities of the unemployed workers themselves was a greater obstacle that the problem of technical expertise or investment capital. Workers were used to being directed by bosses, conditioned for years of not having to make decisions for themselves, and were distrustful of other workers. They were not ready to
collectively manage themselves and operate the enterprise as a collective. Through reading
groups, trainings, and workshops, with other cooperatives and social psychologists, they were
able to begin overcoming some of these problems, but it caused them to think: what would
happen if we started teaching cooperative values to children? A seemingly simple idea inspired
the MTD La Matanza to open a cooperative preschool along their two cooperative enterprises –
the textile workshop and a bakery – and slowly expand into more educational activities. A few
weeks later I met the MTD members again in Miami for protests against the Free Trade Area of
the Americas\(^2\) and solidified my relationship with them.

I first traveled to Argentina in June 2005, and spent two months staying in the MTD La
Matanza’s cooperative and social center (located in an abandoned school building the movement
had been occupying since 2001): the Center for Education and the Formation of Communitarian
Culture (Centro por la Educación y la Formación de Cultura Comunitaria, CEFOCC). During
those two months I spent most of my time helping out at the organization’s preschool, as well as
learning about the movement’s other projects. I also met with members of the MTD Solano and
visited a tract of land they had recently occupied, as well as a number of recuperated and worker-
managed factories in Buenos Aires. Staying at CEFOCC was difficult at first, I had gone to learn
about the movement and also to participate and help, but it was unclear how I could contribute.
Since nobody there would tell me what to do, much of my first days in CEFOCC were spent not
knowing what to do. Slowly, as I spent more time in the social center, I began to see what needed
to be done, and what I wanted to do. I began participating in the preschool, helping out where I
could and soon I gained more and more responsibility and was entrusted with more tasks. I also

\(^2\) The Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA) was a proposed agreement to create a “free trade area,” including all
the countries of North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean, except Cuba. After many rounds of
negotiations, including those in Miami in 2003, the attempt was abandoned in the face of widespread opposition
across the continents.
began developing stronger relationships with other participants in the movement and therefore more of an affective bond that tied me to the movement. I went to the preschool every day, watched the children and organized their activities, helped clean the building and prepare the students' snacks, participated in the teacher and parent meetings, not because of any prior obligation, not because anyone told me I had to or because my wage depended on it, but because I wanted to, because I enjoyed it, because I was committed to the project and the children and their families.

Looking back on this experience, nearly ten years later, I can see that my experience was not that different than any other person approaching the movement for the first time. While, of course, many people first came to the movement because of severe problems they were facing related to the crisis, what led many of them to stay and commit themselves to the project was not simply the promise of a job in the cooperative. What I experienced in CEFOCC could perhaps best be described as freedom. Not the “freedom” promised by the market, a freedom to choose between prefabricated choices, but a more fundamental freedom. Nor was it simply an individual freedom because it was only possible through deep connections with and commitment to others. It was this feeling, more than anything else, that kept drawing me back to CEFOCC and to Argentina.

In the following years, I would return to Buenos Aires various times and continue following political developments, especially the evolution of the unemployed workers' movements under Kirchnerismo. Throughout those years, I would continue my relationships with the MTD La Matanza and the MTD Solano, frequently visiting them and participating in their events when possible. While I was in Argentina from 2007 to 2008, I witnessed a major division occur within the MTD La Matanza as the organization split in two due to differences over how to
relate to the Kirchner government. Part of the organization stayed in the social center CEFOCC and opted to align themselves with the largest opposition party – the Coalición Cívica (Civic Coalition) – led by Elisa Carrió and ran a candidate for Congress with this party. Another segment of the movement, however, disagreed with this decision and refused to campaign for the Coalición Cívica. They eventually left to start their own organization and formed loose ties to Kirchnerista organizations in the neighborhood. Those who left were largely involved in the movement's adult education programs, which they decided to continue by establishing the popular school Yo Sí Puedo (YSP) in 2009. The implications of this division will be discussed in Chapter Four but here it is important to note in order to understand my fieldwork trajectory.

During the period of my dissertation fieldwork my research focused on the school Yo Sí Puedo and the MTD Solano (which also underwent a name change, beginning to refer to itself as the Movimiento de Colectivos Maximiliano Kosteki (MDC) in 2012). The MTD La Matanza's decision to join the Coalición Civica meant that much of their energy and resources were spent on electoral campaigns to the detriment of their territorial organizing based in the neighborhood. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation, I decided to focus on Yo Sí Puedo and the MTD Solano, to allow me to more fully explore the dynamics involved in territorial organizing. While, I continued to talk to some of the workers in the MTD La Matanza's cooperatives and parents of children in the preschool during this time, the MTD La Matanza was not the immediate focus of my fieldwork during this time because of their lack of emphasis on territorial organizing. I do, however, refer to the history and theoretical framing of the MTD La Matanza throughout the

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3 While a more complete analysis of the relationship and contradictions between territorial organizing and electoral organizing is, I believe, necessary, it is beyond the scope of this current dissertation, because of limits of time and resources for the investigation and because tensions between the two currents make it difficult for one researcher to successfully study both in a short amount of time.
dissertation as it is the same history from which YSP emerged and, also, one of the accounts of the formation of an MTD that I know best.

I chose to focus on YSP and the MTD Solano in part because of my previous work and connections with them, but also because these two organizations provide important insights into the transformations in Argentina over the last twenty years. While not the largest nor perhaps the most influential in terms of directly affecting public policies, the MTD Solano and the MTD La Matanza have both been extremely important in terms of inspiring the imagination of the revolutionary Left in Argentina and beyond⁴. As stated above, these two organizations are exemplary in their form of territorial organizing and ways of doing politics otherwise, in terms of counter-power and autonomy. Based in different parts of the Buenos Aires urban periphery, they demonstrate the heterogeneous composition of movements in those zones, the importance of organizing around the spaces and problems of everyday life, and the central role played by women, youth, and migrants in those movements.

**Methods and Knowledge Production**

This dissertation draws upon fieldwork conducted in Buenos Aires between September 2011 and June 2013 and in June and July of 2009, although it is, of course, influenced and informed by my previous experiences in Argentina, as well as continued dialogue with MTD members since leaving Buenos Aires in 2013. For the first ten months of my fieldwork, I spent most of my time in La Matanza, working with the school Yo Sí Puedo. There, I sat in on classes,

⁴ Besides the tour where I first met members of the MTD Solano and the MTD La Matanza, members from these two organizations have also traveled to Canada, Mexico, across Europe and throughout South America. Articles and books have been written about them in a number of languages and their story is well-known among global justice activists. Additionally, immediately following the 2001 crisis, there were a number of tours and encuentros organized in Argentina to which activists from around the world traveled to learn more about those movements and these two MTDs participated in.
helping the teachers and organizers when needed, occasionally tutored students, and participated in other extra-curricular activities (e.g., painting murals and the school buildings, a music festival, trips to marches and other political events). Much of my time was spent sitting inside (or in front of) the school building, drinking mate and talking to teachers, organizers, students or just neighborhood residents who happened to stop by for a chat. This time, while impossible to quantify, was an essential part of my fieldwork experience, allowing me to enter into the rhythm of the movement. It was this time that allowed me to understand the full importance the MTDs accord to struggles around reproduction and the creation of new social relations and subjectivities. In other words, all the forms of the political that are not centered around institutions nor formal moments of politics, nor the rhythm of electoral calendars, but in day-to-day interactions. I also conducted group interviews with different participants: a group of older women studying in the school, various groups of young students, the main organizers and teachers. Group interviews allowed for more of a dialogue to emerge between participants and myself, letting them ask me questions as well and rely on one another for support. The group interviews also served as an important moment of collective self-reflection for movement participants. Additionally, I conducted a few, fairly informal interviews, with current members of the MTD La Matanza, including workers in the movement's cooperative and parents of children who participated in the group's educational activities.

During the remainder of my fieldwork time, I worked more closely with the Movimiento de Colectivos (MDC) (formerly the MTD de Solano), while continuing to make regular visits to La Matanza. My engagement with the MDC was not centered around one site as it was with YSP, but rather over a series of sites in three different neighborhoods: the movement's health clinic in Solano, their community gardens and the houses of various members in Florencio Varela, where
the movement has based much of its activity for the last decade, and the new housing cooperative the movement started farther South, in La Plata. I participated in a number of different political and cultural events that the movement organized, meetings in the health clinic, and the construction of the new housing cooperative. I also conducted group interviews with movement leaders and participants in the various projects. Again, these group interviews allowed me to participate in conversations with movement members in a less hierarchical way than a one-on-one interview might allow and allowed participants to exercise considerable agency in directing the interview direction.

Along with these official projects of the organization, I also participated in several study/research groups with members from the MDC, as well as other collectives. The first of these was the group Hacer Ciudad (Making the City), which had formed a few years prior to my arrival in Buenos Aires for fieldwork, in response to struggles over land in the city of Buenos Aires and its periphery. That group’s analysis of territorial struggles and the importance they attach to experiences of migration were fundamental in shaping my understanding of processes in the urban periphery. My participation in a series of meetings, research and writing groups in response to attacks on the MDC that occurred in the middle of my fieldwork became an unexpected yet essential part of my research. These meetings led to the foundation of the Institute for Political Investigation and Experimentation (Instituto de Investigación y Experimentación Política, IIEP) shortly after I left Argentina in 2013. The IIEP is a network of social movements, collectives, research groups, and other political organizations dedicated to the study of contemporary processes of accumulation and wealth extraction in Argentina and the new forms of social struggle that have emerged in response. The IIEP aims to produce knowledge to shed light on the complex forces at work behind these processes in order to directly contribute to
political struggle, as well as experiment in new forms of social and political organization. Participants in the IIEP include the MDC, the Movimiento Nacional Campesino Indígena (MNIC-VC), militant research and publishing collectives in Buenos Aires and Rosario (e.g., Colectivo Situaciones, Club the Investigaciones Urbanas from Rosario, the publishing house Tinta Limón, the magazine Crisis, and the research collective Juguetes Perdidos, among others), along with other social centers and territorial organizations from Buenos Aires, Rosario, Córdoba, and Santiago de Estero. These groups and collective processes of investigation profoundly marked my own thought and understanding in the field and I refer to their work throughout this dissertation, especially in my analysis of neo-extractivism and contemporary forms of governance. I participated in these groups as another committed, activist-scholar, one among many, contributing to the discussion based on my own experiences of scholarship and activism in the United States, as well from my years of experience living in Buenos Aires and working with groups in the urban periphery.

Research, critical self-reflection, and knowledge creation are an essential part of all the MTDs' practices (Mason-Deese 2013). Thus, the piquetero movement has produced an incredible amount of knowledge and analysis about itself. This ranges from blogs and newsletters, radio shows and documentaries, to more academic articles and books. The MTD La Matanza, as well as the Frente Popular Darío Santillán, a coalition of various MTDs, have publishing houses and have published books about their own struggle as well as other Latin American movements. Part of these knowledge-practices also include a constant practice of self-reflexivity and collective analysis running through all of their activities. Along with the work produced by the research/study groups I participated in, I also deeply engage with the MTDs' own textual production throughout my dissertation. This includes the books, book chapters and articles,
The MTDs’ commitment to knowledge creation and critical self-reflection also marks them as belonging to the broader alter-globalization movement, which has always insisted on producing its own knowledge, challenging dominant forms of knowing, and a commitment to self-reflexivity (Osterweil 2010). Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell develop the concept of “knowledge-practices” in order to recognize the different ways that social movements generate and mobilize knowledges:

This hyphenated term aims to escape from the abstract connotations usually associated with knowledge, arguing for its concrete, embodied, lived, and situated character. […] Moreover, we argue that when we recognize movements as spaces and processes in which knowledges are generated, modified, and mobilized by diverse actors, important political insights are gained—both into the politics of those contemporary movements, as well as into those of society more broadly. This recognition bears important implications for social movement researchers. It requires that we shift the mode of engagement in our research, blurring well-established boundaries in social science between the “subjects” and “objects” of knowledge production. (2008, 20).

They argue that recognizing social movements as knowledge producers requires a new sort of engagement with the movements on the part of the researcher. It requires studying movements on their own terms and taking seriously their own theoretical and analytical contributions. They elaborate:

We will be able to engage with movements not simply as objects to be explained by the distanced analyst, but as lively actors producing their own explanations and knowledges. These knowledges take the form of stories, ideas, narratives, and ideologies, but also theories, expertise, as well as political analyses and critical understandings of particular contexts. Their creation, modification and diverse enactments are what we call “knowledge-practice.” (Ibid., 21).

Recognizing the knowledge-practices of the MTDs is key to understanding their overall trajectory and impacts. For that reason, I give priority to the MTDs’ own theoretical and analytical work in order to be able to understand these movements on their own terms and also because I believe that their intellectual contributions, based from their own positions and
situations, are helpful for understanding the contemporary moment more broadly.

Giving precedent to the movements' theoretical production disrupts the usual exchange wherein the movements, as “research subjects,” are to supply the ethnographic material, while the academic researcher crafts the “theory” from this material. That exchange mimics the one that characterizes the extractive economy, in which the daily lives and practices of the subjects serve as a sort of a raw material, which is extracted by the (usually foreign) researcher in for their own (financial and/or symbolic) benefit. This is, of course, not to say that the all ethnography is only extractive, only that the traditional mode of ethnography often encourages extractive-like exchanges and reinscribes colonial power structures. The coloniality of the relationship between the researcher and the researched is further illuminated when one considers the role that struggles over knowledge play in colonialism: from European colonizers negating indigenous knowledges and world-views in order to justify violent force to contemporary moves by corporations in the Global North to privatize and profit from indigenous knowledges. North American and European universities have always played a crucial role in this process, serving to legitimate a certain type of modern, rational knowledge and the expense of other forms of knowledge and other ways of knowing.

The issue of the relationship between academic researchers and social movements has been well elaborated in Argentina from multiple perspectives and there is a considerable body of work which recognizes movements as knowledge producers. Indeed, as mentioned above, the movements of the unemployed in particular have produced an extensive body of work about their own struggles, as well as political and economic analyses. Additionally, there is a rich literature on the relationship between social movements and academic researchers, as well as the political role of knowledge production. For example, at the same time as the movements of the
unemployed were emerging in the mid-1990s, Colectivo Situaciones was forming in Buenos Aires. Through intense collaborations with the MTD Solano and other social movements, Colectivo Situaciones began elaborating the concept of militant research/research militancy in opposition both to academic research and to traditional leftist activism. Against academic research that proclaims objectivity, the neutral observation of a pre-defined object that often does not go beyond sociological description, and mainly serves the career interests of the author. Opposed to traditional forms of activism with predetermined “revolutionary subjects,” forms of action and organization, aims and conclusions. Both academic research and traditional activism construe themselves as exterior to their object; the researcher and the activist both pose as experts, outside of the struggle. Militant research, on the other hand, is immanent to the situation at hand. This figure is a critique both of the standard academic subject whose pretenses to objectivity leave them without commitment to political struggle, producing knowledge that only serves capital; and, on the other hand, the figure of the traditional activist who already knows the answer, that has a prefabricated solution to everything and thus no room for reflexivity within the struggle. Colectivo Situaciones discusses militant research as a process of love or friendship that radically transforms all of those involved, that produces something in common. The militant researcher does not pretend to be objective, but rather values the production of knowledge for struggle. There is no purism of knowledge; investigation becomes risky, any easy distinction between the researcher and the researched breaks down (Colectivo Situaciones and the MTD de Solano 2002).

Militant research is more than a different form of research; it is also a different way of doing politics and understanding the relationships between the two. As Holdren and Touza state in their introduction to the work of Colectivo Situaciones:
Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. Insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that deposes the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, this kind of thinking is immediately political. And, if we see politics as the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies. Movements think. Struggles embody thought. (2012, 12).

This different way of thinking and doing both politics and investigation is embodied in the practices of the MTDs as they see producing knowledge about their own situations and struggles as an important part of their political work, contributing to the creation of new subjectivities and social relations.

How then does the academic researcher engage with movements that are already producing their own knowledge about their struggles? One way of thinking about this relationship is positing the researcher as a translator or a bridge, weaving together different knowledges from different situations:

Not only are the natives/locales able to speak – and often quite eloquently – by and for themselves, the notion of a stable reality out there waiting to be explained has been definitively superseded. It has been done away with and replaced by a notion of reality transformed and affected by the very knowledges and stories being produced by that reality. This introduces yet another layer of dynamism and recursivity into the ethnographic project, which moves from representation and explanation supported by grand theories of the aims and science to the tinkering and more artisanal task of translation. (Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell 2014, 219).

However, the relationship is somewhat more complex than the image of a bridge might suggest. The researcher does not represent all of academic nor can they profess to be able to translate a movement into a generic “academic language.” Just as a movement is situated in a specific time, place, and political-economic conjuncture, so too is every researcher. The university does not exist apart from broader economic and political forces, but actively shapes and is shaped by them (c.f., Dalton and Mason-Deese 2012). Therefore, the researcher must take their own situatedness into account, as well as recognize the specific ways in which the university contributes to the
processes they are studying.

Is it possible, then, for a researcher from the Global North, from the heart of Empire, to conduct research about movements in the Global South in a different way, to not reinforce hierarchical and colonial relationships of power? While this is a much larger question than can be fully addressed here, I want to offer a few hypotheses as to how this could be done. First, is the question of time: the researcher must be willing to sacrifice their own sense of timing in order to enter into the rhythms of the movement but also to forge a long-term relationship with the movement or communities they are researching. In my case, this has meant repeated visits to Argentina every year or every other year since 2005, along with an extended stay in order to conduct the bulk of my fieldwork between 2011 and 2013. This type of time commitment goes against the demands of the neoliberal university, which increasingly requires more output from scholars at an ever faster rate, to instead encompass a sort of “slow scholarship” (Mountz, Bonds, Mansfield, et al. Forthcoming). The fact that this is increasingly difficult within the contemporary university brings me to my second point: the scholar studying social movements elsewhere should also be engaged in movements and struggles where they are based, especially in challenging the on-going neoliberalization of the university and the dominant geopolitics of knowledge. In this way, the scholar can act as a bridge between concrete struggles in different places, while also working to overturn the system that delegitimizes the knowledge production of social movements. My third suggestion involves taking into account the politics of citations by referencing, as much as possible, research and theory from the Global South and the movements themselves. As I stated above, this serves to disrupt the dominant mode of knowledge production in which “theory” and “analysis” are always thought to come from the Global North or the modern West. Citing and giving credit to the intellectual work of movements then becomes an
important way to reverse some of these assumptions and recognize scholarship “from below.”
For this reason, throughout my dissertation I engage the intellectual production of the
unemployed workers' movements, as well as Argentinean and other Latin American scholars
working on similar questions.

Three Moments in Argentinean History

This dissertation seeks to map the experiences of the unemployed workers' movements
from their emergence in 1996 to the current moment in order to better understand the
movements' innovations and shed light on important economic and political transformations in
Argentina. Following the struggles of the unemployed allows us to identify three chronological
moments in Argentina's recent history. Each of the following chapters will move through these
three moments from different perspectives, focusing on different questions: work, the political,
territory, the common. The three periods I highlight here – the neoliberal era of the 1990s, the
period of revolt from 2001 – 2003, and the “post-neoliberal” period from 2003 to the present –
are not completely distinct moments, but are useful for highlighting broad transformations in the
political and economic situation and the relationship between social movements and the state.

The first is the period of the three chronological periods is that of “classic neoliberalism”
and the emergence of new subjectivities in resistance during the 1990s. Neoliberal economic
policies were first implemented in Argentina under the military dictatorship that ruled the
country from 1976 to 1983, including financial deregulation, the end of import substitution
policies and the promotion of national industry, and decreases in social spending. The
dictatorship, which arose in response to increasingly powerful left-wing movements, violently
repressed all resistance from communist guerrillas to student movements and human rights
protesters. Despite the country's return to formal democracy in 1983, the economic and social
policies begun during the dictatorship only continued and were intensified by the new
governments, especially the government of Carlos Menem, president from 1989 to 1999. This
time could be characterized by a decrease in financial and economic regulation, increasing
privatization, a decentralization of the state, and cuts to social services and public expenditure.
While these policies increased international financial institutions' confidence in the country's
economy, they had devastating effects for the poor and middle class. Unemployment increased
dramatically, reaching 25% by the end of the decade, and cuts in social spending meant that the
unemployed were often reduced to hunger and homelessness.

However, this was also a period of great social unrest, and, although much of the
traditional left was in crisis, new movements had been forming since the early 1990s: a new
human rights movement, a more militant labor movement, autonomous student organizations, a
pensioners’ movement, as well as the movements of the unemployed. The two years prior to the
2001 uprising saw an intensified wave of mobilizations from diverse sectors of the population:
most notably the unemployed in the urban peripheries of large cities and throughout smaller
cities in the countryside. Along with the increase in actions and numbers of participants, there
was an important change in the form of protest, led by the unemployed workers' movements. The
new wave of movements that emerged during this time was characterized by practices of internal
democracy and horizontality, the use of direct action tactics in decentralized and dispersed
protests, and a commitment to autonomy.

This neoliberal period came to a decisive end with the outburst of protests in December
2001. More than the two days of protests, the December rebellion opened a space for a whole
wave of political and social experimentation. People took those decentralized, non-hierarchical
forms of protest back to their neighborhoods to begin experimenting with new ways of
organizing their daily lives. The period from 2001 – 2003 could be characterized as:

a period of intense social creativity, facing the questioning of previous paradigms and the crisis of hegemonic institutions. It was a time of profound rethinkings, when political theses linked to the ideas of self-management, autonomy, horizontalism, micro-politics and the ‘no power’ gained strength. (Barrientos and Isaia 2011, 7-8).

As the state and the market had proved themselves to be incapable of providing for people's basic needs, people started taking matters into their own hands. During these two years, hundreds of thousands of people across the country participated in the solidarity economy (including barter clubs, alternative currency networks, worker-managed factories and cooperatives, community-operated soup kitchens, etc) in order to meet their basic needs and as part of projects to create new ways of life. These practices were organized according to principles and values of solidarity, horizontality and autonomy, challenging the dominant neoliberal subjectivity based on applying an economic rationality to ever more areas of life.

The period of intense social experimentation opened up in 2001 reached a sort of close with Néstor Kirchner's election to the presidency in 2003. Since Kirchner's election, the country has been marked by relative economic and political stability, as Kirchner negotiated a settlement with most of the country's debtors and the currency stabilized. Currently Kirchner's wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is serving her second term as president, which will end later in 2015. The Kirchner government characterizes itself as “post-neoliberal,” defined by the “return of the state” and the return to developmentalist policies of the Peronist/Fordist era (Hupert 2011). The successive Kirchner administrations have promoted policies to encourage domestic production and consumption, through renationalizing some of the industries that were privatized in the 1990s, increasing some forms of monetary regulation, and implementing social welfare programs.
The Kirchner period has also led to a bit of a paradox and troubling spot for social movements. While it is clear that the movements are responsible for creating the opening that allowed Kirchner to come to power in 2003 and implement a series of reforms, the relationship between the movements and the government has not been so simple. The movements that led the 2001 rebellion, that experimented with new ways of living during the crisis, are now caught between supporting the government that has met some of their demands or risk losing what they have won if the government falls to its right wing opposition. Colectivo Situaciones describes how the relationship between movements and the state has changed in the present moment:

If during what we call the ‘de-instituent’ phase, social movements attacked the neoliberal state constituting practices capable of confrontation in areas such as the control of money, or bartering; of counterviolence, as in road blocks; and of political command over diverse territories, as in assemblies; social movements, if we can still call them that, currently confront new dilemmas about whether to participate or not (and when, and how) in what could be called a ‘new governmentality’, thus expressing the distinguishing features of a new phase of the state form and requiring us to problematize the concept of social movement itself. (2014, 397).

In other words, the boundaries between social movements and the state have been blurred as the state incorporates some movement participants and practices and movements are involved in increasingly promiscuous relations with the state (Colectivo Situaciones 2009).

**Ten Years of 2001**

When I arrived in Buenos Aires to officially begin my fieldwork, in September of 2011, it was already well into this latter period – the era of Kirchnerismo – and the ten year anniversary of the December 2001 uprising was approaching. What remained (remains) of that experience of insurrection? Clearly they have not all gone: despite the fact that a president was forced out of office and the Kirchner administrations have made substantial reforms, many of the same politicians are still in power and the entire political and economic structure has not been overturned. For many on the Argentine and international left, 2001 was a clear failure: the
inevitable result of a movement being too diverse, too multitudinous, and not having clear,
unified demands (c.f., Petras and Veltmeyer 2005). This is why movements must attempt to take
state power, they said, if not, a new neoliberal government rises to take the place of the old
neoliberal government, nothing has changed, the movements are now divided, weak and co-
opted. On the other hand, many of those who support the current government, cite Néstor
Kirchner’s election in 2003 and the subsequent advances made by the government as proof of the
movements’ success. For them, Néstor Kirchner, and later Cristina Fernández de Kirchner,
represent the movements themselves and are the culmination of the movements’ projects.

Both of these positions, that which considers the 2001 revolt a failure and that which
considers it a success, make the mistake of seeing 2001 as closed, and only understanding
outcomes in terms of state-level politics and macro-economic structures. In opposition to these
two positions, Colectivo Situaciones chooses to speak of ten years of 2001. They elaborate:

The latent condition of the crisis leads us to think of this decade as ten years of 2001. 2001
is, then, an active principle, almost a method, a way of seeing what is happening as it
develops. In this sense, the crisis, with its multiple meanings – instability and creation, worry
and uncertainty, openness and change of the calendar – becomes a premise. This happens
both when the crisis is visible and when, as in these times, it runs as an underground current
in a so-called ‘normal’ society or in a ‘real’ country. (2014, 396).

They continue, speaking of the traces that remain of 2001:

As long as the new governmentality consists of an expansion of its capacities to incorporate
much of the dynamics represented by the cycle of social protests peaks, the question comes
up about the production of subjectivities under these new conditions. They could sum up the
crisis in this paradoxical statement: 2001 no longer exists, and at the same time, it is
everywhere. (Ibid., 397)

According to Colectivo Situaciones, 2001 must be seen as more than just those two days of
insurrection in December, more than just an economic crisis. Something had changed. The
horizontal, decentralized, networked, assembly-based type of political organizing that
characterized the movements behind the 2001 uprising marked a profound subjective change in a
new generation of activists and would continue influencing Argentine politics well into the future.

Along with these effects on Argentine politics and society, the 2001 uprising and subsequent period of experimentation did more also had important implications for social theory. If the crisis of 2001 was an economic and a political crisis, then the terms and concepts used to describe the economic and the political were also thrown into crisis. Colectivo Situaciones elaborates:

The insurrection of December 19th and 20th did not have an author. There are no political or sociological theories available to understand, in their full scope, the logics activated during those more than thirty uninterrupted hours. The difficulty of this task resides in the number of personal and group stories, the shifting moments, and the breakdown of the representations that in other conditions might have organized the meaning of these events. It becomes impossible to intellectually encompass the intensity and plurality connected by the pots and pans on the 19th, and by open confrontation on the 20th. (2012, 43).

Traditional academic sociology and political science theories about the necessary conditions for political mobilizations and social change were completely incapable of accounting for the December 2001 uprising.

Additionally, the whole set of movements that had been growing during the 1990s defy these academic theories. Sitrin, for example, highlights how the Argentine movements call into question the contentious politics framework dominating much of social movements study:

The [contentious politics] framework does not work for all contemporary movements, specifically the autonomous anti-capitalist movements. These contemporary autonomous movements are attempting to organize themselves outside of the state and traditional forms of hierarchical and institutional power. These are movements that are against capitalism, hierarchy, and concepts of power as a dominating force. Their energy is placed in creating new societies and communities, rather than demanding the state change or asking for things from the state. As the data show, people in these movements are clear in not desiring a contentious relationship to power, but rather in their desire for (and creation of) alternative powers. Either space needs to be made within theories of contention to allow for these new autonomous movements and experiences, or a parallel theory needs to emerge. (2012, 214).

Sitrin locates the failures of the contentious politics framework, and much of academic
sociology, in its insistence on equating power with the state and assuming, a priori, that the ultimate goal of any revolutionary movement is to take state power:

Within these contemporary social movements there is a significant network of movements that are consciously developing a politics and practice that cannot be understood within the framework of contention. By this I mean that they do not place their desire for change onto the state or seek to change the state itself. Implicit in their politics is to live in a substantially different society. One of the core differences is the relationship to concepts of power, and particularly the understanding of state power as a potentially positive or liberatory force. These contemporary autonomous movements explicitly state that they do not want to take state power, and that the change they desire cannot come from the state apparati. (Ibid., 215).

She critiques academic theorists for refusing to listen and acknowledge the movements' own stated goals and their critiques of power. In other words, these theorists place their own definitions of success and failure onto a movement, and then declare the movement a failure when it has failed to reach goals that it never set out to accomplish. The movements, however, understood autonomy as the capacity to choose their own objectives, to create their own definitions of success and failure. By failing to take these into account when analyzing social movements, academic theorists not only fail to understand the movements, conducting bad research, but also contribute to their political marginalization.

However, the movements, as discussed above, developed their own objectives and theoretical concepts based in their practices and struggles. For example, the new generation of human rights activists developed notions of popular justice, enacted by mass movements and tribunals on the streets, without the need for state mediation. The piquetero movement and neighborhood assembly movement also contributed to this move of decentering power from the state and developing a non-state-centric form of politics. It was from these practices that theoretical concepts of counter-power and autonomy emerged in order to describe the movements' analysis of power and political objectives. Clearly, only by recognizing the immense theoretical and intellectual contributions of these movements, the emphasis they place
on thought – thought as an embodied part of everyday practice – can we fully grasp these movements’ impacts.

The post-2003 moment does present specific difficulties for writing about the unemployed workers’ movements. Never unified or homogeneous, the movements of the unemployed have fractured even more since Néstor Kirchner’s election with some movements willingly aligning themselves with the government and even working for the administration, while others, like the MTD La Matanza, have joined the official opposition to the governing party. Still other MTDs, have ceased to exist as such, either disbanding or changing their names as their political projects change to focus less directly on the question of employment. The spatial strategies of the MTDs in this period are particularly worthy of analytical consideration. The unemployed workers’ movement created forms of neighborhood and territorial organizing that persist and have proliferated in recent years. Many of the demands of unemployed workers movements were realized and subsequently deepened, even to the extent of being the backbone of Fernández de Kirchner’s social welfare policies. By focusing on the /MDC and YSP, I highlight the ways in which elements of 2001 persist into the present in terms of territorial organizing and also aggressive attempts by political and economic elites to recuperate, neutralize and co-opt this energy.

Central Arguments

This dissertation is the result of thinking with movements rather than being about the unemployed workers movements. My research sought to investigate the new forms of labor organizing developed by unemployed workers in Argentina: their spatial practices, their understandings of power and the political, and their production of the common. My research also sought to examine what the movements of the unemployed can tell us about broader economic
and political changes underway, recognizing the importance of the movements' own theoretical production. The piquetero movement emerged in response to rising unemployment, the result of a post-Fordist economic system and the implementation of neoliberal policies. Recognizing that in contemporary capitalism production is decentered and dispersed throughout the social fabric, the movements of the unemployed chose to disrupt this dispersed production through the roadblocks. The success of these piquetes forces us to recognize the profundity of these economic transformations in Argentina and to expand our definitions of labor and the working class. In particular, it requires us to recognize the importance of unwaged work, reproductive labor, and social cooperation on a broad scale, for producing value that capital seeks to extract outside of the wage relation. The piquetero movement reveals a new type of labor movement that seeks to organize these diverse and heterogeneous forms of labor without giving priority to one form of labor over another. Throughout this dissertation, I also argue that one of the important elements of the MTDs' struggle is their prioritization of reproductive labor and issues of care. The movements' recognition of the importance of reproductive labor is evident in their fight to have this labor remunerated through the distribution of unemployment benefits as well as their territorial organizing which seeks to prioritize the spaces of reproduction and care.

Alongside this rethinking of labor and labor organizing, the movements of the unemployed also point to another way of doing politics: a non-state-centric form of politics that decenters the state as the primary site of power. This form of politics does not attempt to take state power nor does it focus its demands around the state, but is premised on concepts of autonomy and counter-power. Autonomy, in the case of the urban movements of the unemployed, does not mean complete separation from the state or territorial control, but rather the autonomy to think for themselves, to determine their own values, and objectives as a
movement. Counter-power is the creation of power from below, communities' capacities to make the decisions that affect them and control their daily lives. Counter-power, in this case, then is an autonomous power developed from below that does not seek to become a centralized, hegemonic power. This non-state-centric form of politics necessarily takes place in other times and spaces than those of the state.

An important element of this non-state-centric form of politics for the MTDs is territorial organizing. If the piquetes were an attempt to disrupt capitalist production, territorial organizing is the counterpart: the creation of new forms of life in specific places. Building on the recognition of the reorganization of production throughout the social fabric and the importance of reproductive/care work, and a commitment to a non-state-centric form of politics, the MTDs concluded that labor organizing cannot be confined to the factories, or any official work site, political conflict cannot be centered around the state, and the spaces of reproduction must be prioritized. These conclusions are what give rise to the MTDs' territorial organizing, an attempt to root political and economic organizing in the spaces of everyday life and to create grassroots control of processes of reproduction. It is through these alternative practices and struggles that a new relationship to territory, a new type of space, is produced, which is not based on property rights or exclusion, but rather collective control of space and communitarian social relations.

If the territory is where this non-state-centric form of politics is carried out, then the common is the guiding principle behind this politics. If contemporary capitalism is fundamentally based on the capture and extraction of value from the common, then defending this common becomes a priority for anti-capitalist struggles. However, this is not only the defense of a pre-existing commons from on-going processes of extraction, in terms of land and natural resources, but also all the results of social cooperation. In other words, the MTDs'
territorial organizing includes not only creating alternative economic practices but also collectively organized and non-exploitative *forms of life* rooted in specific territories.

**Dissertation Structure**

The following chapter examines transformations in labor and production in Argentina over the past forty years from the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1970s to the contemporary neo-extractivist economic model. While engaging different understandings of neoliberalism and post-Fordism, I privilege the MTDs' own analyses, which understand neoliberalism both as a specific set of economic and social policies and as a particular subjectivity or rationality. I pay special attention to what these transformations have meant in terms of labor, in terms of forms of labor and their organization and regulation. The chapter then moves to an analysis of different theories and understandings of unemployment and the role of the unemployed in society, ultimately arguing for an analysis that recognizes the *productivity of the unemployed* and the importance of non-waged labor. Next, I turn to the topic of *reproductive and care labor*, which is important to understanding the work that the unemployed do, contemporary forms of exploitation, and their gendered aspects. Then, I look specifically at financial capital, particularly the ways in which it operates in the urban periphery and how it functions as a form of capture. I close the chapter with a discussion of the diverse forms of labor and ways of “getting by” in the urban periphery, highlighting the precarious nature of that labor.

Chapter Three turns to the question of the political composition of the movements of the unemployed: their subjectivities, experiences of struggle, and forms of organization. I particularly focus on the presence of women, youth, and migrants in the movements of the unemployed and how they contribute to unique organizing strategies. The chapter then turns to the question of *subjectivity* in these struggles, arguing that since the identity of “worker” no
longer holds the same power it used to, these movements have been able to create new subjectivities as unemployed workers or piqueteros. I then examine the specific demands that movements have made around work in order to better understand how they understand work and think of the future of work, specifically looking at debates around genuine work versus work with dignity within the piquetero movement as a whole and looking at the particular demands being made by the autonomous MTDs. This brings up the debate around unemployment subsidies, how movements understand and use them to set their own definitions of what counts as valuable work. I end the chapter by discussing how the MTDs challenge the “culture of work” or work ethic and set the stage for a post-work politics and ethics.

Chapter Four looks at the movements of the unemployed in terms of a struggle over the political. While the political is usually considered in relation to the state, as a struggle for state power or to govern, the movements that emerged in the 1990s against neoliberalism, and especially the MTDs, challenged this limited understanding of the political in order to develop a non-state-centric form of politics. The chapter starts with a brief overview of neoliberal governmentality and subjectivity to then turn to look at the movements that emerged in the 1990s in resistance to neoliberalism. I analyze the MTDs' concepts of counter-power and autonomy, and what they mean in practical terms for how the movements relate to the state and the struggle for state power. I show that the MTDs prioritize a form of politics that is not based on a logic of representation but on the production of new social relations and subjectivities. I describe the 2001 uprising as a generalization of this non-state-centric form of politics on the part of a horizontal network of movements. I close the chapter by looking at how the Kirchner state has attempted to neutralize these struggles by recentering politics around the state.

Chapter Five explicitly examines the spatial practices of the movements of the
unemployed through an analysis of what they call “territorial organizing” and struggles to create autonomous spaces. I engage literature on the spatiality of social movements and show how a territorial approach to struggle helps us understand social movements differently. I discuss the piquetes as a way of disrupting the spatial practices of post-Fordist capitalism as well as opening up space for the creation of new social relations. Then I look at the territorial or neighborhood organizing of the MTDs as a way of doing politics differently, privileging the spaces and struggles of the everyday. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Kirchner governments’ form of territorial governance and new territorial struggles over the past three years in relation to the neo-extractive economic model.

Chapter Six explores the alternative imaginaries and practices of the MTDs, including innovative forms of work and social reproduction, while ultimately aim to create new forms of life. I start the chapter with an overview of some of the theoretical underpinnings of these practices: the common, the solidarity economy, and buen vivir. I aim to take a non-economistic perspective to looking at these alternatives, concentrating on the space of the neighborhood and the household and alternative forms of care and reproduction, and immaterial as well as material forms of the common. I give a brief overview of alternative economic practices that emerged and spread across Argentina during the economic crisis, including barter and alternative currency networks, worker-controlled factories, and diverse projects of cultural and social production. I then turn to the specific projects of the MTD Solano, Yo Sí Puedo, and the MTD La Matanza. As I examine these projects closely, I divide them into five thematic areas: cooperatives and worker-controlled enterprises, struggles over food production, health care, housing, and education and knowledge production.
The first piquetes in 1996 signaled the emergence of not only a new protest tactic, but of a new form of labor organization and new political actor: the unemployed worker. The unemployed, no longer confined to their homes or neighborhoods, no longer reduced to feelings of guilt and impotence, started collectively blocking major highways throughout the country, causing gridlock in the cities and stopping the circulation of goods. Hundreds of people – women and men, young and old – camped out on the roads, burned tires to stop traffic, but also cooked and ate, played music together, created new social relations and community. In one way, these piquetes parallel the workers' strike: unable to stop work in the factory, without a direct role in the productive process, the unemployed were forced to intervene in the circulation of goods. Any narrative that sees the roadblock as a less effective strike, however, misses an essential part of the story: the importance of cooperation on a general scale, new forms of socialized production and the extraction of value, in which the poor and unemployed play a crucial role. The piquetes functioned by intervening precisely in these processes of socialized urban production and circulation. Indeed, this tactic was extremely effective: organizations of the unemployed grew throughout the country, won substantial demands from the state, and were able to begin directly providing for the needs of the unemployed.

Following the trajectory of the struggles of the unemployed workers from their emergence in the mid 1990s to the current moment provides us with important insights into the
structure of contemporary capitalism in Argentina and globally. The piqueteros were protesting the effects of neoliberalism on their lives: skyrocketing unemployment, increasingly precarious labor conditions, cuts to social programs, and a growing and visible divide between the rich and the poor. Beyond pointing out the negative effects of neoliberal policies, the piqueteros also highlight broader economic and social transformations: a new organization of labor and production under post-Fordist capitalism. The movements of the unemployed emphasize the centrality of struggles over reproduction: the neoliberal austerity measures of the 1990s were a direct attack on the popular sectors’ ability to reproduce themselves. Therefore, the movements that emerged during that time primarily focused on securing their means of reproduction, either through paid employment or government subsidies, and creating more autonomous ways of sustaining themselves, through a wide variety of self-managed projects. Capitalist development under the Kirchner administrations since 2003 seeks to directly capture value from these reproductive and self-managed activities developed at the height of the crisis. In this neo-extractivist economy, value is produced from the extraction of natural resources, mining and agriculture, oil and gas production, as well as through the capture of value produced through practices of social cooperation and capacities for language and communication. Finance ties these different practices together, from the role of international financial markets in setting prices on agricultural and mineral goods, to urban real estate speculation which captures value in the city, and the expansion of relations of debt and credit into ever more areas of life and portions of the population.

This chapter seeks to understand these macro-economic shifts in Argentina from the 1970s to today, especially focusing on the changes and continuities from the neoliberalism of the 1990s to the neo-extractive model currently in force, highlighting the central role played by the
poor and unemployed. First, I explore global economic shifts on a broad scale to situate the Argentine context, looking at the emergence of neoliberal or post-Fordist capitalism beginning the 1970s and the transformations in the organization of production and labor it entailed. Second, I look at different attempts to understand unemployment, which involve reconsidering our definitions of work in order to recognize the productivity of the unemployed. Third, I look in more detail at new forms of labor and exploitation in the neo-extractivist economy in Argentina, focusing on the multiple forms of work that the unemployed engage in and the conditions of that labor, highlighting the importance of the work of social reproduction and mechanisms of debt and credit. Throughout the chapter, I hope to show how the poor and unemployed find themselves at the center of conflicts over the capital’s intensification and territorial expansion.

**Neoliberalism: Argentina in the Global Context**

The unemployed in Argentina began organizing in the mid-1990s in response to increasing levels of unemployment and precarious labor conditions, as well as the broader consequences of neoliberalism. In their own analyses, the MTDs understand neoliberalism both as a set of economic and social policies defined by deregulation, privatization, and reduction in social spending, promoted by international financial institutions and the countries backing them, and as a specific subjectivity marked by heightened individualism and competitiveness that affects the whole population (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002; Flores 2005). Here I will discuss both the broad economic transformations that account, in part, for the rise in unemployment and precarious labor conditions, and specific policies implemented in Argentina as part of neoliberal reforms.

It was with the military dictatorship that ruled from 1976 to 1983, supported by the U.S. government, that Argentina began the transition from the Peronist “national popular model” to a
post-Fordist production system and neoliberal governance model (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). This transition was only possible with extreme violence as the dictatorship violently repressed all leftist movements and their suspected supporters, “disappearing” approximately 30,000 people. The governing junta implemented economic policies aimed at increasing the wealth of the elite and destroying the power the working class had gained in the previous period, through taking away workers' rights, implementing policies to “flexibilize” labor, and changing financial regulation (Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social 2008). The dictatorship privatized key services and industries, promoted international trade and foreign investment, and reduced spending on social services. Furthermore, the junta continued to take out foreign loans to fund its project, which would force the country to pay off this debt for years to come. Thus, while Argentina as a whole was severely indebted in this process, an Argentine financial elite also developed in collaboration with international financial interests, while the poor and middle class suffered the brunt of the austerity measures.

Carlos Menem, elected president in 1989 under the banner of the Peronist party (Partido Justicialista, PJ), continued and extended the dictatorship's economic and social policies, privatizing whatever national industries and services were left to privatize (such as the national airlines (1990), gas (1992), oil (1993), and mail service (1997)) and further opening up the country to international trade and investment. Indeed, a common graffiti during this time proclaimed, “what the dictatorship began, Menem finished.” Under direction from the I.M.F., the government reduced spending on services to help the poor, including unemployment benefits, public health care and education, and gas and electricity subsidies. Privatization and the administrative decentralization of services led to a marked decrease in the quality of services and the emergence of a two-tiered model of education and health care, wherein public hospitals and
schools were severely defunded while the number of private schools and health insurance companies grew drastically (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). During this time, more and more of the population fell into poverty and the official unemployment rate reached 25% nationally with an even higher rate of underemployment (ibid.). Despite austerity measures, the national debt grew exponentially, expanding from $45 billion to $145 billion over the ten years of Menem's presidency, setting the scene for Argentina's eventual default on its debt and the uprising in 2001.

The implementation of neoliberal policies in Argentina must be situated within the broader global context of the breakdown of the Keynesian/Fordist social pact and a new offensive on the part of capital starting in the 1970s leading to the emergence of a new regime of accumulation and accompanying mode of government (Harvey 2005). On the one hand, this transformation entails significant global shifts in the production process: post-Fordist capitalism is characterized by a flexibilization and deterritorialization of labor and production and the global expansion of supply chains through flexible labor practices, just-in time production, and outsourcing. Communication and information technology play an essential role in linking processes of production and consumption in ever tighter loops and enter directly into the production process, crucially producing desires and subjectivities.

From a geographic perspective, these global transformations in capitalism mark qualitative differences in the role space plays in the production of value and the spatial limits of capital. Harvey argues that capital seeks spatial fixes to counteract declining rates of profit, leading to a seemingly unending geographic expansion of capital and a continuous process of “accumulation by dispossession,” or on-going primitive accumulation and enclosure of the commons (2003). Harvey links the search for these spatial fixes with the emergence of flexible dynamics of production, increasingly mobile forms of capital, and a new round of space-time
compression. Thus, the entire globe increasingly becomes implicated in capitalist production. This is not an undifferentiated process, however, and, like earlier forms of capitalist spatial expansion, it is marked by profoundly uneven development and an international division of labor (Smith 2008). Thus, capitalist globalization does not entail the homogenization of global space but rather the creation of new hierarchies and borders on different scales that do not necessarily correspond to nation-state borders (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

Under neoliberalism, the state no longer directly intervenes in market regulation and the provision of social services as it did under the previous period of Fordism. This process entailed the dismantling of the welfare state, the system of social protections for workers, and the forms of collective organization that had fought for these protections. Yet, although neoliberalism is often equated with a “withdrawal of the state,” or the state's failure to intervene in economic affairs, and neoliberal discourse champions the free market and individual choice, the state still plays a role. Harvey describes the neoliberal theory and ideology behind these economic transformations as:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (2005, 2).

Understanding this neoliberal practice in two phases, Peck and Tickell (2002) explain that while one goal of these policies was to ‘roll-back’ the welfare-state (through privatization, deregulation, union-busting, etc.), a second phase of neoliberalism set to ‘roll-out’ a new mode of governance. One of the defining features of the neoliberal mode of governance is its spatial reconfiguration: power is dispersed throughout the social field and lacks a clear center, operating through a variety of institutions and multiple forms of control at different scales (Hardt and Negri
Foucault (2008) argues that in the neoliberal forms of governance, it is the market that limits the state and not vice-versa; the state models its power on the principles of the market economy. The government intervenes, however, not on the mechanisms of the market as it might have under Keynesianism, but on the framework or conditions of the market economy, and increasingly the social conditions and the population itself.

**New Forms of Labor: Life Put to Work**

The increasing economization of more and more parts of life, moving towards the total subsumption of all parts of life under capital, requires us to rethink and broaden our definition of labor. Here subjectivity itself becomes productive:

Capitalist production has undergone a profound mutation in the past thirty or so years. Stated briefly, it is no longer possible to separate capital, as the producer of goods and commodities, from what used to be called the superstructure: the production of ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and tastes. Capitalist production today has either directly appropriated the production of culture, beliefs, and desires or it has indirectly linked them to the production and circulation of commodities. [...] This transformation also entails a fundamental mutation of labor: It is no longer simply physical labor power that is put to work but knowledges, affects, and desires. In short, capitalist production has taken on a dimension that could be described as 'micro-political,' inserting itself into the texture of day-to-day social existence and, ultimately, subjectivity itself. (Read 2003, 2).

In other words, production does not only refer to the production of goods, but also, the production of knowledge, culture, desires, and relationships. Neoliberal capitalism attempts to bring all of these areas of life into the capitalist relation, extracting value from them, and subjecting them to an economic rationality.

The fact that the production of goods cannot be separated from “culture” or “ideology,” means that it is no longer sufficient to speak of separate spheres of the economic and the political. Fumagalli develops the concept of the bio-economy in an attempt to address this issue:

If biopolitics means the systematic action of the political dimension in the direct and indirect discipline of the life and the health of individuals through the deployment of totalitarian institutions, the bioeconomy represents the diffusion of forms of social (not necessarily
disciplinary) control with the aim of favoring the economic valorization of life itself: bioeconomy, that is, the totalizing and invasive power of capitalist accumulation in the life of human beings. In a more specific form, by bioeconomic accumulation we understand the attempt to submit to the reason of exploitation human beings' vital capacities, primarily language and the rational capacity of generating knowledge through the dynamic of social relations. Language and knowledge are the two pillars over which the concept of general intellect is founded: bioeconomy is thus the capitalistic valorization of the general intellect. With the phrase cognitive capitalism we want to say precisely this: the valorization of the cognitive and relational capacities of individuals as the latest stage in the evolution of capitalist forms of production. It is about an attempt to biopolitically order the life of human beings through new coercive dispositifs and dispositifs of control that presuppose the passage to total subsumption of life, that is, of the bios. An attempt 'we are sure' cannot triumph, because of the irreducibility of humankind, and particularly of the general intellect, to dominion and control in toto. Here is the ambivalence and the germ of new future conflicts. (2010, 27).

A full definition of the bio-economy must also recognize all the labor of social reproduction, the labor that goes into reproducing workers as such, but also people in general and the social relations that make up the capitalist system. Hardt and Negri move in this direction with their understanding of biopolitical production in which, “capitalist production is aimed ever more clearly at the production of not only (and perhaps not even primarily) commodities but also social relationships and forms of life” (2009, 133). This understanding of the bio-economy or biopolitical production allows us to begin to recognize that, despite all the ways in which they are excluded from society, the unemployed do not exist completely outside of the economy.

An intensification of capitalism accompanies the spatial expansion and globalization of capital: more and more parts of life become subsumed under capital, life itself increasingly put to work (Hardt and Negri 2000, 258). The labor of the “social factory” takes additional forms besides that of the industrial labor, notably what has been termed “immaterial labor,” or labor that produces the informational, cultural, communicative, and affective aspects of commodities (Lazzarato 1996). Lazzarato elaborates:

If production today is directly the production of a social relation, then the ‘raw material’ of immaterial labour is subjectivity and the ‘ideological’ environment in which subjectivity
lives and reproduces. The production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the production of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive, because the goal of our post-industrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator -and to construct it as ‘active.’ (Ibid., 143).

This “immaterial labor” is that which directly produces the capitalist relation and subjectivity.

One essential element of immaterial labor is what other authors have identified as its “affective” quality, or what feminists have long recognized as emotional labor. Hardt defines this affective labor as all that is involved in producing “social networks, forms of community and biopower,” in other words, “what is created in the networks of affective labour is a form-of-life” (1999, 96).

Thus, today it is the production of relations and forms of life that generates value and is the key site of exploitation and therefore also of struggle (Virno 2003). This labor can no longer be clearly delimited from “life” or “recreation,” as many activities outside of the official workplace also produce value for capital.

Recognizing these transformations in labor does not imply the necessity of a new vanguard figure of the working class, but rather the need to recognize the diversity of the new forms of labor. Toward this end, Mezzadra and Neilson develop the concept of the “multiplication of labor” to describe the intensification, diversification and heterogenization of labor under post-Fordist capitalism:

Labor was intensified, in the sense that its tendency to colonize the entire life of laboring subjects became even more pronounced than before. Second, it was internally diversified, according to a process already identified by Marx in his analysis of the creation of relative surplus value in the Grundrisse, which continuously pushes capital beyond the division of labor toward ‘the development of a constantly expanding and more comprehensive system of different types of labour, different kinds of production, to which a constantly expanding and constantly enriched system of needs corresponds’ (Marx 1973, 409). Third, it was heterogenized as far as legal and social regimes of its organization are concerned. (2013, 88).

This diversification of labor means that the male industrial worker no longer represents the norm, there is no one figure that has replaced him. Mezzadra and Neilson elaborate:
While labor is taking on more and more social characteristics, due to the intensification of cooperation and to the role increasingly played by ‘common’ powers such as knowledge and language as basis of production, subjective labor positions are multiplied both from the point of view of tasks and skills and from the point of view of legal conditions and statuses. (Ibid., 91).

In other words, the multiplication of labor refers to heterogeneity in terms of subjective experiences of work, as well as the processes regulating labor. Again we will find that binary divisions, such as formal and informal work, are not sufficient to understand contemporary labor; labor is as complex as life itself. This expanded conception of labor is necessary for recognizing the work that the poor and the unemployed do, often outside of the wage relation, and the multiplication of forms of value extraction across all times and spaces of life.

Labor, in the form of social cooperation is ever more autonomously organized, while exploitation takes on the form of capture or rent:

Capital – although it may constrict biopolitical labor, expropriate its products, even in some cases provide necessary instruments of production—does not organize productive cooperation [...] Cognitive labor and affective labor generally produce cooperation autonomously from capitalist command, even in some of the most constrained and exploited circumstances, such as call centers or food services. Intellectual, communicative, and affective means of cooperation are generally created in the productive encounters themselves and cannot be directed from the outside. In fact, rather than providing cooperation, we could even say that capital expropriates cooperation as a central element of exploiting biopolitical labor-power. This expropriation takes place not so much from the individual worker (because cooperation already implies a collectivity) but more clearly from the field of social labor, operating on the level of information flows, communication networks, social codes, linguistic innovations, and practices of affects and passions. Biopolitical exploitation involves the expropriation of the common, in this way, at the level of social production and social practice. Capital thus captures and expropriates value through biopolitical exploitation that is produced, in some sense, externally to it. (Hardt and Negri 2009, 141).

Thus, labor, in a broad sense, can be considered as all the forms of social cooperation people engage in on a daily basis from which capital is able to extract value, whether or not they are formally organized by capital.
The Contemporary Neo-extractive Economy

Understanding contemporary capitalism as functioning through the extraction or capture of value that is produced externally to it, is a useful starting point for thinking about the neo-extractivist economy. The term “neo-extractivism” usually refers to the extraction of natural resources, and in the case of Argentina refers to the exploitation of mineral resources and land (through soy production). These are the areas of the Argentine economy that have experienced the most growth since 2003 and the source of much of the government's tax revenue, which has fueled the expansion of social programs. These practices have been linked to high levels of environmental degradation, as well as the expulsion of indigenous peoples and campesinos from their lands, a new enclosure of the commons. This definition of neo-extractivism, prioritizing the extraction of natural resources, posits it in opposition to neoliberalism, as a shift from the Washington Consensus to the “commodities consensus” (Svampa 2015). In this narrative, neo-extractivism differs from neoliberalism because of the state's increased role in regulating the market and providing social welfare, and the supposed decline of power of international financial institutions.

On the other hand, Gago and Mezzadra make a decisive argument for a more expansive concept of extractivism that highlights its continuities with the neoliberal period of the 1990s:

Extraction cannot be reduced to operations linked to raw materials become commodities on the global level. On the one hand, because the dynamic of the digital and the financial have a fundamental role even in the operations of extraction of raw materials, in the organization of the logistics of circulation and in even in determining the rise and fall of prices in the international exchanges. This implies complicating the very image of Latin America and its position in the so-called international division of labor. On the other hand, because extraction cannot be limited to inert materials. Extraction also has to do with extraction of labor power, in such a sense that it allows for broadening and complementing the very notion of exploitation. If extraction is a constitutive feature of the extractions of capital, it is necessary to raise the question of how capital itself relates with what in traditional terms could be called work, and that, however, – as is seen in the examples of the digital and the financial – increasingly takes on the form of complex and highly heterogeneous social cooperation. (2015).
This more expansive definition of neo-extractivism also includes urban processes of extraction and rent-based economic activities, such as urban real estate speculation and the operations of financial capital at different scales. The broader definition of neo-extractivism allows us to include the myriad ways in which biopolitical capital captures the value produced by social cooperation, extracting that wealth in a form very similar to the way in which it extracts natural resources from the earth.

The Institute for Political Investigation and Experimentation (Instituto de Investigación y Experimentación Política – IIEP) identifies agribusiness, the oil industry, drug trafficking, and mining as key extractive industries that have seen tremendous growth in Argentina since 2001. Additionally, these industries all share important ties to finance and international markets: “Argentina has benefited by its insertion into the global commodity markets, thanks to which it acquires considerable profit emerging from financial speculation with natural resources and food items” (Instituto de Investigación y Experimentación Política 2013, 5). In a similar vein, Sandro Mezzadra, in a conversation with Argentine activists, calls for us to rethink exploitation in general in terms of extraction and to link narrowly defined extraction of natural resources with this extraction in a broad sense:

Today surplus value is produced and appropriated by capital in a totally different situation from what Marx tried to describe through the labor theory of value. We no longer have a measure that allows us to create a distinction between the part of the working day in which the worker produces for herself and the part of the day that she produces for capital. At the same time, the notion of property also changes when confronted with extractivist capital. What matters is no longer property in itself so much, but rather appropriation, and this is an essential element in both the narrowly defined extractivist practices as well as projects of urban renewal. Appropriation means violence, dispossession. Therefore, I think that it is necessary to rethink the concept of exploitation, taking dispossession as one of its fundamental characteristics. (Brighenti and Mezzadra 2013).

Dispossession, usually linked to the appropriation of land and natural resources, and exploitation, tied to wage labor, can no longer clearly be distinguished. Here we see the distinction been the
waged proletariat and the unwaged reserve army break down into multiple forms of exploitation and dispossession that occur in various spaces and times of life. The IIEP elaborates:

The extractive character of the aforementioned businesses is a mark of up to what point the process of valorization underway requires subordinating and exploiting or directly destroying the existing social fabrics. Accumulation by dispossession is another way of referring to this business pattern that seized common goods in exchange for astronomical monetary gains. The result is a social and communitarian disarticulation that, however, benefits with a general increase in incomes. This increase in the capacity for popular consumption does not mean, however, a horizon of collective enrichment or of social equality. (2013, 5-6).

The IIEP describes examples of farmers being evicted from their lands by transnational soy companies, aggressions towards indigenous people standing in the way of mining projects, and other attempts to divide and subordinate communities struggling against extractive projects and environmental degradation. These industries rely on the extraction of natural resources, as well as on the knowledges and capacities of the very people they subordinate in order to better use the land and extract resources from it. This capture of knowledges and capacities adds yet another layer to the neo-extractivist economy and highlights the importance of those immaterial forms of value production along with the more material extraction of natural resources and direct exploitation of labor through the wage relation.

As the IIEP (2013) and Gago and Mezzadra (2015) signal, finance is one of the key elements connecting this different extractive operations of capital, as well as one of the principle continuities between the neoliberalism of 1990s and the neo-extractivism of the current period. While the existence of finance is obviously not new, its role is qualitatively different today and "finance is cosubstantial with the very production of goods and services" (Marazzi 2011, 28). Thus, finance cannot be thought of a separate sphere of the economy but as one that underlies all of production and consumption. Even the extraction of natural resources is dependent on the financial markets that set commodity prices and the investment that makes those projects
possible, and therefore cannot be considered purely separate from finance. Likewise finance
capital and international financial markets are central to manufacturing and industrial production
and circuits of consumption.

Mezzadra and Neilson explore the relationship between neo-extractivism, finance and
logistics, as well as the specifically urban elements of extraction:

The link between extraction and financial markets emerges when the question of commodity
prices and their influence on projects of extraction comes into view. At the same time,
logistics and extraction are integral to the operations of finance. This is evident in the forms
of logistical coordination that animate algorithmic trading and the infrastructural embedding
of financial markets in electronic circuits that require the ongoing extraction of mineral
goods. Once extraction is understood in more general terms than its association with mining
suggests, other implications become evident. In processes of gentrification and extraction of
value from urban spaces, for instance, financial capital enters into strategic alliances with
real-estate agencies and construction companies, prompting dynamics of dispossession and
displacement. (2013, 14).

Urban rent and real estate speculation is one of the most visible forms that neo-extractivism takes
in the city. In Buenos Aires, real estate speculation occurs throughout the city, including in the
urban periphery and informal settlements and is often tied to violent dynamics of displacement
(Taller Hacer Ciudad 2011). Additionally, the IIEP (2013) has investigated the links between
money flows in the soy industry, the drug trade, and urban real estate speculation, documenting
the dense interconnections among them and linking them as part of the same financialized
economy, in which urban real estate investment serves to evade taxes from agricultural
production or to launder money earned illegally.

Lazzarato argues for referring to contemporary capitalism as a “debt economy” as it is the
creditor-debtor relation that has become generalized and that serves as the cornerstone of
contemporary forms of social control. This debt economy is global and universal, as “even those
too poor to have access to credit must pay interest to creditors through the reimbursement of
public debt; even countries too poor for a Welfare State must repay their debt” (2012, 32). It is
easy to see how the entire Argentine population has been subjected to the exploitative creditor-debtor relation through the public debt and austerity measures put in place in an attempt to repay it. In this way, debt extracts value from all of life and social cooperation as a whole. Lazzarato elaborates: “Credit, then, not only exploits social relationships in general, but also the uniqueness of existence. It exploits the process of subjectivation by affecting the individuation of existence itself” (ibid., 60). He continues:

Through the subjectivation involved in debt, modern-day capitalism encompasses action as well as the forces that make it possible. Indeed, debt exploits the ethical action constitutive of the individual and the community by mobilizing forces that are at the basis of man's moral existence, man's social existence.” (Ibid., 66).

Marazzi also highlights how finance capitalism increasingly works to include the poor: “In order to function, this capitalism must invest in the bare life of people who cannot provide any guarantee, who offer nothing apart from themselves. It is a capitalism that turns bare life into a direct source of profit” (2011, 39). The unemployed have found themselves increasingly implicated in these processes, through the proliferation of multiple forms of credit and debt, both “from above” and “from below” (Gago 2015). The fact that this wealth is captured directly from the reproductive activities of the poor, putting at risk their very ability to reproduce themselves, often has the same effects as pure exclusion (being left to die) but, in the meanwhile, is an ever more violent form of exploitation--exploiting bodies and social relations directly.

The Productivity of the Unemployed

As stated earlier, the piquetero movement emerged most directly in response to growing unemployment rates in Argentina and a “crisis of employment” during the height of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. On the one hand, this unemployment can be seen as one of the major consequences of post-Fordist production, an effect of deindustrialization, automatization,
outsourcing, and the loss of labor protections. On the other hand, in most of the Global South, much of the population had never been fully incorporated into the capitalist wage relation—living outside or on the margins of it. Neoliberal reforms led to an increase in “marginalized” and “excluded” populations, who were denied access to the means of reproduction as those were increasingly privatized, for example, peasants and indigenous people were forced off of their land, and also not able to sell their labor for a wage due to lack of employment opportunities. Argentina experienced both of these forms of unemployment: former industrial workers losing their jobs and rural populations forced into increasingly marginalized positions.

One of the most novel elements of the MTDs is precisely that the unemployed organized as such, demonstrating their productivity and defying theories and common wisdom that see the unemployed as unproductive and a reactionary political force. Thus, a different theory of unemployment is needed in order to understand the rise of these movements. Here I will briefly discuss different theoretical approaches to understanding unemployment starting with Marx to theoretical approaches that emphasis the value produced beyond the wage relation. I argue that those approaches which recognize the value produced by many of the activities engaged in by the unemployed are the most useful for understanding the emergence and effects of the piquetero movement.

Marx understood the unemployed in terms of the “reserve army of labor,” a necessary condition of capitalist development and while unproductive to capital still essential for the reproduction of the capitalist relation. Marx describes the development of the industrial reserve army:

The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the
expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass
of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the
greater this reserve army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose
misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The
more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working class, and the industrial reserve
army, the greater is official pauperism. This is the absolute general law of capitalist
accumulation. (1977, 798).

Thus, the formation of the industrial reserve army, this process of pauperization is an
unavoidable feature of capitalist accumulation. The unemployed as “industrial reserve army”
serves the fundamental purpose of driving down wages, keeping labor costs down and thus
allowing capitalists to accumulate more surplus. Therefore, this relative surplus population is
responsible for regulating the supply and demand of labor power. The industrial reserve army
also serves to discipline waged labor, keeping workers in line with the threat of losing and falling
into the industrial reserve army themselves.

Marx further divides the industrial reserve army into three categories: floating
(temporarily or conjuncturally unemployed, usually due to technological advances), the latent
(those who have not yet been incorporated into the capitalist labor market, but that could be with
the expansion of capital's frontiers, such as peasants), and the stagnant, characterized by
“irregular employment” and a “maximum of working-time, and minimum of wages.”
Additionally, Marx describes those living in pauperism, including those who are able to work,
orphans and pauper children (who are candidates for the industrial reserve army), and the
“demoralised and ragged, and those unable to work, chiefly people who succumb to their
incapacity to adaptation, due to the division of labour.” Marx describes pauperism as

The hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its
production is included in that of the relative surplus population, its necessity in theirs; along
with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the
capitalist development of wealth. (1977, 797)

Beyond this pauperized segment of the population exists the lumpenproletariat, the “criminals,
vagabonds and prostitutes,” the “dangerous' classes.” Marx considered this lumpenproletariat to exist outside of capitalist relations, unproductive, unable to develop class consciousness and often reactionary in regards to working class struggle.

While this characterization of the lumpenproletariat has been challenged by many theorists and the organized “lumpen” themselves, much of the Left in Argentina has continued using this language to disregard the struggles of the unemployed. Toty Flores, talking about the unemployed in La Matanza, recounts, “the Leftist political parties, minus a few honorable exceptions, accused us of being 'lumpens,' and ordered us to go work in the factories. Of course, factories that no longer existed” (2005, 19). Disagreements about the causes of unemployment in the conjuncture, solutions to the unemployment crisis, and the role of the unemployed in political and economic struggles were the root of the conflicts between organizations of the unemployed and labor unions and Leftist political parties, and one of the reasons that the unemployed chose to form their own organizations independent from the unions and parties. More orthodox interpretations of Marx, including those that see the unemployed only as the reactionary lumpenproletariat or the industrial reserve army waiting to become employed, cannot account for the emergence and success of the movements of unemployed in Argentina (Zibechi 2003), therefore, we are forced to develop other theories of unemployment.

We can trace different periods of unemployment in Argentina from the emergence of the post-Fordist economy in the 1970s to the current moment of neo-extractive growth. Neoliberal policies first translated into an increase in self-employment and the informal sector in the 1980s and then into a drastic increase in unemployment during the 1990s (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). The privatization of many state-run companies allowed them to lay off workers or drastically reduce pay in order to become more profitable. For example, following the privatization of the
state-run oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF) in 1993, unemployment rose to 30% in oil towns and the percent of the population living below the poverty level increased to nearly 50% (Auyero 2003, 18). Additionally, the government terminated import substitution programs to promote national industries and eased restrictions on imports and foreign owned businesses, allowing more multinational corporations to be able to do business in the country, resulting in a wave of deindustrialization across the country. The peripheries of large urban centers were hit especially hard by this deindustrialization, as they had been home to much of the country's manufacturing and by the late 1990s unemployment reached as high as 50% in some parts of Greater Buenos Aires (Isman 2004). The Menem government, pressured by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, drastically reduced spending on social services and welfare programs, meaning those out of work were not able to rely on the government for support either. These cuts, along with the privatization of many services, generated an increasingly violent form of marginalization as poor sectors were denied the very necessities for survival. This form of marginalization could be seen as the production of an absolute surplus population from the view of capital. The cuts to services also forced more people to seek paid employment, increasing the number of job seekers and thus the unemployment rate (A. C. Dinerstein 2003). This led to a proliferation of different forms of informal and precarious labor, which had already been the norm for many women and migrants, as the poor were forced to seek ways of making a living outside of the formal labor market.

In Argentina, unemployment under neoliberalism has been discussed largely in terms of “exclusion” versus “inclusion,” with the media, government, academics and the movements themselves considering unemployment principally a problem of exclusion. This narrative highlights how the unemployed are denied the rights of citizenship by being denied access to a
wage. Therefore, the government's social programs explicitly aim for “social inclusion” for the poor and unemployed and many social movements make this one of their key demands. The MTD La Matanza, for example, refers to the “thousands of excluded” as the “social cost” of neoliberalism in Argentina, “the disappeared in democracy,” comparing the unemployed to the desaparecidos from the last military dictatorship (Bordegaray 2005). The argument I want to develop here, however, building on the analysis of neo-extractivism discussed above, seeks a different understanding of the relationship between unemployment and exclusion, in terms of “differential inclusion” or “inclusion through exclusion.” Colectivo Situaciones and the MTD Solano, drawing on Agamben, define exclusion as “the place that our biopolitical societies produce to be able include people, groups and social classes in a subordinated manner” (2002, 128). They emphasize that “inclusion” and “exclusion” go hand and hand, one cannot exist without the other, therefore the goal cannot simply be inclusion.

What the concept of “exclusion” and even the term “unemployed” itself, hide are the many productive activities that people engage in and the various ways that they still manage to get by despite not having access to formal employment. Recognizing this productivity of the unemployed requires us to broaden our definition of work beyond wage labor. We can start by acknowledging that waged labor never accounts for all labor: a portion of all work, whether in the factory or elsewhere, is unwaged. Cleaver further explains unwaged work:

To say that the working class sells its labor-power to capital must be understood broadly: the working class includes those who work for capital in various ways in exchange for a portion of the total social wealth they produce. As Marx pointed out in his discussion of wages in Part VI of Capital, and as the Wages for Housework Movement has emphasized, the money wage represents payment only for a part of that work. In the factory the unpaid and unwaged part counts as surplus value; the development of the analysis of the social factory has brought out how capital is able to force the working class to do unwaged work for it in many other ways. The most closely analyzed aspect of this is the work involved in the training and upkeep of labor-power itself – work performed by the wage worker but also by unwaged household workers – mainly wives and children. Other formally unwaged work includes
such things as travel to and from the job, shopping, and those parts of schoolwork, community work, and church work that serve to reproduce labor-power for capital. Unwaged work is not unpaid; rather it is at least partially sold to capital in return for nonwage income. The important point here is that the analysis of the commodity-form in the class relation must include this kind of exchange as well as the direct exchange of wages for labor-power. (2000, 84).

It is clear from this analysis that the unemployed, even when exempt from a wage, are still very much engaged in labor, including housework and community work, as well as all the other work that goes into reproducing labor power and the capital-labor relation.

Denning, building on the recognition of the importance of unwaged labor, calls for us to decenter the wage relation in our understandings of capitalism, recognizing that capitalism begins not with an employment contract, but with dispossession and the need to earn a living. He insists:

Unemployment precedes employment, and the informal economy precedes the formal, both historically and conceptually. We must insist that ‘proletarian’ is not a synonym for ‘wage labourer’ but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. You don’t need a job to be a proletarian: wageless life, not wage labour, is the starting point in understanding the free market. (2010, 81).

Thus, Denning's argument is that the working class cannot be thought of only in terms of waged workers nor should waged workers be privileged or taken as the norm in our understanding of capitalism. Waged labor is but one form of work and one form of exploitation under capitalism, but dispossession and capitalist accumulation take many other forms. Denning's approach calls for us to center the experiences of the wageless in our analyses of capitalism and the struggles against it.

The analysis of the transformations in the regime of accumulation and the dominant forms of post-Fordist labor described above enable us to more completely recognize the productivity of the unemployed. The real subsumption of life under capital means that all of life is increasingly being put to work and producing value for capital, including the life of the
unemployed. Based on this understanding, Dinerstein challenges the conception of unemployment as lack or exclusion: “More than a lack, unemployment is an intensified form of capitalist labor where the dematerialization of labor becomes apparent” (2009, 256). Thus what unemployment makes visible, at least when the unemployed themselves make it visible, is precisely these transformations in labor, the immaterialization of work, due to the real subsumption of life under capital. Dinerstein argues for understanding unemployment itself as work, “unemployment is a form of work produced by the intensification and expansion of capitalist labor in its most abstract form: money (or abstract labor in movement)” (ibid., 245). Therefore, unemployment cannot be understood solely in terms of lack or exclusion, but must be seen as a specific, especially violent, form of exploitation and dispossession.

Virno, also basing his argument on an understanding of real subsumption, as well as the increased importance of communicative-affective labor, makes a compelling argument for challenging the very distinction between employment and unemployment:

The crisis of the society of labor (if correctly understood) implies that all of post-Fordist labor-power can be described using the categories with which Marx analyzed the ‘industrial reserve army; that is, unemployment. Marx believed that the ‘industrial reserve army’ was divisible into three types or figures: fluid (today we could speak of turn-over, early retirement, etc.), latent (where at any moment a technological innovation could intervene, reducing employment), stagnant (in current terms: working under the table, temporary work, atypical work). According to Marx, it is the mass of the unemployed which is fluid, latent or stagnant, certainly not the employed labor class; they are a marginal sector of labor-power, not its main sector. Yet, the crisis of the society of labor causes these three determining categories to apply, in effect, to all labor-power. Fluid, or latent, or stagnant, applies to the employed labor class as such. Each allocation of wage labor allows the non-necessity of that labor and the excessive social cost inherent in that labor to leak out. But this non-necessity, as always, manifests itself as a perpetuation of wage labor in temporary or 'flexible' forms.’ (2003, 102).

He continues,

Labor and non-labor develop an identical form of productivity, based on the exercise of generic human faculties: language, memory, sociability, ethical and aesthetic inclinations, the capacity for abstraction and learning...there is no substantial difference between employment
and unemployment. It could be said that: unemployment is non-remunerated labor and labor, in turn, is remunerated unemployment [...] The old distinction between 'labor' and 'non-labor' ends up in the distinction between remunerated life and non-remunerated life [...] The productive cooperation in which labor-power plays is always larger and richer than the one put into play by the labor process. (Ibid., 103).

The unemployed, as much as the employed, participate in processes of social cooperation involving the “generic human faculties” that are a key element of the dominant forms of work and capture of value today.

Therefore, we can see that the unemployed are engaged in a wide range of activities that are productive of value for which they are not remunerated. For example, the *cumbia villera* and rock music and corresponding fashions that are produced and made famous in the poor neighborhoods of Buenos Aires become not only heavily commercialized, but are also then reproduced in the middle and high income neighborhoods of the city. Even more important are the territorial knowledges of local organizers and activists, women's work of cleaning and caring for households and public spaces, maintaining the affective ties that hold communities together, and the alternative and informal economic practices developed by the poor and unemployed to survive during the economic crisis. For example, these practices gave birth to large informal markets and related economies of counterfeit production for sale in these markets that account for significant amounts of economic activity today (Gago 2014). Additionally, the organized unemployed, especially the autonomously organized MTDs began creating worker-managed cooperatives and other types of micro-enterprises to directly address the question of unemployment and provide some source of income for their members during the crisis. These activities are not marginal to capital accumulation but quite the opposite, they are where much of the creativity and dynamism behind capitalist expansion lie. The strategies that individuals, families, and communities use to survive and maintain their livelihoods outside of the wage
relation are now the dynamic force behind innovation leading to the expansion of capital into more spaces and times of everyday life. Both Kirchner governments have been especially cognizant of this and have attempted to bring more and more elements of these activities under government control through complex and subtle forms of governance and capture (Gago et al. 2012, Gago 2014).

Thus, as opposed to those analyses that locate immaterial labor solely in the figure of the cognitariat or similarly privileged class of those with access to the most innovative technology and education, it is in those “marginalized” populations where the most important relational-communicative labor takes place. As Kaufman elaborates:

Marx also maintained that to find the real site of production, we must shift our gaze from the marketplace to the ‘basement’ where the exploitation of labor and the extraction of surplus value take place in order to produce profit. In a socialized and globalized productive process, the ‘basement’ where communication and cooperation take place is found, literally, ‘below’: both the ‘below’ of everyday life and social relations, and the ‘below’ of current global society: an ‘underclass’ mined for its labor, both as individual bodies and as the wealth of its cooperative practices […] Society is productive beyond measure. (2010, 127).

The poor and the unemployed are very much engaged in this work of cooperation, developing language, social, and organizational capacities. Thus, it is clear that while the unemployed are excluded due to their lack of access to a wage, they are still not only an important element of the working class, but involved in the social production of wealth (included) as well. This is what Giuseppe Cocco describes as the “paradoxical centrality of the poor” since the poor, their very lives and bodies, are increasingly important to capital accumulation. According to Cocco, “cognitive, globalized and financial capitalism includes the entire world, and, therefore, the poor, no longer passing through their previous insertion in the factory type of wage relation” (2014, 840). In other words, the poor are included in this new phase of financial capitalism but, produce value for capital without receiving a wage in return. This form of inclusion challenges simple
linear narratives of capitalist development based on the emergence of industrial capitalism in Europe. It is clear that contemporary financial, cognitive capitalism very much relies on the biopolitical labor of the poor and unemployed, capturing value from them, in a form more akin to the extraction of rent than exploitation through the wage. This recognition has important implications for understanding the political potential of the unemployed in general, and, particularly, the organized movements of the unemployed in Argentina.

The shift in Argentina's economic situation between the 1990s and the Kirchners' década ganada\(^5\) corresponds to a recognition of this economical potential of the poor and the unemployed. Verónica Gago describes the transformation “from the misery, scarcity and unemployment of the century's beginning (and the forms of struggle and resistance that emerged then) to certain forms of abundance found in new forms of experiencing consumption, work, entrepreneurship, territorial organization and money,” arguing that there is a new type of “citizenship through consumption” taking hold even in peripheral neighborhoods (2015, 13). As discussed above, Argentina's supposed economic recovery is largely based on two key elements: the over-exploitation of natural resource commodities (minerals and soy) (e.g., the natural commons) and the incorporation and exploitation of the alternative economic practices developed by marginalized sectors during the height of the country's crisis (the markets, cooperatives, barter networks, etc.) (e.g., a social common). Thus, the multiplicity of ways of “getting by” developed by various sectors of the population, especially by the organized unemployed, are central to Argentina's current economic growth and must be taken seriously, not

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\(^5\) The década ganada, the gained decade, is a slogan used by C.F.K. on the occasion of the ten year anniversary of Néstor Kirchner's election to the presidency. It is a reference to the “lost decade” used to refer to the inflationary and debt crisis that much of Latin America experienced during the 1980s. On the contrary, the “gained decade” tells a story of ten years of economic growth, industrial development, and investment in public infrastructure, education and health care (c.f., www.decadaganada.gov.ar).
merely seen as marginalized or minor economic activities.

**Reproductive and Care Work**

The MTDs point to the centrality of struggles over reproduction and the continued importance of reproductive labor. Looking through the lens of reproduction provides us with another way of recognizing the productive capacity of the unemployed, while also highlighting the gendered aspects of contemporary exploitation. The movements of the unemployed emerged in response to a crisis of reproduction during the height of neoliberalism: faced with the increasing difficulty of reproducing themselves when denied access to a wage, they attempted to sustain and create new and alternative methods of social reproduction. These struggles over reproduction also show how the new forms of capture that have emerged with the neo-extractive economy seek to extract wealth directly from the reproductive activities of the working class.

Feminists have long discussed the importance of emotional and affective labor as part of the work of social reproduction, as well as the importance of the very material activities of reproduction, recognizing that the production of relationships and forms is life is not an abstract and disembodied process. Social reproduction can be understood as the “complex of activities and services that reproduce human beings as well as the commodity labor power, starting with child-care, housework, sex work and elder care, both in the form of waged and unwaged labour” (Barbagallo and Federici 2012, 1). These activities include household cleaning, shopping, preparing food, doing the laundry, paying the bills, providing intimacy and emotional support, such as listening and consoling; bearing children, teaching and disciplining them are also an important part of reproductive work. We must add the unnamed, unnamable labor required to anticipate, prevent or resolve crises, keep up good relations with kin and neighbours, coping with the growing threats to our health – through the food we eat, the water we drink. (Ibid., 4).

Beyond the tasks that traditionally make up concepts of domestic work and biological
reproduction, this definition includes the affective labor of creating and maintaining social relations that are at the heart of capitalist production today, as described above. These are the activities that allow for the reproduction of human life, of labor power, of the bios, but also the territory and the community. These activities are crucial for capitalism, despite being systematically ignored and undervalued.

Orthodox Marxist perspectives separate “productive” labor from the tasks of “reproduction,” and consider reproductive labor outside of the system of capitalist production and exchange. Traditionally seen as women’s work and naturalized as such, these activities were often not considered “real work,” justifying the expectation that women would continue to carry them out without pay and recognition. Marxist Feminists have long challenged this distinction and pointed out the ways in which capitalist production depends on this, often unpaid and unrecognized, reproductive labor usually carried out by women. They struggled to redefine “work” to include that unpaid reproductive labor, challenging conceptions of reproductive labor as unproductive. Dalla Costa and James argued in The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community (1972) that domestic labor is directly productive of surplus value through the production of the commodity labor power. They refer to the all the social services that capitalist organization requires women to do in order to reproduce labor power, making these activities socially necessary and the precondition for all capitalist production. Therefore, this labor of reproduction must be central to all debates around work, which was ultimately the goal of a series of feminist struggles such as the International Wages for Housework Campaign (Weeks 2011). While this led to a series of debates within the women's movement that were never fully resolved, the arguments of these Marxist Feminists continue to be important to understanding contemporary forms of labor and can help us move beyond a binary between
productive and reproductive work to recognize the value of different forms of labor.

Today, under post-Fordist capitalism, where all of life is increasingly put to work, the distinction between reproductive and productive labor becomes difficult to maintain, as does any division between “productive” and “unproductive” work. Productive and reproductive work become increasingly integrated as what has traditionally been unpaid reproductive work enters into the market in the form of paid work with or without the use of technology. Meanwhile, the affective and communicative skills characteristic of reproductive work are becoming necessary for more and more forms of work outside of the clearly reproductive sphere. Despite these general transformations in work, most reproductive and domestic work continues to be carried out by women. For example, a 2014 report released by Argentina’s INDEC shows that women on average dedicate 2.5 hours per day more than men to domestic work, including childcare, and carry out 76% of the total domestic labor. This work continues to be undervalued, taken for granted, and unremunerated. Additionally, the entrance of this work into the sphere of market relations means that it can also be outsourced: upper and middle class women are now able to hire low-income (usually non-white) women to do their domestic labor for them, further entrenching the racial and gendered dynamics of exploitation.

The reproductive and care work carried out by poor and unemployed women during the economic crisis were essential for that sector’s ability to survive the crisis. During the period of neoliberal structural adjustment in the 1990s, women faced an increased burden as the social safety net provided by the state was greatly reduced through austerity measures. Cuts to spending on health care, education, unemployment benefits and aid to the poor in general, meant that women were forced to pick up the extra costs in order to protect their families. Dalla Costa

understands neoliberalism in this way as a process which:

Further sacrificed the sphere of reproduction to that of production, and has therefore underdeveloped reproduction in order to further develop production. This led to the disappearance of individual and collective rights achieved through hard struggle in the preceding decades, and to the withdrawal of resources available for the pursuit of a life that would not be 'all work' in a context of increasing precarity and uncertainty. (2008, 30).

This extra work added to the generally unwaged and unrecognized labor that women already carried out, especially in peripheral neighborhoods where the state often does not provide basic services (such as running water and sewage). This gendered aspect of neoliberalism must not be overlooked. For this reason, Nagar et al. call for a gendered analysis of neoliberalism that “would reveal how inequality is actively produced in the relations between global restructuring and culturally specific productions of gender difference” (2002, 261). Like Dalla Costa, they also note how structural adjustment especially affects women, “neoliberal states are subsidized through the informal provision of housing, food, health care, and education. As neoliberal states withdraw from the provision of social services, this work is most often assumed by women in the feminized spheres of household and community” (ibid.).

However, while neoliberalism has particularly affected women, especially poor and non-white women, these women are not passive victims in the face of an ever more powerful abstract neoliberal force, but have proven to be one of the strongest sources of resistance to neoliberalism. The networks and organizations that women created to feed their families and provide for their basic needs, for example, through community meals and barter networks, laid the groundwork for the foundation of the urban MTDs, and were able to effectively meet people's basic needs, allowing them to survive the worst times of neoliberalism and crisis. Besides the directly productive activities of women in these networks (usually starting micro-enterprises in their homes, for example), they also carried out the essential affective labor of
creating the social relationships based on solidarity that allowed people to support one another--the basis for the eventual movements and organizations that would emerge out of their struggles.

While during the 1990s, there was what could be called a crisis of reproduction due to the implementation of austerity measures and cuts to social spending, making it increasingly difficult for the poor to reproduce themselves, under the Kirchner neo-extractive model there is a new relationship to this reproductive labor. The new model attempts to incorporate the alternative forms of social reproduction created during the crisis, all of that labor of producing social relations and forms of organization, as well as the material labor that allowed for people's continued existence, into the dominant capitalist system in order to be able to directly extract value from it. Thus these practices of social reproduction enter into complex relations with government subsidies and processes of financialization: subsidies both support reproductive activity and bring it under the state's control, while financialization, especially through micro-credit and other forms of indebtedness, is the process through which capital is able to extract value from these activities.

**Financialization in the Urban Periphery**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the key continuities between the neoliberal era of the 1990s and the contemporary neo-extractivist economic model is the central role played by finance. On the one hand, this refers to the role of international finance in regulating production as described earlier in this chapter. On the other hand, processes of debt and credit also play an essential role in instilling a neoliberal subjectivity and organizing the capture of wealth from an ever larger part of the population. Here I will look at a few of the specific financial processes that operate in the urban periphery, among the poor and the unemployed.

Micro-credit loans are one of the most common examples of the dissemination of
relations of debt in the urban periphery. No or low interest micro-credit, first became available on a small-scale in the neighborhoods of the urban periphery in the late 1990s, originally funded by international NGOs and international financial institutions. Now, not only are international bodies involved in providing funding for micro-credit programs, but Argentinean NGOs and the national government do so as well. These programs started in the midst of high unemployment and cuts to state social services. With the economic recovery these programs have multiplied as a way of implicating the poor in financial capitalism and controlling and capturing value from the myriad of alternative economic activities that emerged in the wake of the crisis. Micro-credit goes to finance a wide range of small business projects, with distinctions arising from the more individual or collective character of these projects.

The piquetero organizations, besides often taking on micro-credit loans themselves to fund their own collective projects and small enterprises/cooperatives, have, in some cases, become involved in managing micro-credit programs for the government and NGOs. The MTD La Matanza, for example, manages the micro-credit project called the Banco Popular de la Buena Fe, funded by the Ministry of Social Development, in the neighborhood of La Juanita. This program provides small loans to individuals (at first only women but then it was expanded to include men) to start up or expand small business projects. The initial loans charge no interest but can be renewed with a 6% interest rate. The projects funded through the MTD La Matanza were often based in the participants' homes and included making and selling food or clothing, or, even more frequently, reselling clothing or other products purchased cheaply in a central market. Participants were placed into groups of five people (segregated by gender) that then would be held collectively responsible for ensuring that everyone in their group repaid their loans. MTD members served as “promoters,” who were trained by the government to facilitate the small
groups and manage distributing the loans and collecting repayments in the neighborhood. While some members complained of the administrative work involved in these tasks, the leadership of the MTD lauded the program as a way to promote the self-sufficiency of neighborhood residents without relying on the state (despite the fact that the loans came from the state to begin with).

When some members left the MTD La Matanza to form the school Yo Sí Puedo (YSP), the people largely responsible for managing that micro-credit program went over to the school as well, abandoning their duties with the Banco Popular de la Buena Fe. YSP decided not to continue involvement in micro-credit programs, as they were very critical of the way the program had developed and its overall effect on the MTD. One of the women in charge of managing the program for the MTD La Matanza, who later joined YSP, explained her critique of the micro-credit program in this way: “it makes everything be about money, everyone's relationships are centered around money” (Interview Sept. 23, 2011, La Matanza). Another former MTD member critiqued the program for promoting individual solutions to unemployment as opposed to collective ones and not actually aiding in building the movement. He also opposed it for promoting financialization in the neighborhood: “even if these [micro-credit loans] don't charge high interest and put people in debt, they promote a culture of using credit for everything. Now [the MTD La Matanza] even distributes real credit cards” (Interview, Sept. 23, La Matanza). Later we drive by the MTD La Matanza's social center and indeed, at the entrance, the Banco Santander has a table where they are signing people up for credit cards.

Micro-credit has been critiqued by various authors and social movements for functioning to interpellate the poor into relations and subjectivities of debt. For example, Mujeres Creando in Bolivia are critical of the entire enterprise of micro-credit, arguing that it serves to transfer money from the informal sector to the formal sector with no benefit for the participants
themselves. They see micro-credit as a method of capturing the value created by the social networks and practices that the poor, mostly women, create as survival mechanisms (Toro Ibáñez 2010). Micro-credit programs aim to integrate these informal networks and survival mechanisms into a capitalist system. In this way, micro-credit serves as a mechanism to privatize and constrain women's reproductive work, capitalizing on women's informal relationships and introducing competition into otherwise cooperative mechanisms. Mezzadra and Neilson also see micro-credit as a form of capture: “The arrangements of micro-credit are one means by which the entire life of these masses is coded as 'human capital' that should not be wasted (although it is often wasted) but rather compelled to generate value according to the logic of abstract labor” (2013, 93). The experiences of the MTDs with micro-credit programs validate these critiques and demonstrate the intimate relationship between these low-interest micro-loans and other forms of credit.

Thus, while during the economic crisis financialization was promoted through small scale micro-credits that generally charged no to low interest and served, at least theoretically, a social good, with the economic recovery those same mechanisms are now being used to promote an overall increase in consumption facilitated by more standard forms of credit. In addition to the proliferation of credit cards, buying on credit has become common for the purchase of household and electronic appliances and motor vehicles. PROCELAC (La Procuraduría de Criminalidad Económica y Lavado de Activos, The Office of Economic Crime and Money Laundering) reports that most of the increase in credit, especially predatory forms of lending, in the past five years in Buenos Aires has taken place in low-income neighborhoods in Buenos Aires and its periphery (2013). The expansion of financial practices into these neighborhoods that were once thought of as peripheral, extends credit to people who, according to most accounts, are outside the
economic system, people who are not formally employed and who meet many of their needs through non-market means. Therefore, PROCELAC argues that it is no longer possible to think of the financial economy and the popular economy as separated spheres, but that the two activities are now fully intertwined.

The IIEP describes how financial capital as operates both “from above” and “from below”:

This dynamic of financialized capitalism branches off, in conditions of neo-developmentalist hegemony, according to a double line: from below, it feeds dynamics of popular consumption and indebtedness that make possible a type of inclusion beyond the world of employment; from above, it permits a fund of resources that at this point become irreplaceable for the functioning of state agencies. (2013, 6-7).

In one sense, this increase in the capacity for popular consumption is the positive outcome of struggles against austerity measures in the 1990s: the consumption is, in large part, funded by social programs and subsidies demanded by the movements. It is a refusal, on the part of the poor, to have their needs and enjoyment subordinated to capital, a refusal of austerity and poverty in a society filled with so much wealth, a refusal that takes its ultimate form in recurrent outbreaks of looting (as occurred for example in December 2012 and December 2013). On the other hand, this consumption includes the poor in an unequal and subordinate way through mechanisms of debt and relationships of dependency that ultimately threaten their very ability to reproduce themselves. In addition to these forms of credit “from above,” in recent years there has also been a proliferation of finance “from below.” This expansion of credit is part of what Gago (2015) terms popular neoliberalism or neoliberalism from below: the extension of practices of consumption and a type of neoliberal subjectivity into peripheral areas. This increase in consumption does not correspond with an increase in formal, well-paying employment, meaning it is mostly funded through credit and welfare benefits. For Gago, this popular neoliberalism is
based on the informal practices of cooperation and self-management developed by migrants and
the movements of the unemployed during the height of Argentina's crisis that are now being
subsumed under capital in the “post-neoliberal” or neo-extractivist economy.

Understood in this framework, the Kirchner governments’ implementation of subsidies,
loans and other social programs in low-income neighborhoods serves to bring various informal
practices under the control of the state and capital, allowing for those energies to be more easily
harnessed and captured. For example, Gago describes how the social benefit packages serve as
form of financialization by forcing recipients to have bank accounts and distributing the benefits
through bank cards. Additionally, Gago et al. argue that the subsidies are a form of capturing
popular knowledge:

The social programs allow for the development of an intelligibility of the popular world
profoundly disrupted by the mutations that have taken place since the 1990s and the 2001
crisis. It is a way of recording and classifying the modes of life that cannot be considered
within the formal salaried world nor with the classic cannons with which the state operates.
Consequently, it was necessary for the state to incorporate into its roster many officials
coming from the movements and the social sciences. Their knowledge of their groups and
their operative, territorial, and organizational knowledge are the foundation of a new
dialogue (but also a system of exclusion). (2012).

Thus, according to those authors, “the expansion of ‘popular’ consumption would, paradoxically,
announce, an intensification in processes of capitalist exploitation of social cooperation in its
increasingly diffused and varied forms. The rhetoric of human rights, now widespread in
Argentina, would go hand and hand with the growing financialization of the popular world”
(ibid.). In other words, the growth in consumption, sustained on credit and state subsidies, points
to an increase in exploitation and dispossession, forms of extracting value from more and more
spaces and times of everyday life, that do not necessarily need to go through the wage relation.

Often the state subsidies themselves serve as a guarantee to be able to access other forms
of credit in the urban periphery. Gago and Mezzadra describe how this works in the large
informal markets outside of Buenos Aires where one of the many activities taking place at the market is offering cash loans in order to make purchases at that same market:

In the belts of the periphery of Buenos Aires, there are the financiers that are established on the same premises where sports clothes and domestic appliances are sold. Only a stairway away, they offer loans for consumption meant to be spent in that same physical space. In turn, those immediate cash loans are obtained through a very precise accreditation: the beneficiary number that one has for receiving a social benefits package or state subsidy. Such that financial extraction is organized around sectors that do not have a capacity for solvency given by the traditional labor market and that, however, on being recognized as a subsidized population, the state accredits their inscription into the banking system. Thus, the financiers literally extract value from a set of activities, forms of cooperation and obligations to labor in the future, guaranteed by the state. (2015).

These cash loans take place outside of banking regulations and are often extremely predatory in nature, preying on people that, in many cases, would not qualify for more formal loans, and who often face dire consequences from this this indebtedness. Additionally, these informal loans are often tied to the drug trade, other illegal economic activity, and diverse forms of violence.

**Diversification and Precaritization of Labor in Argentina**

To deepen our analysis of the recent transformations in work, we must look more closely at the wide range of activities engaged in by the poor and unemployed, those forms of social cooperation that took on increased importance with the increase in unemployment and were what allowed the unemployed to survive the neoliberal era and the economic crisis. When formal employment decreased during the 1990s, the poor found other ways of getting by, relying on informal work and support networks of family and friends. With the “economic recovery” under Kirchner and implementation of a neo-extractivist economic development model, unemployment rates have decreased, but the old jobs of the Fordist/Peronist period have not returned. While industries such as mining and soy production are largely mechanized and employ little direct labor, the neo-extractivist economy does engender other, often highly precarious, forms of labor. This section aims to explore the forms of labor common in the urban periphery, the multiple
ways that poor and unemployed manage to “get by” without access to formal, waged employment. The following chapter will explore how the unemployed were able to organize in this context and what alternative ideas of work they proposed.

The myriad forms of work and income-generating activities engaged in by the poor are broadly classified by a variety of terms, such as “the informal sector,” “unwaged work sector,” and the “shadow economy,” among others. Definitions of the informal sector vary and are highly contested but it can be defined in general terms as including those forms of employment and exchange that are unregulated or poorly regulated, illegal or untaxed, precarious (without formal contracts), or poorly remunerated and without legal protections. These definitions tend to look at different elements of the labor process, such as work time (part-time, temporary, unsure hours), forms of payment (“under the table”), workers' status (without a contract or legal protections), benefits (not provided by the employer), and place of work (the home, the street, etc.). The informal sector is usually defined negatively in terms of lack, in relation to “formal” employment, and its theorization has generally been used by governments, supranational bodies and NGOs to attempt to formalize those activities and bring them into the field of regulated work. In many cases this informal sector is considered “pre-capitalist” and assumed to vanish with capitalist development, yet the continued persistence and growth of the informal sector, especially in the Global South, complicates this view. A more balanced view of the economy would see that it is in fact these unwaged and “informal” activities that continue to sustain the “formal” economy and thus the persistence is quite necessary. As the IIEP (2013) has pointed out, these illegal or “under the table” activities are also necessary for the state's functioning and an important source of its revenue. Additionally, the legal “flexibilization” of labor and the generalized precaritization of work blurs the line between informal and formal work, making
clear distinctions between the two impossible and showing that formal work cannot be considered the norm even in highly developed capitalist economies.

Indeed, the majority of residents of the urban periphery have always survived through some combination of formal and informal employment, state subsidies, illegal activities, and support from family and friends. These informal and illegal activities became increasingly important in the 1990s as formal employment decreased and traditional forms of solidarity and mutual support broke down (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). In 2003, in the midst of the country's economic crisis, nearly 50% of workers in Argentina worked in the informal sector (workers not registered in Social Security according to the INDEC). Today that number has dropped somewhat, but 34% of workers still work in the informal sector. Statistics alone, however, do not account for the complexity of lived experiences of work and “getting by.”

For residents of the urban peripheries, the most common forms of paid work include domestic labor and childcare for women, construction for men, and other service sector jobs (such as retail or restaurant work). With the economic crisis, the availability of these jobs plummeted as even the middle class was forced to consume less and new construction stopped. In recent years, however, much of this work has returned with significant growth in the service sector linked to increased consumption. Today, more than 70% of those employed in Argentina work in the service sector, while less than 25% work in manufacturing. Service sector jobs are often part-time and temporary, less likely to be unionized and rarely provide benefits or enough income for an entire family. Thus, families, even if one or multiple members have formal jobs, supplement this income either through other types of informal work, welfare benefits, and self-provisioning. And, for a great many more families, these informal jobs and welfare benefits are their principle source of income. This informal work includes recycling collectors (cartoneros)
and street vendors (often, but not always, involving selling pirated products). It can also include self-employment through micro-enterprises run out of the home (e.g., kiosks selling beer and cigarettes, making food, reselling clothing, etc.) (Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social 2010). Many people “get by” through a series of odd jobs (changas), fixing things, helping out on a construction site or in someone’s kitchen, transporting something, etc. The benefits offered by different levels of the government enter complex relationships with all of these other activities as people often resell the items included in their food baskets or use the payments to buy materials to start a micro-enterprise. Since unemployment benefits are obviously not available to those with formal jobs, many people choose to work informally, without the same legal rights and protections, in order to be able to receive government benefits. Thus what we see in the urban periphery is not only the proliferation of forms of work but that multiplication often manifests itself within a single worker who is forced to work multiple, different jobs in order to support herself.

Looking at the different ways through which the poor manage to get by and survive without a wage complicates our picture of unemployment: unemployment is not a single, homogenous state describing the lack of paid employment but encompasses a multiplicity of practices. In this context, the concept of precarity is useful in order to understand predominate forms of labor on a general scale, including this blurred division between formal and informal work, as well as for understanding the consequences of all of life being put to work. Mezzadra and Neilson define labor precarity as “the movement away from 'standard' full/time, continuous working arrangements with a single employer” (2013, 90). Precarious labor lacks legal protections and guaranteed benefits and is usually unstable or temporary, and poorly remunerated. Mezzadra and Neilson continue, describing the effects of precarious labor for
social reproduction: “A growing number of precarious workers are unable to support a household, and under these circumstances, the capacity of labor to reproduce itself becomes uncertain” (ibid., 90). The concept of precarity is helpful because it does not assume a qualitative division between waged and unwaged workers but seeks to find a common ground between extremely heterogeneous forms of work. Precarity as a concept, however, is only effective when it does not assume sameness or unity, that all precarity is experienced in the same way and that all precarious workers automatically have shared interests.

Barchiesi (2012) defines precarity in terms of the “capture of living labor in the form of labor power sold for a wage,” noting that the period of “decent work” defined by the welfare state in some parts of the world was, in fact, only an anomaly within capitalist development toward the increased colonization of life itself. Barchiesi discusses the relationship between this contemporary form of precarity and employment:

Contemporary precarity has instead rather to do with the fact that capital, aided by the ‘immaterial’ circuits of global finance, reproduces and expands itself also without the direct employment of workers in traditional sites of production, where work efforts are codified, measured, and rewarded with monetary equivalents that claim a remotely plausible principle of universal, or at least industry-wide, commensuration. In a ruthless economy of poverty wages and the lifelong compulsion to fine-tune individual ‘employability’ – which takes place across quotidian social networks capital benefits from at virtually no cost – the inadequacies of ‘jobs’ are, if anything, reinforced by official discourses that praise formal employment while the common forms of life of multitudes, which is what is actually put to work, receive no wherewithal or social provisions to even satisfy basic needs. (Ibid.)

Thus, the precarity of contemporary life arises precisely from the fact that it is the daily life and activities of the (poor and unemployed) multitude that is producing value for capital. In this sense, precarity goes hand and hand with extractivism. One of the consequences of this type of precarity is that all aspects of life, not just work, become increasingly precarious, reinforcing the need for questions of reproduction to be placed at the center of struggle. It is in this sense that social movements from different parts of the world have taken up the term precarity as a political...
concept. The Italian Frassanito Network describes precarity: “as a political term it refers to living
and working conditions without any guarantees: for example the precarious residential status of
migrants and refugees, or the precariousness of everyday life for single mothers” (2005). With
this definition, precarity is about more than precarious forms of labor but describes a condition of
existence itself as the result of all of life being put to work and the continuous dispossession and
enclosure of the common. Precarity therefore is a productive concept, starting from difference,
the recognition that precarity refers to a great many areas of life besides work and that there are
many very important divisions among the precarious.

In Argentina, a discourse on precarity has become increasingly prevalent within the social
movements along with the “economic recovery.” While certain groups employed the concept of
precarity in the 1990s, the majority only referred to unemployment, meaning a decrease in
formal as well as informal jobs. The “recovery” is supposed to have created jobs and resolved the
problem of unemployment, yet, as many movements have pointed out, these new jobs are
increasingly precarious, they lack the job security of previous eras, are generally not well paid,
lacking benefits and, in many sectors, the previous workers’ organization has been destroyed
(Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social 2008). In general terms, there have been economic
gains in Argentina under the Kirchners: between 2003 and 2007, the GDP increased by an
average of 9% and unemployment dropped from 17.3% to 8.5% (Svampa and Pereyra 2009,
239). However, as described above, much of this economic growth is predicated on extractive
industries (mining and soy) that, besides having devastating environmental effects, create few
well-paying, stable jobs, relentlessly displace indigenous peoples and agricultural workers,
causing the number of urban unemployed to grow, and largely produce wealth for multinational
corporations and fuel a very uneven form of growth.
Colectivo Situaciones has researched two examples of the new precarious employment, which affect very different sectors of the population, and thus, taken together, might be emblematic of the current moment. In the first, described in ¿Quién Habla? (Quién Habla? Collective 2006), young, mostly university students are exploited for their language, conversation and technical skills in call centers serving multinational corporations. While in De chuqueistas y overlockas (Colectivo Simbiosis Cultural and Colectivo Situaciones 2011), Bolivian migrants are exploited, often entrapped in conditions approximating slavery, in clandestine textile workshops producing equally for major clothing brands and cheap knockoffs sold in the informal markets. While the differences between these forms of work and exploitation, and the different ethnic and class make-up of the workers are not to be ignored, they display important similarities. Both take advantage of a perversion of already existing forms of social cooperation: the textile sweatshops rely on the perversion of Bolivian family ties, while call centers rely on the forms of social cooperation and conviviality developed in network by a generation of young people. Neither are seen as permanent jobs or careers: young people plan to work in call centers while they are studying at the university; migrants plan to work in the sweatshops until they settle into the new city or decide to return home. Exploitation is intensive: migrant workers living in cramped conditions, forced to work over ten hours a day, and, after paying for their living expenses are left with a very small paycheck. In the call centers, workers’ salaries are not guaranteed but given in the form of “bonuses” for completing certain objectives, creating a climate of uncertainty and competition. Workers’ every word (spoken or typed) is dictated and monitored, their attitude is policed, leading to what they have called “exploitation of the soul,” which often ends in burn out, numbing exhaustion, and severe psychological problems. In neither case are traditional forms of labor organizing very effective (or even possible in the
case of the clandestine workshops).

Precarity, as described above, refers to more than just the proliferation of precarious forms of labor with Argentina's "economic recovery," but also, increasingly precarious living conditions in general, as rent is extracted from different areas of life. For example, this precarity is seen in the rampant inflation in recent years, increasing cost of living, especially in food stuffs and housing prices, that has not been matched with a comparative increase in income, and thus serves to more directly extract value from social reproduction. The multiplication of forms of debt and credit with the penetration of finance into poor neighborhoods represents another element of precarity as well. PROCELAC has documented the proliferation of different forms of credit in the low-income neighborhoods of Buenos Aires and its periphery, showing how these forms of credit serve to increase inequality and precarity by charging unsustainable interest rates, what PROCELAC characterizes as "vulnerable" forms of debt because they put the very subsistence of the indebted in jeopardy (Feldman 2013). This severe indebtedness makes all of life precarious, putting all elements of reproduction in question.

The types of precarious jobs described above are emblematic of the growth in employment that is making up Argentina's current "economic recovery": heavily outsourced jobs, usually lacking in basic labor rights (especially in the case of the textile industry). The informal sector continues to be an important source of income for the country's poor, despite government attempts to curb informal sector activity and regulate and collect taxes on this activity. On the other hand, the economic activities developed by the organized unemployed during the crisis, which provide an alternative to these highly exploitative practices, continue to play an important role. These alternative economic practices – barter networks, cooperatives and other micro-enterprises – provided a way for the poor to survive with dignity outside of the
formal labor market during the crisis, when state support could not be relied on. These practices are also the backbone of the new government jobs and assistance programs, which seek to promote cooperatives and small-scaled, self-organized enterprises. It is these informal or self-organized economic activities, along with the different government benefit programs, that account for much of the decrease in unemployment under the Kirchner administrations.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to shift the center of our analysis of contemporary labor practices to recognize the productivity and importance of the unemployed. In order to do this, it has attempted to bring together two streams of thought: first, analyses of global transformations in production under the regime of post-Fordism that point to the extraction of surplus from all areas of life, and second, arguments about the importance of unwaged work, and especially unwaged reproductive labor, to the historical development of capitalism. Together these two lines of analysis show that unwaged work continues to be essential to capitalist reproduction and expansion and shows that more and more of life's activities can be counted as unwaged work in this scenario. Thus, I would like to argue, along with others, that Argentina's economic recovery is largely based on the creativity and energies of those who are not formally unemployed and especially the organized efforts of the unemployed to survive in the midst of an economic and political crisis.

It was out of the post-Fordist, neoliberal context described in the beginning of the chapter that the movements of the unemployed first emerged, as a direct reaction to these conditions and experimenting with new forms of political organization corresponding to these economic and political transformations. These movements attempted to organize the heterogeneous population of the unemployed, under-employed, precarious and informal workers in the urban periphery and
other low-income areas of the country. The following chapter will explore this composition of the movements and how the ways through which they have been able to organize such a diverse group of the unemployed.
Chapter 3: Recomposition – Organizing the Unemployed and Precarious

In the previous chapter, I examined shifts in the organization of production and forms of value extraction in the contemporary period, marked by the neo-extractive model, which attempts to capture values from all areas of life. Labor, therefore, is not primarily defined by waged labor in an official workplace, but takes on diverse forms across a range of spaces. Given these profound transformations in the world of work, it follows that working class political organization will also have to adopt new forms in order to be effective. In Argentina, the unemployed workers’ movements arose precisely to meet this need. Zibechi argues that because the piquetero movement brings together the very diverse segments of the unemployed and constructs a new collective identity, it should be understood in terms of the process of the formation of a new working class (2003, 131). He highlights two ways in which the piqueteros are different from the old working class: they will not submit to going back to work for a boss and they refuse to take up previous forms of organization. This chapter aims to explore the piquetero movement in these terms, as the construction of a new working class.

First, I will briefly address the limitations of the previously dominant forms of working class organization in Argentina and their relationship with the unemployed. Next, I describe the emergence of the piquetero movement in Argentina as a whole, with specific emphasis on the two organizations with which I worked. I explore the composition of these movements, focusing on the participation of women, youth, and migrants. I also examine how the MTDs organize in
relation to the heterogenization and multiplication of labor and different experiences and expectations of work, and how they challenge distinctions between waged and unwaged work, formal and informal labor, productive and reproductive labor. I look at how the MTDs are able to bring together different types of workers and unemployed people, the construction of a new collective identity and new subjectivities around the figure of the *piquetero*. Next, I examine the demands that different organizations of the unemployed make in relation to work, including the demand for unemployment benefits from the state, and demands for genuine work and work with dignity, looking at what the demands can tell us about different analyses and desires related to work. Finally, I explore how the MTDs challenge the “culture of work” or work ethic in Argentina and thus lay the groundwork for building a society beyond work.

**Limits to Traditional Modes of Organizing**

Despite high levels of unemployment and increasing poverty during the 1990s, the trade unions and Leftist political parties continued to ignore the plight of the unemployed. The official, Peronist labor union, the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT) not only abandoned the unemployed but blamed them for the country's economic problems. The more independent union *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA)7 and Leftist political parties, on the other hand, initially ignored the unemployed and later attempted to co-opt their struggles and bring the unemployed into their ranks (Oviedo 2004). Drawing on orthodox interpretations of Marx, analyzed in the previous chapter, labor unions did not seek to organize the unemployed, considering that their own role in the working class struggle would be to support the waged workers, the privileged subjects of class struggle, or to get a job and become that privileged

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7 The CTA formed in 1991 when a number of unions split from the CGT in opposition to the CGT's support of Menem and his neoliberal reforms. As a whole, the CTA is considerably more combative and democratic than the CGT and includes some groups of the unemployed within its ranks (Zibechi 2003).
subject. More often than that, the unemployed were considered reactionary and a danger to working class organization with the argument that their very existence drives down wages for the employed and is used to discipline those holding jobs (Flores 2005). Additionally, the “flexibilization” of work and changes to labor law made traditional forms of workplace organizing more difficult as workers were less likely to stay in the same job for long periods of time and were more likely to face repercussions for on-the-job organizing (Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social 2008). As unemployment began rising in the second half of the 1990s, the fear of losing one's job became pervasive, leading to a climate where unions were more likely to work to maintain the status quo than push for more profound changes (Auyero 2003).

The traditional vehicles of working class organization and representation therefore failed to recognize the importance of the unemployed as a valid separate category and, in many cases, impeded the unemployed's efforts of self-organization. Toty Flores, of the MTD La Matanza, recounts arguments over identifying as and organizing specifically around issues of unemployment:

Back in '95, when the irruption of the unemployed was a conjunctural question for many organizations and when it still wasn't perceived as an important problem, claiming to build with the unemployed was almost a heresy that negated the perspective of developing the possibilities for change starting from the working class. For these organizations, recognizing us as unemployed was part of extremely hard debates and never ending discussions (2005, 16).

Flores continues to describe how labor unions expected the unemployed to mobilize “to support workers” but never around their own interests. The CTA, was quicker to catch on to the importance of the unemployed in the conjuncture, and attempted to organize a union of unemployed workers. Yet, because it maintained the internally hierarchical model of union organizing, and was seen as a form of organization coming from outside of the experiences of the
unemployed themselves, it was largely unsuccessful (Flores 2005, 19). Because the labor unions and other Leftist organizations considered unemployment a temporary condition, they did not see the value in organizing around unemployment itself. In part this was because of an erroneous reading of the situation: they saw unemployment as merely conjunctural, caused by technological advances and thus temporarily necessary for progress, but assumed that the problem of unemployment would resolve itself in time. Yet this erroneous reading is symptomatic of deeper problems of the perspective of traditional labor unions. They did not want to support anything that would call into question the centrality of the working class, very narrowly defined, or their status as the primary representative body of the working class.

Party politics in Argentina is traditionally characterized by the dominance of the system of clientelism or patronage, where in return for investment and sometimes direct subsidies from a political party, beneficiaries are not only expected to vote for the party, but also donate their time to organizing for the party. While this clientelism is usually exclusively associated with the Partido Justicialista (PJ), the Peronist political party, Javier Auyero shows that all major political parties operate this way and that the benefits they distribute serve as an important source of income for the poor (2001). When factories began closing in the 1980s and 1990s, the political parties’ territorial networks were strengthened as they were often the only access to income for the poor, intensifying patronage practices. Mazzeo understands this clientelism as a biopolitical strategy, through which capital and the state exercise control over the life force and subjectivity of the worker (2004, 30). Much of the urban periphery, especially La Matanza, remains strongly Peronist, making it difficult for other forms of political organization to organize effectively within the territory (Flores 2005; Monteagudo 2011).

The commitment to the Peronist party was so strong that many working class
organizations and labor unions, including the CGT, supported Carlos Menem for most of his presidency, despite his implementation of neoliberal austerity measures harmful to the poor and working class, because of his affiliation with the Partido Justicialista. Menem demonstrated the limits of Peronist party organization and Peronism's ability and tendency to incorporate right-wing elements (Rozitchner 2009). Therefore, as Menem's disregard for the working-class became ever more apparent, people began to look for alternatives modes of resistance outside of the trade union and Peronist Party structures (Zibechi 2003). It was in this political context that the unemployed would start organizing independently in different parts of the country in 1996.

**Emergence and Composition of the Organizations of the Unemployed**

As the unemployed who were determined to organize around their own situations and demands found no place to do so in the labor unions or political parties, they began mobilizing in different parts of the country explicitly as movements of the unemployed. These movements often started as spontaneous protests or gatherings of neighbors, acting in response to the shock of recent job loss, cuts to social services, and rising inflation, which made the costs of reproduction unbearably high. The protests and subsequent organizations would take on different forms in different places, corresponding to the specific composition and experiences of the unemployed in those sites. Zibechi compares these movements to the traditional labor movement, which took the spaces and rhythms of the factory and the state as their models, while new movements:

consist of sectors of the population who have been physically expelled to the margins and who, therefore, are not included [in these older institutions]. As a result, they are organizing themselves in ways that do not differ much from forms that are practiced in everyday life (for example, from how the women organize themselves in the markets or neighborhoods). The tendency, at least until progressive governments appear with their social programs, is to bring the ways and means of everyday life directly into the realm of political-social organization. You can see organizational meetings with styles similar to the meetings of young people or women in their neighborhoods, which are non-Taylorist, unordered, and
In other words, movements of the unemployed adopted different tactics and forms of internal organization than the traditional labor movement due to their different composition and rootedness in the spaces of everyday life.

The first roadblocks organized by the unemployed took place in the town of Cutral-Có in 1996, in the province of Neuquén, when nearly 5,000 workers lost their jobs as the result of the privatization of the state-run oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF). Thousands of laid off workers and their families blockaded State Highway 22 for a week demanding that the state tackle the question of unemployment and eventually won increased unemployment benefits from the provincial government (Auyero 2003). Soon the tactic of the roadblock spread across the country to other cities and towns affected by privatization and deindustrialization. While the specific circumstances were different in each town, there are important similarities: in most cases, the central protagonists were workers who had been laid off from seemingly stable jobs and generally had experience with trade union organizing. Youth, even if they had not started to work, likewise had the expectation of stable employment. Existing social ties in small towns led many community members to participate in the roadblocks, even if they were not directly affected by downsizing, thus the protests became community affairs, uniting whole towns against the provincial and national governments and private companies (Svampa and Pereyra 2009).

On the other hand, the movements of the unemployed that formed in Buenos Aires’s urban periphery later in 1996 were influenced by this history of roadblocks in the countryside, as well as by urban struggles over land and experiences of neighborhood organizing. Additionally, the struggles in Greater Buenos Aires were responding to a different set of problematics than in the interior of the country. While many participants were former factory workers of Buenos
Aires' "industrial belt," who were protesting in response to having lost their jobs, there were also other demands and interests at stake. Affordable housing was a central problem, especially in areas with a predominance of informal shantytown housing. Another important issue was access to public utilities and services, as many of these settlements did not have running water, electricity or gas, or sufficient public transportation. These concerns went well beyond the question of employment or work, to include basic questions of living and social reproduction, and thus involved all of the community, regardless of their relationship to formal employment (Svampa and Pereyra 2009).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the contemporary multiplication of labor refers to heterogeneity in forms of labor, types of workers, and regulation of work (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). This diversity has created difficulties for traditional forms of labor organization concerned with unity and privileging a certain type of worker (e.g., the mass industrial worker). The urban periphery is an important site of this multiplication of labor where people engage in numerous types of work, in terms of the content of activities, their legal classifications, and forms of compensation. The urban periphery is also home to an extremely heterogeneous population in general with very different experiences of work, from those with former experience as full-time factory workers to those having no experience at all with formally contracted waged labor. The specific characteristics vary greatly throughout the different counties or even neighborhoods of Greater Buenos Aires. In other words, there is no one figure that is paradigmatic of the unemployed resident of the urban periphery. In their most successful cases, the MTDs were able to use this diversity to their advantage, bringing together diverse segments of the population and people with different experiences and skills in order to create new, innovative projects.

La Matanza is the largest and most populated county in the province of Buenos Aires,
with a population of approximately 1,800,000 people (INDEC 2010). It was an important industrial center during much of the 20th Century, with a number of large metal, automobile and textile factories and also a site of relatively cheap housing. It therefore features a mixture of working-class neighborhoods and poorer, informal settlements known as villas8. Perón's administration invested heavily in a manner of ways in areas of La Matanza, constructing schools, libraries, and hospitals (and Ciudad Evita – a neighborhood constructed in the shape of Eva Perón's profile), giving the Peronist party a strong base in the county, dominated by clientelist networks. In the 1980s and '90s, La Matanza was heavily affected by deindustrialization as many factories shut down and workers lost their jobs, leading to some of the highest unemployment rates in the country (Isman 2004). During this time, the clientelist networks became even more important as many of the poor and unemployed began to rely on them for their income and even food was distributed through these networks (Auyero 2001). Therefore, the unemployed workers' movements often found themselves in direct competition and conflict with these clientelist networks.

The MTD La Matanza began in 1996 when residents of different neighborhoods of La Matanza came together to protest the increase in electricity prices that left many of them unable to afford to light their homes. Soon they identified other shared problems: the lack of a sewage system and potable water, few educational opportunities, inadequate public transportation, and, above all, unemployment. Identifying unemployment as the cause of many of their shared problems led this group of neighbors to focus their demands and struggles around the question of employment. The MTD La Matanza was not the only organization of the unemployed to emerge

8 Villas de miseria (literally “misery villages”) is the name given to precarious, dense, shantytown-style housing settlements in Argentina. In the Buenos Aires region, there are twenty recognized villas within the Buenos Aires city limits and dozens more dispersed throughout the urban periphery.
in La Matanza: two of the largest organizations of the unemployed – the *Corriente Clasista Combativa* (Combative Classist Current, CCC) with a Maoist orientation and the *Federación Tierra y Vivienda* (Land and Housing Federation, FTV), linked to the CTA, – are also based in La Matanza. While the MTD La Matanza initially participated in events organized by these other organizations, eventually the CCC and FTV's hierarchical structure and links to political parties and trade unions caused the MTD La Matanza to part ways with them (Flores 2005). Therefore, while the CCC and FTV organized more as traditional labor unions and mostly made up of men, the MTD La Matanza is considerably more diverse, including more women and youth, and more horizontally organized.

The counties to the South of Buenos Aires where the MTD Solano is based, on the other hand, have much less of an industrial history. Florencio Varela, on the southern edge of Greater Buenos Aires, is less urbanized and more agricultural than some of the other low-income areas of the periphery. Quilmes, just north of Varela, has more of an industrial past, but the neighborhood of Solano, from which the MTD gets its name, is located in a less industrialized part of the county, with many unpaved streets and much informal housing. Recently these counties have been the landing ground for migrants from Argentina's interior and neighboring countries, especially Paraguay. In the 1980s, these areas were the sites of important struggles for land by these migrants who occupied and formed settlements on large tracts of unused land. These struggles over land and consequent struggles to secure basic services in the settlements served as the starting point for many of the movements of the unemployed in this region of the urban periphery, including the MTD Solano. The group that would eventually form the MTD has its foundation in grassroots liberation theology: a few priests and community leaders started organizing assemblies of neighbors in Church buildings in the early 1990s that soon began to
focus on the question of unemployment, recognizing it as one of the central problems in the neighborhood. Eventually these assemblies of the unemployed would enter into conflict with the Bishop and the priests organizing them were excommunicated. After breaking ties with the Church, these assemblies became the MTD Solano in 1996 (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002).

**Women's Participation in the MTDs**

The organizations of the unemployed in general, and especially the MTDs, have always been marked by high levels of women's participation. In the urban peripheries, women were the first to organize and were primarily concerned with issues relating to social reproduction, because they were the first to lose employment and were the most affected by structural adjustment policies that cut public spending on social services. Women were at the forefront of the movement because it was their responsibilities of caring that were in crisis and because their ways of relating to one another and working collectively would be the seeds of the solution to the crisis. Women were less likely to be represented by labor unions, but had developed other, less formal, ways of supporting each other – networks for exchanging goods and caring for each other – that greatly impacted the form of organization adopted by the movements of the unemployed.

Meanwhile, many men were left feeling shocked and uprooted by losing what they had considered to be life-time employment, upon which they based much of their identity, friendships, and militancy. Svampa and Pereyra (2009) describe a crisis in masculinity brought about by cultural shifts but also rising levels of male unemployment in the 1990s that separated men from the work that was a crucial element of their identity and social ties. Many unemployed men were initially unwilling to organize, feeling shame, guilt, and impotency after losing their
jobs (Auyero 2003). One woman, an early member of the MTD La Matanza and now participant in Yo Sí Puedo, describes how many responded to being laid off: “the men were embarrassed, they didn't want anyone to know they were not working, so they would stay inside all day, many started drinking. […] Meanwhile, us women had to go on providing for our families, we had to eat, we didn't have time to go about being embarrassed or worrying about our pride […] that's why we came together and started organizing” (Interview, Nov. 11, 2011, La Matanza). This initial organizing was aimed at meeting the basic needs of participants and other neighborhood residents, through collective meals and other forms of mutual aid and support, recognizing that those needs would either be met collectively or not at all.

Highlighting reproductive and care work allows us to better understand the impetus behind the mobilizations of the unemployed in the urban periphery. In these neighborhoods, always characterized by high levels of informal work, residents were not originally protesting about the loss of jobs but rather about the cuts to the social wage and the increasing costs of reproduction. Like the MTD La Matanza, many other urban piquetero organizations began as groups of neighbors organizing around rising electricity and food prices in their neighborhoods (Flores 2005; Svampa and Pereyra 2009). This marks an important difference from the piquetero organizations in the countryside that were made up of workers who had been laid off from one site of employment and thus, from the beginning, organized explicitly around the question of employment and access to jobs. The first gatherings of neighbors in the urban periphery, on the other hand, met, not to complain about unemployment, but to collectively provide for the needs of the community, needs that the state no longer provided for and that individual families were often not able to meet. Women began organizing ollas populares, communal meals where everyone contributed what they could and ate what they needed. These meals took place in
public spaces, plazas or street corners, bringing the issue of hunger into the public eye, and sometimes were confrontational, blocking streets or local government buildings. Therefore, since their inception, the urban piquetero groups organized around questions of reproduction.

Having come together initially around a crisis in reproduction, the MTDs have always been committed to creating alternative forms of reproduction and care and have focused much of their work on questions of education, health care, housing, and food sovereignty. An important part of their struggle revolves around fighting for reproductive labor to be recognized and securing remuneration for it, as well as creating more sustainable and community-controlled forms of social reproduction. For example, the first project that the MTD La Matanza initiated upon occupying their social center in 2001 was a preschool for neighborhood residents and they have subsequently worked to ensure a living wage for the women working in the school. Working with children forced them to recognize the importance of questions of the everyday: having food at events, providing space and activities for children, creating forms of emotionally sustainable activism to avoid activist burnout. This dedication is shared by the activists in the Yo Sí Puedo school who fight to have women's labor remunerated and place a central importance to issues of care in their neighborhood organizing.

The MTD Solano has also always focused on issues of reproduction and care, including a community, operating a collective garden, a health clinic, and a housing cooperative. These activities are oriented toward autonomously meeting the needs of the organization's members and neighborhood residents, without relying on the market. For example, in the community garden, workers are paid through one of the government jobs programs, and the produce from the farm is distributed amongst movement members or eaten at collective meals. The movement also operates a health clinic that provides free, alternative forms of medicine to neighborhood
residents and in 2013 started a small housing cooperative to allow families to have secure and stable places to live. How these projects function and are organized will be explored in more detail in the following chapters, but here it is important to note that these are projects aiming to directly intervene in reproduction, recognizing it as the central battleground for contemporary struggles. The labor involved in these practices is recognized and highly valued by the organization and they fight to have the work remunerated either through state subsidies or other means.

Despite the high levels of women's participation in these movements, Svampa and Pereyra consider this participation to be of an ambiguous nature, as they are often not accompanied by an equal amount of leadership roles and women's participation often centered around their presumed natural role of caregivers. Thus, women play essential roles in the organizations of the unemployed, but these roles often revolve around questions of the day-to-day logistical organizing, administrative tasks and the relational and psychological work that keeps movements together. Svampa and Pereyra characterize women's participation as “the vehicle for the needs of others” (2009, 166), rather than organizing around their own needs.

Bottaro (2010) complicates this picture, with her ethnographic study of three different organizations working with the unemployed in the urban periphery, showing how the different compositions and internal structures of each organization are related to different gendered divisions of labor within the organizations, as well as different valuations of that labor. In a philanthropic organization affiliated with the Catholic Church, made up of women from different class backgrounds and organized hierarchically, the lower class women are usually responsible for the most “feminized” labor, including that of cooking, cleaning and childcare, while the wealthier women are responsible for administrative tasks and decision-making. However, in
another organization, a more grassroots community organization, made up exclusively of low-income women and organized according to more horizontal principles, this feminized care work was more evenly spread throughout the organization, and also more valued as being “useful to the community.”

It is true that women's participation is often centered around care roles in these MTDs, but rather than assuming this role is natural and taking it for granted, the MTDs consciously value and prioritize this work. Additionally, this does not mean that women are excluded from decision-making structures, but rather are central to all parts of the organizations and that questions of collective care and creating sustainable movements are placed at the center of all discussions. In the MTD La Matanza, the textile cooperative started by only offering positions to women and later hired a few men, while the bakery hired mainly men. Additionally, the work of cleaning was usually carried out by women but the cooking was handled by women and men. Most of the administrative tasks and educational activities were carried out by women but men and women participated equally in decision-making processes. When YSP split from the MTD La Matanza, to focus on education, the educational and administrative tasks, as well as decision-making were fairly evenly shared by men and women. However, those responsible for cleaning were usually women receiving social plans. In the MTD Solano, there seemed to be a fairly even gendered distribution of both labor and decision-making across the organization and its different activities.

**Youth Participation**

Youth participation was also of vital importance to the MTDs, forming a significant part of their make-up and greatly influencing their organizing strategies and tactics. Young people coming of age during the neoliberal 1990s and 2001 crisis saw little hope for obtaining stable,
formal jobs; they were much more likely to engage in a series of odd jobs or part-time, temporary work. This was true of youth from different class backgrounds as unemployment cut across the whole spectrum of society in the early 2000s and middle class families lost their savings due to currency devaluations. Unemployed youth, especially in poor areas of the city, often exist completely outside of the formal labor market: in 2004, 60% of unemployed youth in La Matanza had never held a job and 35% had been out of work for over a year (Pérez 2010, 102). When they do find jobs, they tend to be “precarious, poorly paid, with long work hours, piecework, without benefits, etc.” (ibid., 107). These youth were not interested in developing careers and even when they did find jobs, were less likely to identify with them, having a “purely instrumental” relationship with employment (ibid., 113).

Most young people did not have experiences in traditional forms of political or collective organization (which had been dismantled during the dictatorship), considered most existing forms to be corrupt, and were more likely to draw on experiences at rock concerts or soccer games. Of particular importance to the movements of the unemployed in the urban periphery is the neighborhood rock (known as rock barrial or rock chabón): “a rock movement was beating in the neighborhoods, a stirring that tried, as it could, to make rock a form of life, a route of escape, of support, and of creation” (Colectivo Juguetes Perdidos 2011, 39). Much of the social life of youth in peripheral neighborhoods is organized around these local rock bands: “The rock group is important for convening the youth of the neighborhood, who also participate in the planning, organizing the band's support: painting banners, preparing the trips so that each time the band goes out to perform they feel supported from below, that is, taking responsibility for the band's mística” (ibid., 40). Therefore, through following rock bands, young people developed alternative forms of sociability, networks and forms of action from below; they learned to resist
authority and fight/escape the police, while creating their own forms of organization in order to put on shows, manage underground venues, and organize trips. This neighborhood rock movement marked an entire generation in the urban peripheries, many of whom would end up joining the movements of the unemployed. Their knowledges and practices of resisting the police would become an important element of the destituent force of the movements in 2001.

Youth are an important component of the MTD Solano: a large number of neighborhood youth, many Paraguayan migrants and children of migrants, participate in the MTD's activities. The MTD puts a considerable amount of effort into organizing activities specifically geared toward youth, such as music and dance lessons, martial arts, etc. These youth also participate in the MTDs' other activities, such as the community garden and building the houses for the housing cooperative. The MTD La Matanza also started with significant youth participation, including many unemployed teenagers who were some of the most militant participants in the early roadblocks, as well as organizing the educational activities in the movement's social center. However, many of the young people left the organization to found the YSP school after the MTD decided to align itself with a political party, a process that many of the youth felt alienated from. YSP, on the other hand, maintains a commitment to the youth culture and ways of organizing already present in the neighborhood. YSP regularly organizes buses to take neighborhood youth to rock concerts in the city center and hosts band practices in the school building on weekends.

The youth element is one of the factors that distinguishes the different organizations of the unemployed from one another, as those with greater active youth participation are more likely to be organized in non-hierarchical and democratic ways, while organizations with more older participants tend to replicate the trade union model of organization. Although the PJ – had traditionally counted with a strong youth presence, youth during the 1990s were much more
likely to join these autonomist, horizontal organizations, citing the corruption and politics as usual practiced by the PJ under Menem. Today, youth continue to be an important force in the MTDs and other movements of the unemployed, especially pushing for more horizontal forms of organization and a post-work ethics, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Migrant Participation**

The third important, but often overlooked, element making up these movements are migrants. In the 1980s and '90s, Buenos Aires's urban periphery experienced a new wave of migration: as workers lost their jobs in the interior of the country (especially after the state oil company was privatized and laid off thousands of workers) and peasants and indigenous people lost their land due to the mechanization and consolidation of agriculture, many moved to Buenos Aires in search of work, usually settling in the periphery or the city's villas. Meanwhile, gentrification forced laid off workers in the capital city out of downtown and into the urban periphery (Grimson 2009), while neoliberal restructuring in neighboring countries, especially Paraguay and Bolivia, caused many people to migrate to Buenos Aires in search of new opportunities. Some migrate or settle in groups and are more likely to maintain their own customs and knowledges, which have been useful political tools, especially in mobilizations to take over land and create housing settlements, as in the case of the MTD Solano. Yet, many others become isolated upon moving so far away from their homes and communities leading to a sense of social fragmentation and loss of communal ties. For this reason, migrants have been some of the most active participants in the MTDs, finding in them a space to create new networks of support and mutual aid.

Racism and ethnic prejudices cannot be underestimated, both within the movements and in society in general affecting the way these movements are perceived by the public. (For
example, the right wing press often publishes stories equating the piquetero movement with “brown” or indigenous people, Bolivians or Paraguayans, in other words *foreigners* who are here to steal benefits and resources from hard-working Argentines. While the MTDs have generally not focused explicitly on organizing around migrant rights, they are, in a way, the closest thing to a migrants' rights movement in the country. The MTDs organize legal aid for migrants, helping them obtain the papers and documentation they need in order to be able to access public benefits and services in Argentina (for example, in Argentina education and health care are free to migrants from bordering countries but do require certain documentation). Both the MTD La Matanza and the MTD Solano partnered with local radical legal groups to provide free legal aid to migrants at their movement spaces and opened up all of their activities to migrants regardless of nationality. Additionally, many of the key organizers from the MTD Solano are migrants from Paraguay, while many members of the MTD La Matanza are migrants from the interior of Argentina. Unlike the more cultural organizations that bring together people of one ethnicity to celebrate a particular cultural heritage, the MTDs have effectively been able to bring together migrants from different countries and ethnicities with native Argentinians. The migrants' practices of land takeovers and autonomous organizing in those settlements has been an essential part of the MTDs' own organizing strategies.

**Experiences and Expectations of (Un)Employment**

Additionally, the movements of the unemployed bring together very different experiences of unemployment: those who experienced full employment or realistically had the expectation of full employment, and those who did not, but always lived off precarious, part-time, temporary, etc. employment. Most organizations include people with each of those experiences but in different geographic regions and in differently ideologically-orientated organizations different
experiences dominate or are privileged. In the oil towns of the interior of the country, the experience of full employment clearly dominated and even youth had the expectation of one day having full employment. These shared experiences and expectations of work, as well as more socially cohesive communities centered around the oil refineries, provided the conditions for the unemployed to begin organizing in these towns. In the urban regions this was more complicated as different urban areas were more industrialized than others and different waves of deindustrialization hit at different times. Additionally, as mentioned above, many of the residents of these neighborhoods are recent migrants (from neighboring countries, the interior of Argentina, or other neighborhoods of the city), and lack the social cohesion of the rural regions.

Because of La Matanza’s history of industrialization, many of the men who joined the piquetero movement in La Matanza had had the experience of being laid off of factory work. The largest movement of the unemployed in La Matanza – the CCC – is made up almost entirely of former industrial workers and is organized much in the same manner as a trade union, but of unemployed people (Isman 2004). The MTD La Matanza, however, was formed of a more heterogeneous group of people, including some men with experience working in the factories, along with other neighborhood residents, mostly women, youth and the long-term unemployed. The MTD Solano, on the other hand, is made up largely of people who never had the experience or the expectation of full employment, leading to a very different orientation toward work.

The MTDs have demonstrated that identity no longer revolves exclusively around work, neither a specific job or even a profession. Unlike the image of the life-long factory worker under Peron, it is common for people, especially women, youth and migrants, to have worked at a variety of jobs, both private and in state-funded projects, often for short periods of time and never fully identifying with them. One young man in his twenties, living in La Matanza,
recounted to me that he had worked in a family member's kiosk, and doing carpentry/repairs, as well as a series of other odd jobs. Another that he had worked cutting hair, as an electrician and in a textile cooperative. Currently he was taking courses to become a computer technician (Interviews, Apr. 19, 2012, La Matanza). Women's experiences were often much more limited, often confined to domestic work or other low-paying service industries, generally without formal contracts. None of these people identified with any of the previous forms of employment, nobody said “I am a carpenter,” “I am a hairdresser,” “I am a housekeeper.” When asked about their work, most people I spoke to would respond with some form of “I do what I have to do to get by,” and would most often identify with the social or political organization in which they participated. Therefore, the urban unemployed do not organized according to “sectors” or past employers, or in any way that relates to jobs they once held or might one day hope to pursue. Most people, especially young people, but increasingly people of all ages, did knot identify with the work they performed, nor think in terms of a career or profession. These different experiences and expectations of employment correspond with different desires in relation to employment: unlike those trained and disciplined by factory work, women and young people would often talk of a desire to have a life beyond work, more time for their family or friends.

**Constructing a Collective Identity**

Since the piquetero groups do not start from a shared identity of a *worker* or experience of work, they have had to find other ways of bringing together the diverse population of the unemployed in a common struggle. One of the main tasks of the MTDs has been to find shared experiences and desires and construct a collective identity that could serve as the basis for building a movement. One essential part of creating a collective identity was overturning the negative conception of unemployment, challenging notions of individual guilt and failure, and
emphasizing the productive capacities of the unemployed. Besides changing conceptions of the unemployed, the movements of the unemployed also united around the positive identity of the *piquetero*, a collective identity formed in struggle that emphasizes the power of the unemployed as active agents of social change.

Colectivo Situaciones, in conversation with the MTD Solano, discusses the identity of the unemployed:

One could suppose that a movement of unemployed workers wouldn't be that different from any other group of unemployed peopled because the identity comes given immediately from the fact of all being unemployed. This is how, at least a certain, sociological discourse acts for which the 'unemployed' is 'one who looks for work.' And there, in that common property – that lack – the unemployed would find their identity. But if it has to do with, as you all say, 'struggling to not go back to being an exploited worker,' with 'changing labor relations,' then things are radically transformed. The problem of identity turns out to be much more complex. For which there are different ways of understanding what an unemployed person is. (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002, 68–69).

Colectivo Situaciones highlights the tension between those that continue to view the unemployed in terms of lack as opposed to those who seek an identity that goes beyond one's relation to wage labor. Their claim is that the MTDs, unlike many labor unions and other leftist organizations, are able to understand the unemployed not as victims, not in terms of lacking or needing a job, but rather as something else entirely. That something else is based on the struggle to produce in new and different ways, to create non-exploitative labor relations and ultimately to live without depending on capital. The MTD Solano continues the conversation:

The apparent contradiction implied in talking about unemployed workers is false. Because it would seem that an unemployed person cannot be a worker precisely because s/he lacks a job: but we are speaking about the worker (*trabajador*) in another sense, a deeper sense, and not simply the laborer (*obrero*). (Ibid., 70).

They go on to say that therefore their organization is not just for “the unemployed” in a technical sense, but rather for all of those who want share similar values and a commitment to creating non-exploitative forms of work and of life.
The term piquetero was first used as a derogatory term by the press to describe the unemployed blocking roads in Neuquen in 1996, in an attempt to cast them as disruptive, non-productive members of society (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). It was, however, soon picked up by the movements themselves who began to construct a positive identity around the name *piquetero* in opposition to the negative connotations of the unemployed. The term *piquetero* is an identity formed in struggle, an active rather than passive identity that signifies someone willing to fight for their needs rather than wait for the state or the market to resolve their problems. Piquetero is also a collective identity, produced through struggling in common and in this sense represents an overcoming of the individualistic subjectivity characteristic of neoliberalism.

Svampa and Pereyra give great importance to the emergence of a common "piquetero identity," which is shared by the different organizations of the unemployed despite other political and tactical differences. They identify four common elements of this identity: 1) the use of the roadblock as tactic and methodology of direct action, 2) the use of direct democracy and the assembly, 3) strong references to the *puebladas*\(^9\) as the insurrectional horizon, and 4) the model of territorial intervention based on the of the demand for the social plans and community work and *autogestión* (2009, 154). They also point out that heterogeneity and fragmentation have been present in the piquetero movement since its beginning, as it includes different ideological and political tradition, with different diagnostics and analyses of the contemporary moment. In terms of practice, the forms of direct democracy practiced by different groups are often very different, as are the way the plans are used to further organizations' territorial work. However, it is true that

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\(^9\) *Puebladas* refer to a series of popular uprisings in opposition to neoliberal austerity measures that occurred in small towns and cities across Argentina in the 1990s starting with the Santiagueñazo in the province of Santiago del Estero in 1993 and continuing with the uprisings of Cutral-Co and Plaza Huincul in 1996, and Tartagal, General Mosconi and the Jujeñazo in 1997 (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). See Auyero (2003) for an ethnographic account of these uprisings.
for a while at least the piquetero identity was a common element amongst all these organizations and was able to bring together different piquetero groups in national days of action and a number of national piquetero congresses and assemblies.

Zibechi describes the shift from identifying as “unemployed” to “piqueteros” as a moment of change in movement members’ subjectivity. Participants go from seeing themselves as helpless victims of global capitalism, solely defined by their lack of employment, to identifying as active agents of social change, with the capacity to produce their own ways of life: “Unlike the vocabulary of 'unemployed,' that refers to something negative, passive and that is defined in relation to others, those who have work, that of 'piqueteros' emphasizes the active, the positive, the self-construction of a new image and reality” (2003, 143). In this way, identifying as piqueteros, allowed these unemployed activists to go beyond definitions based on lack, which assumes waged labor as the norm, and rather to highlight the productive capacity of the unwaged. Colectivo Situaciones also highlights the importance of the piquetero identity as opposed to the unemployed:

The name piquetero expresses something different. Piqueteros tells us about a subjective operation. It is not a synonym for unemployed. The unemployed is a subject determined by need, defined by a lack. The piquetero is someone conditioned by need, but not determined by it. The difference is a major one: the piquetero has managed to produce a subjective operation on a socially precarious background. She cannot deny her condition, but neither does she submit herself to it. And in this subjectifying act she appropriates her possibilities of action. (2012, 104).

Thus, identifying as piqueteros means going beyond the objective conditions of their existence to recognizing themselves as active agents, a fundamental subjective shift.

Mazzeo argues that the piquetero identity “carries a recognition that the unemployed exceeds the relations of production, is 'something' outside of them” (2004, 32). Thus, while the identification of “unemployed” means subordinating one's identity to the capital-labor relation,
an identity of lack defined by the lack of waged employment, the piquetero identity “has been constructed outside of the interiority of the capital-labor relation but also outside of the frustration of remaining on its margin” (ibid.). For Mazzeo, the piquetero identity is one that corresponds to the proliferation of spaces and relations of class antagonism, going beyond production to include the terrain of reproduction and as well as the terrain of subjectivity: “it questions exploitation, cultural domination, the degradation of nature; it rebels against the lack of recognition and respect, against political representation and against the varied forms of symbolic injustice” (ibid., 33). Mazzeo argues that, therefore, the piqueteros form a class for themselves in the sense that Marx used the term, a class defined by its own interests rather than solely in relation to the means of production.

**Challenging Divisions, Finding Commonalities**

A key element to establishing this collective identity has been challenging the assumed natural distinctions of different types and classifications of labor, including waged-unwaged, formal-informal, productive-reproductive divisions. Different piquetero groups understand and manage these differences in different ways. Some piquetero organizations have formed official alliances or even joined larger organizations made up of mostly waged workers. While organizations of the unemployed generally maintain some autonomy in these relationships, the interests of the unemployed often get pushed behind the concerns of waged workers (Oviedo 2004). These organizations still prioritize the figure of the formal wage worker over forms of work. Other organizations, however, actively challenge this distinction between waged and unwaged workers, recognizing that those categories themselves are not predetermined or stable but are constantly in flux and being struggled over. For example, the *Frente Popular Darío Santillán* (FPDS), primarily made up of MTDs from across the country, includes a section of
waged workers among the other groups that make up the FPDS. For the most part, they organize around their own demands and hold their own actions separately from the groups of unemployed that participate in the FPDS. However, they do recognize the common cause, the key structural relationship between employed and unemployed and attempt to confront those divisions by working together (Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social 2008).

The smaller MTDs have less formal divisions between different types workers in their organizations, seeking to integrate them as naturally as possible. These organizations include people that are at times engaged in different forms of waged work and, more often than not, in unwaged work. Since they are not primarily based on the distribution of unemployment benefits, members are not forced to or encouraged to leave when they no longer qualify for those benefits. Since the MTDs do not base their activities and events around the demand for more jobs, there is no reason for people to stop participating once they become employed. These MTDs recognize the heterogeneity of work, that different people engage in different types of labor and different moments, that these are at best temporal categories, not permanent identity markers. In thinking about work, the MTDs do not make a distinction between formal or informal work. Graciela, from YSP, described the pros and cons of working legally without making a moral judgment: “working formally you have access to better health services and a pension, but if you work under the table you can continue receiving the social plans, increasing your immediate income, and you have more control over who you work for and when” (Interview, Sept. 23, 2011, La Matanza). Many young people also prefer the flexibility offered by more precarious forms of employment, working just enough to meet immediate needs or finding odd jobs when they want to make a specific purchase, and otherwise spending their time on non-work activities. Many others do not see the possibility of ever obtaining stable, formal employment.
A member of the MTD Guernica, also located in the Buenos Aires periphery, talked about the effects of the “economic recovery” on her movement, stating that while there is more work, it is often fairly low paying that requires a lot of travel time and long hours. The work available for people in her neighborhood is mostly in the construction sector for men or the service sector (domestic work, cleaning, retail) for women, working in the cities of Buenos Aires or La Plata, a commute of one to two hours. Thus, people often quit participating in the movement’s activities, largely because they no longer have the time and because their immediate needs are being met through their employment so they no longer need to rely as much on the movement for that (Interview, Oct. 6, 2012, Buenos Aires). What this shows, is that, for the movements to be effective today, they must rethink their relationship to both unemployment and employment and seek ways to break down that divide in their organizing practice.

Different MTDs have different ways of dealing with the question of the relation between employment and unemployment and the new situation opened up by the growth in employment in recent years. In many cases, this is based on a flexibility of membership and participation requirements, allowing for members to participate in different ways at different times. For example, a member of the MTD Solano disappears for a few weeks while he is working in a restaurant, he still comes to major actions and meetings however, when he subsequently goes bankrupt and he loses his job, he returns to full-time organizing with the MTD. He claims he never stopped belonging to the movement, even during that period when he was working and less involved in the movement's activities. He marks the difference this way: work is what I have to do to get by, to be able to feed my family, but [the movement] is about challenging all of that, so that we don't have to work shitty jobs just to get by but to create new ways of living and providing for our needs” (Interview, March 17, 2013, La Plata). Another older man involved in
the MTD Solano, although working at the moment claims he continues to be involved in the organization because “I could lose my job tomorrow, I could go back to being unemployed. This group provides me with a sort of security, somewhere to go in case that happens” (Interview, March 17, 2013, La Plata). The MTDs attempt to provide a sense of community and stability in the midst of the precarity and uncertainty of contemporary life.

For some of the youth involved in YSP, this does represent a problem, however, as high school attendance stops becoming mandatory if they obtain formal employment. Thus many youth, if they can obtain formal employment not only have less time to attend school or participate in movement activities, but also no longer need to go to school in order for their families to receive welfare benefits. In many cases, however, they remain involved in the movement for the affective ties generated there. One teenager who recently found a job doing construction with his uncle and therefore stopped attending academic classes at YSP but still attends some of the music and art classes and spends time in YSP's space, explained his involvement this way: “I have a job, I'm working now for my uncle, and it's fine and all but that's not where my friends are, my friends aren't at work, my friends are here, at [YSP], they're my compañeros, this is where I like to spend time” (Interview, Apr. 19, 2012, La Matanza). The MTDs strive to create a climate for the creation of new affective and social bonds, and, in order to do this, must go beyond focusing solely on the question of employment to building movements that encompass other areas of life.

These efforts demonstrate a commitment to overcoming divisions based on different classifications and organizations of work: focusing on identifying broader structural conditions that affect everyone and fighting exploitation in its myriad forms. This includes the recognition that the neo-extractivist economy functions by capturing value from a wide range of activities,
increasingly including everyone in its reach. This means that any movement against neo-extractivism must engage these diverse forms of extraction and exploitation, including the extraction of land and natural resources, as well as extraction through debt and finance and the capturing of the wealth of social cooperation. Therefore, many of the MTDs are currently seeking to broaden their alliances and networks beyond the unemployed, or even precarious and low-waged workers, to include campesino and indigenous groups being affected by the extraction of natural resources, and urban groups fighting against real estate speculation and gentrification. They do this through participating in broad mobilizations and coalitions against different forms of extraction, as well as opening up their spaces for talks and conversations relating to these issues aiming to build relationships between different movements and organizations.

**Demands around work**

Given the heterogeneous composition of these movements, the diverse experiences of work and unemployment, the varied ways that people make their livings, coming together around long-term collective demands is not a given. For movements this diverse and as massive and powerful as they have been in different moments, a general call for jobs is not enough. Since their inception, different movements have made different demands around the question of work: asking for more benefits and subsidies from the jobs, demanding “genuine” work and “real” jobs, to calling for “work with dignity.” Looking at these demands shows how different organizations understand work, as well as their imaginaries for what other types of work and forms of life are possible.

**The Demand for Unemployment Benefits**

Initially, the piquetero movement united around calls for welfare benefits and other
resources for the unemployed. The roadblocks demanded direct payment to the unemployed, leading to what were known as the *planes sociales*: welfare programs to give support to the poor and unemployed in the form of direct monetary aid or food baskets, usually requiring a certain number of hours of work or community service. On the one hand, the piqueteros demanded the full implementation of the *Argentina Trabaja*, an employment program begun in 1995 with support from the World Bank that because of budget constraints was never able to reach most of the unemployed. On the other hand, they demanded new and more universal forms of benefits to be directly controlled and distributed by the movements themselves. The piquetes were successful in winning different benefits from different levels of the government, including municipal, provincial and federal governments. Local governments were the first to begin benefits programs, such as the *Planes Barrios Bonaerenses* started in the Province of Buenos Aires in 1997 to provide jobs for the unemployed in public works projects in the poor neighborhoods of the province that were lacking in infrastructure. The largest federal program was the *Plan Jefas y Jefes de Hogar* (Heads of Household Program) begun by presidential decree in 2002 in response to the rising social pressure created by the piquetes and the “employment emergency.” The program, initially partially funded by the Inter-American Reconstruction and Development Bank, provided a monthly payment to unemployed “heads of households” with dependent children under the age of eighteen in return for fulfilling a work or service requirement. At its height in 2003, this program reached nearly two and a half million people across the country, providing the unemployed a monthly payment of 150 pesos in return for carrying out four hours of work per day in a participating institution or organization (Svampa and Pereyra 2009).

Since 2003, the Kirchner/Fernandez governments have attempted to expand and unify
these different benefit programs. Argentina Trabaja was expanded to provide more forms of reimbursements to cooperatives and the micro-enterprises already being created by the movements of the unemployed. Therefore, the program now offers salaries for a certain number of workers per project, as well as start up funds for organizations to create their own cooperatives. The expansion of the program to support more cooperative forms of work was a direct response to the struggles of the unemployed – their demands for more state support as well as a recognition on the part of the government of the economic potential behind these cooperatives and micro-enterprises. Yet the program is still criticized by many on the Left for two primary reasons: for its limited reach (each participating organization only receives a certain number of paid slots and are therefore constantly struggling to obtain more, initially this struggle occurred principally in the streets, in the piquetes, today they are often determined through less confrontational modes of negotiation) and that the subsidy paid to each worker still falls well below a living wage (Féñiz and López 2010). Additionally, the program has been critiqued for reproducing forms of clientelism or patronage, with many claiming that organizations that support the (local or national) government receive more slots or are more likely to have their requests met in a timely manner (Flores 2007; Marcioni 2010).

The other important benefit program implemented under Fernández de Kirchner is the Asignación Universal por Hijo (Universal Child Allowance, AUH), passed into law in 2009. The AUH is, in some ways, a continuation of the Jefes y Jefas program but with more universal pretensions. The program provides low-income parents (usually mothers) with a monthly benefit payment for each minor child if certain requirements are met, mainly that the child attends school and is vaccinated. Again, in one sense this program is a response to movements' demand, in this case, movements demanding more universal benefits that would not come with work
requirements. On the other hand, the AUH can be seen as extending biopolitical control over populations that previously existed largely outside of the state's reach by requiring children to attend school and be vaccinated. Yet, the program has also had unexpected consequences: for example, the requirement that children attend school dramatically increased school enrollment in low-income neighborhoods where there were not enough public schools to meet this new demand. The movements were able to use this situation to their advantage to demand that the government recognize their movement-run schools and receive full accreditation for those schools. This has been especially important for the YSP school and is a large factor behind its increasing enrollment. In summary, the benefit programs implemented under the Kirchners reach a greater number of people and provide a larger sum of benefits than previous benefits but can also be seen as enhancing biopolitical and financial control (Colectivo Situaciones 2014).

Initially the work requirements were determined by the state institutions that managed the programs and, ultimately, usually by local government officials. This led to significant corruption as politicians, especially at the municipal levels, would force the unemployed to work for them in order to receive their welfare payments. After sustained protests, the movements were able to win the right to administer the benefits and determine the work requirements themselves. This led to a qualitative difference in the ways the benefits operated, instead of serving to reinforce the power of local political officials, the movements were able to use the benefits towards their own objectives, in order to pay people to do work that benefited the movement. With these social programs, the movements' numbers swelled as people saw in them a way out of the difficulties of unemployment and could gain direct access to unemployment benefits by joining one of these movements and meeting the work requirements through participation in the organization (Grimson 2009; Oviedo 2004).
Thus, the majority of the piquetero organizations began using and administering the benefit programs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of the interesting aspects of the unemployment subsidies becomes the way in which movements themselves use them to value specific types of work. Since the movements get to decide what work people have to do in order to receive their benefit, this allows movements to define for themselves what counts as work, what types of work they most value and think are most necessary, and, in turn, to have that work remunerated. Many of the MTDs, thus, use the subsidies to compensate the labor of social reproduction which already occurs and privilege women in the distribution of benefits. Another activist commented that the great thing about the subsidies is that they are used to pay for organizing work itself, a form of work that is inherently relational-communicative, and that often goes unrecognized and unremunerated (Interview, Oct. 12, 2011, Buenos Aires). While some opponents of the social plans criticize this form of distributing benefits, I would argue that is a legitimate recognition of the ways in which labor has changed and represents an effort to revalue certain types of work.

Activists at Yo Sí Puedo recognize and value the work not only of the teachers but also the work of cleaning (the school and the neighborhood), childcare, and the organizing work of managing the school. YSP, along with other popular schools has been part of a struggle to have those schools recognized by the government, to become accredited and able to issue official diplomas. As part of this struggle, they have also demanded that teachers in their schools be paid by the state and that the state provide other resources in order for the schools to function. YSP has also won control of several unemployment subsidies for which they determine what work will be performed as the work requirement. As one (male) YSP organizer put it, “these women do all this work all the time, they are the ones that keep the families and the communities
together, they do so much work” (Interview, April 19, 2012, La Matanza). These women are the ones that the school hires, using the welfare plans they manage to pay them for things such as cleaning the school and running a daycare for students' children. The benefit packages won from the state serve as a way of recognizing and remunerating the work that is already being done, but that often goes unrecognized.

Other MTDs, however, have maintained a critique of the benefit programs and, in some cases, refuse to administer them. The MTD La Matanza, for example, critiques the subsidies as a way of increasing “dependency” and promoting a “culture of assistentialism” (Flores 2005). The MTD La Matanza is the only major MTD that has never engaged in distributing unemployment subsidies, losing a substantial portion of its membership when it made this decision in 1997; yet, they argue that this decision was necessary in order to retain independence from the state and to grow autonomously as a movement. Neka Jara, from the MTD Solano, is also critical of the plans for the way that the movements become administrators and take on the work of the government, a sort of further outsourcing the work of management to the poor themselves. She explains that at one point they decided to scale back their use of the subsidies because they realized they were expending too much of their energy on administering the plans, keeping records and handing out benefits, coordinating work shifts, etc., that they were unable to concentrate on the projects that mattered most to them. In this way, the state was able to capture their energy and organizational efforts by allowing them to administer the plans. Currently, however, they still distribute a small number of unemployment benefits and are fighting to receive more, but only if they can be used for the MTDs' own projects (Interview, February 18, 2013, Quilmes). Zibechi understands these social plans as a new form of governance, a more subtle way of bringing the movements' activities under government control than direct
repression, through involving the movements in processes of governing and thereby limiting their radical capacities (2008b). Since the movements that receive government subsidies and manage the unemployment benefits continue to embody radically different political ideologies and different positions in respect to the government, it appears that these programs serve as more than simply co-optation, or, at least, are extremely ineffective at co-opting the movements since they do not guarantee support for the government.

Beyond these critiques, the unemployment benefits, along with the other services and benefits provided by the government, can be understood in terms of the “social wage,” paid to all for their socially productive activity, which was won by previous generations of struggles. Barbagallo and Beuret recognize the ambiguity and dual nature of the social wage: “it is a method by which the state organizes our lives and produces disciplined social subjects, and it also a means of reducing the direct cost (to us) of our own material reproduction. It is both our tool and theirs” (2012, 183). In much the same way, most of the movements of the unemployed consider these plans to be the results of years of hard struggle, not something that was merely “handed” to them by the government, but rather something that they took by force. Many of the recipients of these plans refuse to see themselves as “beneficiaries,” arguing that they are in fact engaging in work and being paid for it. These benefits are a way for people to continue to reproduce themselves in the situation of generalized precarity, as well a the basis for building stronger organizations and more guaranteed ways of sustaining themselves. Yet, it is true that, even with the increased payments under the Kirchners, the meager benefits offered by most of the plans are far from enough to sustain a family on and thus, in another way, reproduce the very precarity they proclaim to eradicate. The benefits that come with work requirements, especially when not determined by the movements, can be seen as another way of promoting low-paid and
precarious work under the guise of a social program. Despite pretensions to the contrary, the expansion of benefits and programs including job training do not tend to lead to more formal, stable employment. Yet others see these benefits as the initial groundwork for demanding a guaranteed basic income that would reimburse all members of society for their participation in activities of social cooperation and ensure everyone had the means to sustain themselves (Elgarte 2010). This move towards more universalized benefits can be seen in the Universal Child Allowance, which, while still being limited in its scope, has a much more universal reach than other programs. Thus, movements continue demanding not only additional subsidies, but the universalization of existing ones, without work requirements, and increases in monthly payments to make the benefits approach something of a living wage.

**Demand for Genuine Work**

After winning the initial unemployment benefits, the piquetero organizations quickly diversified their demands. Some sectors of the piquetero movement, in opposition to the demand for unemployment benefits, started calling for “genuine work”: “real” or “legitimate” jobs, often their former jobs, for the most, industrial, manufacturing jobs or jobs in the public sector. The term “genuine work” came out of a desire of certain movements to distinguish their productive activities from movements that focused on obtaining subsidies from the government. It has mostly been used by the movements of the unemployed that are closest to the traditional labor movement. In general, organizations with this demand share a belief in the possibility of a return to Fordist style full employment and reindustrialization. Whether or not they support Kirchner, they support a developmentalist model to create economic growth (whether through extractivism, a renewed industrialism or the promotion of a “knowledge economy”).

The demand for “genuine work” is usually manifested as a demand made directly on the
state or a specific company to provide a certain number of job positions. These requests have been successful in forcing local governments to hire more people and in a few cases forced large companies to reincorporate laid off workers. These organizations critiqued the demand for subsidies and welfare benefits, which they considered to reproduce patterns of laziness and dependency (c.f. Bordegaray 2005; Flores 2005). While certainly politicians' use of these subsidies to subvert and co-opt movements must be critiqued, it is easy to see how the simple critique of subsidies as dependency risks reproducing the logic of neoliberal capital as each individual is responsible for one's self and of blaming the poor and unemployed for their conditions. In practice, the call for “genuine work” often becomes a sort moral argument, differentiating between legitimate and authentic work and other forms of work that are not considered valuable or worthy. Usually this reinforces a division between “productive” and “reproductive” work and leaves out many forms of unwaged of work, largely carried out by women. This discourse also tends to stigmatize those who receive subsidies, in many ways reproducing the neoliberal discourse which blames individuals for their unemployment, and creating further fragmentation in the movement.

Colectivo Situaciones characterizes the demand for genuine work, recognizing that as a slogan it was used by diverse elements of the piquetero movement but that these diverse elements share a common imaginary around work:

As an alternative to the logic of ‘workfare,’ some movements developed economic enterprises (cooperatives, markets, commercialization networks, etc.) that they decided to call genuine work, alluding the their nature of producing exchange value, and not merely being subsidized. At the same time, this slogan was used as much by the most combative wings that demanded jobs from large companies as a response to their struggles, as by those that believed in an effective recomposition of the labor force and encouraged, by all means possible, employment generation as part of a sustained industrial development. (2009, 26).

Colectivo Situaciones continues:
The repositioning of the imaginary of the wage society based on what in official discourse today is called decent work supposes a negative balance of the referenced experiments, it displaces the questions they posed and proposes 'full employment' (a persistent horizon of meaning despite its evident crisis) as the privileged means of 'redistributing wealth.' At the same time, it recuperates those initiatives as the orientation for social policies (under the form of the creation of cooperatives and enterprises financed and monitored by the state). (Ibid., 28).

Thus the demand for genuine work centers around an imaginary of full employment, development based on jobs for all. While this demand could potentially exist alongside alternative and worker-managed economic projects, in practice it usually corresponds to a state-centered politics, which relies on the state for the implementation of jobs programs, rather than encouraging autonomous creation on the part of movements. If the potency of the 2001 revolt stems from experimentation in forms of living beyond work, then the call for genuine work negates those experiments and expresses a nostalgia for a lost (imagined) period of Peronist industrialism.

**Work with Dignity**

Another segment of the piquetero movement, with the MTDs as its center, calls for “work with dignity” or “dignified work.” As dignity cannot merely be handed from one person to another, work with dignity is not so much a demand as a statement of intent, for it is precisely what the movements are putting into practice. Different groups interpret dignified work in different ways and put it into practice through different means. However, there are some common threads of these experiences of work with dignity: 1) self-management: workers' control, no boss; 2) workplace democracy and horizontality; 3) encourage communitarian values over market values. Work with dignity is usually interpreted as requiring at least some level of

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10 While I distinguish the calls for “genuine work” and “work with dignity” here, the division is not quite as simple and the two are not mutually exclusive, with many organizations, such as the MTD La Matanza, alternating between the two. However, I think it is useful to distinguish between the two for analytical purposes.
autonomy from the state and the market, although what this means in practice varies greatly between different groups.

Colectivo Situaciones describes the emergence of the call for work with dignity, contrasting it not only to the call for genuine work but also to the forms of clientelism dominant in local politics in poor neighborhoods:

The piquetero protagonism gave rise to the slogan work with dignity, that expressed resistance to limiting the reproduction of life to servile modes under the form of workfare through the social plans provided by different levels of government. Which implied a radical questioning of the forms of neoliberal management of the territorial powers based on clientelism and an entire style of administration of social energy in the peripheral neighborhoods: from the intolerable reduction of the 'beneficiaries' (of the plans) to the domestic servitude on the part of the district political leaders (utilization as domestic employees or construction workers for municipal officials) to the use of time in jobs that sustained the basic functioning of the municipalities and consolidated subordination (2009, 26).

Colectivo Situaciones sees this call for dignity as part of the expression of the self-activity of the working class, as part of the formulation of an active identity of the piquetero as opposed the passive identity of the unemployed and the struggle to create new forms of life:

Work with dignity was the expression of an autonomous will to unfold the activity of the movements that resisted, in their initiatives, to assume the equation 'unemployed equals passive/dependent.' For that, diverse perspectives were developed around dignified work, some linked with to a reappropriation of the plans as the basis of a self-organization of enterprises, while others looked for modes of popular entrepreneurship that from the beginning rejected any relationship with those plans. (Ibid., 29).

Colectivo Situaciones also highlights the fact that different piquetero organizations understand the concept of dignified work in different ways and that the unemployment benefits played different roles for the different organizations.

The MTD Solano explains their thinking about the unemployment benefits and dignified work:

Our struggle is not for the plans, the struggle is for work, dignity and social change. And in that is encompassed that which we are trying to construct. The benefit programs, like all types of demands, are some of the axes, means that we have found to organize ourselves, to
go on subsisting a little. The matter of genuine work we define in these terms: can the work be defined by the exploited-exploiter relationship based on a capitalist logic? When some compañeros say to us that the struggle has to take place in the factory to request genuine work, we ask ourselves: is that really, for us, genuine work, or is that asking them to keep on exploiting you? In this sense, we have been debating. We do not define work from our situation of unemployment, we define it from our identity, and we try to build work ourselves. For us, working is also this that we are doing today, we are constructing thought, new ideas, exchanging experiences. This is also work for us, and all of the spaces that form the MTD are also work: the murga for us is thinking about art in another way; the comedor that we share everyday, where we don't just go because we are hungry but that we collectively self-management the possibility of eating and sharing a ton of things when we sit down at the table. (2002, 251).

Thus, the MTD Solano situates work with dignity in direct opposition to exploitative work under capitalism, opening up the conversation about what other types of work might be possible and desired beyond a mere request to return to earlier forms of exploitation. Additionally, their understanding of what constitutes work itself goes beyond that of industrial or factory work to include forms of cultural, knowledge and social production, and, fundamentally, all the labor involved in reproducing life itself.

The MTDs are only one of many movements that discuss work with dignity but in the context of their struggles it often takes on a different meaning. Starting from the position of unemployment and how to construct collective forms of living opens up a new position that does not assume working within a capitalist labor market. The dignified alternatives that the MTDs construct are not limited to workplace alternatives, to working without bosses and democratically controlling the workplace, as the recuperated factories are for the most part. They aim to create different ways of working, questioning what counts as work and how that work is valued, how that work is carried out and organized, and the relationship between that work and other parts of life.

**Challenging the Culture of Work**

In recent years some former piquetero organizations have further delinked dignity from
work, arguing that dignity does not come from any type of work at all but from struggle and the construction of new social relations. The relationship to work should be understood as more than only an ideological element of the piquetero organizations, but also an affective tie. Both more Peronist organizations and those tied to traditionally Leftist parties often display a sort of nostalgia and longing toward what is considered the lost "culture of work" or workers' dignity of the era of full employment. Therefore, these groups continue to center and privilege the experience of the industrial worker and organize much in the same form as a traditional labor union even when engaging in territorial organizing. These organizations, in general, are much less interested in experiences of autogestión on the community level, although they do tend to involve themselves in the struggles of the recuperated factories (Svampa and Pereyra 2009).

This “culture of work” is similar to what might be referred to as the “work ethic” in the United States context. Kathi Weeks (2011) critiques both the work ethic “from above:” constructed by power to produce docile subjects, encouraging a certain relationship between production and consumption, imposed on people to produce certain work habits; and the work ethic “from below:” produced by workers’ struggles and movements that celebrates the dignity and worth of labor. She also examines the construction of a new work ethic/discourse around work developed in response to changes in labor and production since the 1970s. She describes this work ethic as a biopolitical force, “one that renders populations at once productive and governable, increasing their capacities together with their docility.” Weeks also analyzes the post-industrial work ethic, corresponding to a shift toward the increasing importance of communicative and affective labor, emphasizes work as a means to personal growth and development. This post-industrial work ethic demands workers’ affective attachment to the work, evaluating workers on their attitudes and enthusiasm as much as for the quality of their work,
acting to an ever greater extent on the level of subjectivity and desire.

A similar commitment to the work ethic can be found in Argentina. Peronism can be seen as simultaneously celebrating a work ethic from above and from below. Drawing on the strength of labor movements, Peronism places immense value on labor and confirms the dignity of the worker. Peronism also aims to produce workers that are obedient, docile subjects, passive supporters to the supposedly infallible figure of Peron himself (or in his place, the union or the party). Thus, as Sitrin explains, "the dignified worker under Peron is one who works hard and produces" (2012, 45). Daniel James discusses the historical construction of the dignified worker under Peron: "In an important sense the working class was constituted by Peron: its self-identification as a social and political force within national society was, in part at least, constructed by Peronist political discourse" (1988, 38). While this formation of working class identity under Peron was certainly important and the basis of a good deal of working class struggles (with victories as well as defeats), as Sitrin points out it was also always "an identity constructed by those who have power over you" (2012: 45), thus limiting a creative construction from below. Rozitchner argues that its incorporation into Peronism and integration into a nationalist-capitalist project meant the working class was never able to fully develop through its own struggles but instead has continuously relied on leadership from above, making it more susceptible to right-wing Peronism like Carlos Menem (2009). Sitrin describes Peronism as a "paternalistic relationship to the population," continuing "some see this relationship as good, when the government is giving out food and unemployment subsidies, while many see this is as negative, that the government is forcing people into a dependent relationship" (2012: 29). Peronism has been much critiqued by those on the Left precisely for this sense of dependency it created and the long term effects on working class organization (c.f., Flores 2005, Rozitchner
Bottaro also describes how in organizations with a more religious outlook or ties to the Church, including some organizations of the unemployed, “the meanings of work are strongly permeated by the significance that it was historically given by the Catholic Church, for whom work is related to dignity, morality and sacrifice” (2010, 136). Thus, despite a long history of antagonism between Catholicism and both Peronism and Marxism, in many cases they actually converge rather well on the question of the meaning of work, linking it to dignity and sacrifice.

By maintaining that dignity comes from work, traditional forms of Leftist and Peronist labor organizing are extremely adverse to any sort of post-work or anti-work ethic and thus manages to include many reactionary elements. With the rise of neoliberalism in the '90s, this work ethic became increasingly individualized and used to blame the unemployed for their poverty and lack of employment (Flores 2005). This could be seen in the rhetoric employed by the neoliberal government, as well as the mainstream labor movement, which pitted employed workers against the unemployed, casting the unemployed as lazy and unproductive. Many of the movements of the unemployed, explicitly or implicitly, reproduce this work ethic by holding on to a concept of dignity through work and the morality of hard work.

The autonomous MTDs, however, tend to be much more distanced from this world of factory work and have less of an affective attachment to it. As discussed previously, the membership of these organizations is less likely to have previous experience of factory work nor expectations of it. They are the ones that are most committed to territorial organizing and local experiences of collective self-management, not so much to recreate a culture of work or to create successful productive enterprises, but to meet participants’ basic needs and (re)create social ties and relationships of solidarity. Thus, when they talk about “dignity” it is not necessarily tied to
having a job, but living in dignified conditions (the opposite of precarity) and having collective control over the matters that affect them. While they are concerned with creating new cultural practices, subjectivities and social relations, they are not interested in restoring those pertaining to the “culture of work,” but rather one corresponding to more communitarian or communist ethics.

Although some older organizers in all of the organizations I worked with complained about the “lack of a culture of work,” implying that young people lack the discipline and responsibility demanded by a steady job, for the most part, this precarious condition was expected. In Juan Pablo Hudson's (2011) account of recuperated factories in Rosario, this conflict takes a mainly generational character with younger workers opposing the rigid factory discipline opposed on them by older workers. The older workers, veterans of the factory-with-boss, complain that the “pibes,” young men who have never held steady jobs and with much less experience submitting to authority, regularly arrive late to work or do not show up at all, they show no commitment to the business, do not participate in assemblies and other decision-making processes even when given the chance. What they want is not a democratic workplace but not to work. This generational difference was clearly apparent in the MTDs I studied: young people were much less committed to work, whether or not it was organized cooperatively, did not identify with the jobs that they performed, and had an instrumental relation to employment.

Colectivo Situaciones describes what they term a refusal of work on the part of the young people that make up these movements:

Today, that refusal of work (its politicization, its materiality of rupture, its other image of happiness) is a diffuse texture in the peripheral neighborhoods (those in the center of the city as well as the ancient ‘industrial belt’): it is included in the urban calculus that many prefer to participate in more or less legal and/or informal networks before looking for a stable job; it is visible in many of the strategies of the youngest kids that don't have the possibility of a job on the horizon but many other forms of earning and risking their lives; and others still insist
on the search for cooperative or self-managed solutions to resolve daily existence. (2009, 33).

This is the youth element that makes up the MTDs and is partially responsible for the MTDs' different attitudes toward work and different forms of political action compared to more traditional forms of organization. Indeed, even compared to other organizations of the unemployed with more traditional organizing styles or closer links to trade unions, the MTDs include considerably more young people. This refusal of work is partly predicated on the impossibility of stable employment since the height of neoliberalism and unemployment in the 1990s, but more than this impossibility, it also represents a desire not to work.

Older organizers, on the other hand, often lament young people's changing attitudes toward work. Vicky, a woman in her 50s from the MTD Guernica, comments “kids have never seen their families working, they've never seen the famous culture of work, they grew up with 'each man for himself’’ (Interview Oct. 6, 2012, Buenos Aires). She explains that, having grown up during the neoliberalism and unemployment of the 1990s and the crisis of 2001 and the current moment of precarious work, they never experienced a time when full employment was the norm and could be expected (this is what she means when she refers to the “culture of work”). They never saw their parents or other adult role models get up every morning to go to work and never had any sort of work ethic instilled in them. She goes on to conclude that this means that young people search for the easy solutions to their material problems, instead of seeking formal employment, they tend to prefer informal and illegal work, and are more likely to turn to drugs. She admits, though, that even for those wishing to work, this usually means completing years of difficult schooling and then working long shifts for little pay. Despite this lack of commitment to working, they still want to consume – music, clothing, in some cases
drugs – meaning they are still tied to the market even if not working. Vicky's complaints matched those of several older organizers I spoke to, who lamented that the lack of work ethic and individualist attitudes of the youth were making it difficult to organize them. The MTD La Matanza makes a similar argument, related to their critique of the unemployment subsidies, claiming that a “culture of dependency” has overtaken the “culture of work,” meaning people expect to be able to rely on the state to meet their needs and solve their problems rather than seeking their own solution to those problems through work.

On the other hand, other participants in the MTD Solano and YSP, rather than lament the decline of the culture of work and work ethic, see this as as a positive or, at least, irreversible trend. Of course young people have different attitudes and expectations toward work, work itself has changed, as described above, precarity has become the norm, full employment is myth of the past. Having grown up during the economic crisis, it is true that youth have never experienced the “culture of work,” working full-time formal, stable jobs is just not an option for most young people, even those coming from middle class backgrounds but especially those from the low-income neighborhoods hardest hit by unemployment in the 1990s. But, rather than see this as a cause for concern, activists in the MTD Solano see this is an opportunity for creating new ways of living that are not centered around work, but rather the collective production and management of the common.

What many accounts of the work ethic and neoliberal subjectivity fail to fully recognize, however, is just how unstable this subjectivity and commitment to the work ethic are. This can be seen in the crisis of the “culture of work” in Argentina identified by an older generation still very much committed to the Peronist/Fordist ideals of dignity and value through labor. If the precarization and flezibilization of labor starting in the 1970s can be seen, in part, as a response
to the struggles of the '60s and '70s against alienated labor in the factory, then today too this crisis of identification with work can be seen, in part, as a result of the struggles against neoliberalism in the 1990s. As Kathi Weeks states:

Where attitudes are productive, an insubordination to the work ethic; a skepticism about the virtues of self-discipline for the sake of capital accumulation; an unwillingness to cultivate, simply on principle, a good "professional" attitude about work; and a refusal to subordinate all of life to work carry a new kind of subversive potential. My claims are that, given its role, the work ethic should be contested, and, due to its instabilities, it can be contested. (2011, 77).

What the continual refusal of formal salaried work, despite the economic recovery and increasing availability of work, shows is just how unstable this work ethic is, especially for Argentina's youth.

The MTDs that continue to be most effective politically are those that pick up and build on those anti-work desires, moving beyond demands for more jobs, developing a critique of productivism and work, and recognizing desires for a life beyond work. Challenging the work ethic does not only take place through a movement's demands or theoretical analyses of work, but also in the movement's own practices, in the ways that they attempt not to reproduce the work ethic in their own organizing. That means not reproducing the morality of hard work and sacrifice that many activist organizations rely on, but focusing on constructive desires and the joy of being together.

Moving Beyond Work

Some more consciously and explicitly than others, various MTDs and former MTDs have moved away from struggles centered around employment in recent years. The MTDs of Solano and Guernica in the urban periphery of Buenos Aires changed their names in 2012 and no longer go by “movement of unemployed workers,” but now go by the name “movement of collectives”.

124
Neka Jara explained that change, “we no longer wanted to be defined by our relationship to employment, whether we had jobs or not, but by the positive work we are doing.” Those positive elements of their struggle go beyond the question of work and include the work of different “collectives” that now make up the “movement” (Interview, February 18, 2013, Buenos Aires).

In La Matanza, former activists of the MTD La Matanza, who now work at the school Yo Sí Puedo describe their decision to organize around education instead of work in similar, if not as explicit, ways. While the MTD La Matanza focused on education in part because they saw education as a means to a job or as a way of reinvigorating a culture of work, Yo Sí Puedo emphasizes education for the effect it can have on people's lives, as a way of creating dignity and political power and capacities. One activist explained, recognizing that work is not the most important aspect of young people's lives, that young people don't define their lives around work, but rather a host of other activities and relationships. Therefore, they use education as a way to introduce young people to other possibilities for ways of living, and to create other relationships and values that could challenge the neoliberal consumerist subjectivity (Interview, Apr. 19, 2012, La Matanza). Education is seen as another way of creating dignity by helping people develop the tools they need to have more control over their lives. Work is no longer seen as the sole source of dignity, but rather dignity is defined through having collective control over one's living conditions and forming new types of community.

These shifts represent a generalized trend to move away from demands for jobs or even focusing on work to a focus around questions of reproduction and care. Ultimately, what can be seen in these movements then, is the struggle against the wage relation and for the abolition of the worker. Or in the words of Colectivo Situaciones:

Workers normally struggle – and with all justice – for higher wages, or against them being
cut. But workers as a radical category struggle against the wage relation itself. The unemployed struggle for employment, for work, to enter into the productive structure. When this doesn't happen, then they struggle for unemployment benefits. But the unemployed that we have been talking about here, the piqueteros, struggle against the society of alienated labor, of individualism and competition. (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002, 138-139).

Thus, perhaps what the struggles of the unemployed point to most of all is the struggle not for jobs, but the struggle against work and for ways of living beyond work.
Chapter 4: Struggles over the Political – Autonomy and Counter-Power in the MTDs

The piquetero movement was innovative and influential not only because it brought together the unemployed in new organizations, but also because it challenged and transformed the very manner of doing politics in Argentina. The movements of the unemployed sought to redefine the spaces and forms of the political: from official political institutions, political parties and elections, to the spaces of the everyday, the neighborhood and the household. Through internal practices of direct democracy and horizontality and actions aimed at meeting participants' basic needs, the MTDs created a form of politics that is not centered around the state nor based on representation, but allows participants to directly intervene in the matters that affect them. Instead of prioritizing the struggle to take state power or to create centralized institutions themselves, the MTDs aim to create new social relations, subjectivities and forms of life in the present, to build collective autonomy and control over daily life.

This chapter examines the MTDs as a struggle over precisely what is considered the political and how politics is carried out. By rejecting traditional forms of representational politics, the MTDs were not promoting a sort of anti-politics or apolitical organization. Rather, they were enacting a form of politics that is not centered on the institutions of the state, that does not assume that power operates only from above or that the path to social change lies through occupying institutions of power – a non-state-centric form of politics. This way of doing politics otherwise must be understood by looking at its effects in terms of the production of knowledge,
meaning, social relations, and subjectivities. It could be thought of in terms of micropolitics: “how we reproduce (or don’t) the dominant modes of subjectivation” (Guattari and Rolnik 2005), which does not necessarily mean small scale, but rather recognizes that capitalism functions at the level of subjectivity and is reproduced as a social relation.

The rebellion of 2001, under the slogan *que se vayan todos* [they all must go], was widely heralded as a rejection of taking state power and indeed the movements that were most powerful in that moment practiced a *non-state-centric* form of politics, a politics that is not defined nor measured in relation to the state, but in terms of the development of popular power and capacity. In other words, a non-state-centric form of politics avoids the binary of either state or non-state politics, but rather looks to go *beyond the state*. 2001 marked the inflection point of this different form of politics in Argentina, which privileged the common construction of meaning, subjectivities and ways of life independent from the state and fundamentally and irreversibly transformed the relationship between social movements and the state (Gago and Sztulwark 2011). The new forms of political action that reached maturity that year decentered the state as the primary site of struggle and granter of rights; the movements did not aim to take state power, but rather to create forms of “counter-power” or power from below.

A non-state-centric politics implies a different understanding of emancipation and the objectives of political action. According to Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar:

> to emancipate oneself is essentially to perform collective acts of resistance and struggle in order to change social, economic, and political relations that then facilitate autonomous collective decision making and the regulation of social life based on these modes of decision making. If we accept this proposition, a critique of what is meant by political activity or, more specifically, what is considered as emancipatory politics follows. From this perspective, the politics of emancipation or, more accurately, emancipatory political action is no longer primarily, or solely, a discussion or competition regarding different ways of regulating and managing society conceived as a totality. Rather, it is a matter of the creation, care, expansion, and consolidation of a common ability to intervene—through deliberation and execution—in the issues that are incumbent on us all. (2008, 57).
This understanding of emancipation changes the meaning of politics and decenters the state from our understanding of political action. It with this understanding of emancipation that the concepts of counter-power and autonomy develop their specific meanings as they are used by movements in Argentina. Autonomy, in the context of the movements of the unemployed, is understood primarily not as total self-sufficiency or local sovereignty but as the capacity to make the decisions about matters affecting them, to set their own agendas and values. Counter-power must be understood in a double sense: resistance to the existing oppressive system and the simultaneous creation of new forms of life and social relations.

I begin the chapter with a brief description of the neoliberal governmentality and forms of subjectivation that were dominant in the 1990s in order to situate the movements that arose in resistance to neoliberalism. Then, I discuss the new social subjects that emerged during the 1990s and some of their key characteristics: struggles that decentered the state, refused representation and were committed to internally practicing direct democracy and horizontality, creating forms of autonomy and counter-power. Next, I give an overview of the 2001 uprising, which was defined by the generalization of this non-state-centric form of politics. I close the chapter with an analysis of struggles over the political since the election of Nestor Kirchner in 2003: the development of a new form of governance and the response on the part of social movements. Through these different moments, I trace the development of a form of politics that does not center the state and attempts to enact politics in a different time and place, prioritizing the creation of new social relations and subjectivities.

**Neoliberal Governmentality**

As discussed in Chapter Two, neoliberal policies of reducing public spending on social services, encouraging private investment and attacking sources of working class power began in
Argentina with the military dictatorship that took power in 1976. This dictatorship emerged in response to the powerful social movements of the late 1960s: a militant labor movement, student and feminist movements, and revolutionary Peronist movements. When conflicts between armed right-wing militias and Leftist groups became increasingly violent after Perón's death in 1973, the military took power, proclaiming that it would bring economic and political stability to the country, while brutally repressing any expressions of dissent or subversion. This repression went well beyond the military defeat of Leftist guerrilla groups to dismantle all forms of Leftist and worker organization and establishing a generalized fear of militancy and political organizing in the population that would leave its mark on the population for decades to come.

In 1983, after its defeat in the Malvinas and facing increasing protests from human rights groups both in Argentina and internationally, the military junta stepped down, allowing for democratic elections. The newly elected president Raúl Alfonsín created the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), a truth commission tasked to uncover the extent of crimes committed under the dictatorship, whose findings led to trials of a number of military officers. In 1986 and 1987, however, the Ley de Punto Final and the Ley de Obediencia Debida put a halt to the trials and declaring that anyone following orders could not be held accountable for their crimes. Human rights organizations protested these laws at the time but met with little success. They were dealt a further blow when, in 1990, the recently elected President Carlos Menem granted pardons to those who had been found guilty under Alfonsín, stating, "I have signed the decrees so we may begin to rebuild the country in peace, in liberty and in justice... We come from long and cruel confrontations. There was a wound to heal" (NY Times 10/9/1989).

Menem's method of “healing the wound” consisted of continuing and deepening the
economic policies begun in the 1970s but without the direct repression and violence that characterized the military dictatorship. Under Menem, the government cut social programs and public spending, and deregulated the economy, privatizing national industries and allowing increased foreign direct investment. During this time, the government generally attempted to place the impetus for the resolution of social and economic problems on non-state actors. As the state withdrew from providing social services, NGOs, charities and other civil society organizations took on a larger role for providing for the needs of the poor, in many cases serving to individualize and depoliticize social problems. This cast poverty and unemployment as technical, rather than political, problems, requiring technical or managerial solutions in the manner of those offered by institutions such as the World Bank, and limiting what was considered the legitimate field of intervention for social movements (Ferguson 2007). The discourse of neoliberalism also serves as a limit on the imagination, making alternatives seem impossible and politics is cast as technical management of what exists rather than the struggle over the creation of something new (Hupert 2011).

Neoliberalism, in this sense, is more than a set of economic policies, more than a transformation in regimes of governance, but also must be analyzed in terms of the production of subjectivity. As discussed in Chapter Two, neoliberalism involves an external geographic expansion as well as an internalization of capitalist relations, in the form of the emergence of a self-governing, entrepreneurial self, in which a competitive capitalist logic spreads to all areas of life. Drawing on Foucault, Dardot and Laval also seek to understand neoliberalism as more than purely destructive, as more than the lack of state intervention in the economy, arguing that neoliberalism is:

productive of certain kinds of social relations, certain ways of living, certain subjectivities.
This norm enjoins everyone to live in a world of generalized competition; it calls upon wage-earning classes and populations to engage in economic struggle against one another; it aligns social relations with the model of the market; it promotes the justification of ever greater inequalities; it even transforms the individual, now called on to conceive and conduct him- or herself as an enterprise. (2013, 3).

They describe neoliberalism primarily as a rationality (“the rationality of contemporary capitalism”) defined by “the generalization of competition as a behavioral norm and of the enterprise as a model of subjectivation” (ibid. 4). This rationality entails subjecting all parts of life and social relations to economic calculation, which has important implications for the struggle against neoliberalism as well. Understanding neoliberalism as a rationality goes beyond either a focus on the ideology or theory behind neoliberalism or the specific economic policies implemented in different places and times. It points to the subjective transformations that the MTDs highlight in their own analyses and allows us to see how neoliberalism persists despite the discrediting of its ideological premises and the proclaimed “return of the state” (Gago 2015; Gago and Mezzadra 2015).

Colectivo Situaciones, discusses the changes in subjectivity as a transformation from a political subjectivity of the citizen to one of a consumer:

The dominant subjectivity is no longer political subjectivity, but that of the consumer-customer. Inside this form of domination new modalities of resistance merge that are not strictly 'political' in the sense that they do not have as a priority resistance against a central state, but their preoccupations expand and become heterogeneous simultaneously with the disarticulation of the representations of the Fordist world of work. The challenge of contemporary struggles is to inquire into the forms of subjectification that are possible in market conditions. (2012, 26).

In this new form of citizenship, identity and belonging are based more on consumption than on work; market relations and capitalist economic logic invade all areas of life, affecting how people calculate decisions and relate to one another.

León Rozitchner directly links the emergence of a neoliberal subjectivity to the residues
of terror left by the dictatorship:

What the genocide accomplished was the destruction of the social fabric in order to impose, by terror, only one form of sociability. As long as it was not possible to act without putting one's life at risk, the only thing that could appear on the debris of this terror was neoliberal market economics, which requires the dispersion of the subjects and reduces human bonds to the categories of buyer and seller. (2012, 49)

Here Rozitchner highlights the individualist neoliberal subjectivity, the lack of collective and community bonds. This goes hand in hand with feelings of fear, guilt, mistrust, and competition, as social safety nets fall apart and individuals increasingly feel that they can only rely on themselves. When looking at the emergence of this subjectivity, it is important to remember the violence that was and continues to be necessary to tear apart these social bonds so that individuals are left feeling isolated and so that relations of collaboration are replaced with competition.

Rozitchner links neoliberalism and the lack of resistance to it in the 1980s and early '90s to a deeper subjective problem at the heart of Argentina's democracy:

The current democracy was opened from terror, not from desire. Ours then, is a terrorized democracy: it emerged from defeat in war. It is not one that we won from inside, but that they lost outside [...] Ours is still a 'terrorized democracy;' its originary law, that of terror and weapons, is still in force as an internalized law inside of each citizen. (2011, 25).

Thus, for Rozitchner, the fact that Argentina was “handed” its democracy, that it was not something movements won through struggle but rather that the military government lost with its defeat in the Malvinas, has had profound and long-lasting subjective effects on the Argentine population. Following Rozitchner, one of the effects of the dictatorship and the transition to democracy, as well as the deep traces left from Peronism, was to limit the popular capacity to intervene in public affairs, through these subjective effects that made it difficult for people to recognize their own political power and instead trust in outside intervention or the rule of a leader.
The MTDs also emphasize the relationship between subjectivity and contemporary capitalism, highlighting the specific subjectivity of neoliberalism in their analyses and attempting to create new subjectivities in their practices. The MTD Solano characterizes this new subjectivity in terms of maximized individualism, the destruction of social ties outside of capitalist logics and an attitude of “each person for themselves.” They focus on the ways in which neoliberalism acts on desires, producing new desires linked to increased consumption and belief in the “promise of capitalism” (Colectivo Situaciones and the MTD Solano 2002). The MTD La Matanza highlights how individualism has replaced any notion of the collective and how “consumer culture” has replaced the “culture of work” (Flores 2005). What both groups are pointing to here is how economic relations have thoroughly saturated social relations, how economic interests and rationality have overtaken other forms of calculation and rationality. This focus on subjectivity points to an important element of the MTDs’ forms of organization, which emphasize internal processes of direct democracy and horizontalism in order to create new social relations within the group.

**Emergence of New Social Subjects in Resistance to Neoliberalism**

It was out of this neoliberal context, after much of the organized Left had been dismantled from repression or merely proven itself ineffective in the face of changing political and economic conditions, that new social movements emerged in the 1990s. These movements challenged the continued legacy of the dictatorship and the supposed consensus around neoliberal reforms, as well as the dominant modes of political engagement. Segments of the population that had traditionally been excluded from formal politics, such as women, youth, migrants, and the unemployed, were at the forefront of this new wave of mobilizations. Rather than merely seek inclusion through traditional means, these sectors sought to create new spaces
and forms of political participation. These new forms of political organization were premised on practices of horizontality and direct democracy, rejecting the hierarchical and representative forms of traditional politics that contributed to the exclusion of so many people. These new practices were based on a different understanding of the political, which decentered the state as the privileged site of political decision-making, and attempted to create methods for broader political intervention by all in the matters that affected them.

**Human Rights Organizations**

One of the first groups to break through the inertia of the neoliberal period (and thereby serving as an inspiration for other groups) was HIJOS (*Hijos y Hijas por la Justicia y contra el Olvido y el Silencio*, Sons and Daughters for Justice and against Forgetting and Silence) made up of the sons and daughters of activists of the 1970s who had been tortured, killed or forced into exile. HIJOS invented a new form of public protest: the *escrache*, a protest outside of the house or workplace of someone responsible for torture and murder under the dictatorship, aiming to call out their continued role in society and impunity for their crimes. By holding taking place around the city, in front of people's homes, the spatial practice of the *escraches* physically decentered the state from the debate around justice. This spatial dislocation was part of a deeper shift towards a new way of doing politics. The escraches consisted of festivals, incorporating music and theater; carnival music and bands, mock trials condemning the speakers, soccer games against the IMF, and a proliferation of different types of artistic interventions.

Beyond the tactic of the *escrache*, HIJOS showed itself to be a new way of doing politics and a new form of political organization. Although often collaborating with Leftist political parties and trade unions, HIJOS retained its independence from them in terms of decision-

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11 In *Lunfardo*, the word *escrache* means to bring to light what has was hidden, to unveil what power hides (Grupo de Arte Callejero 2009, 55).
making and planning actions, setting an important precedent for other autonomous movements. Internally, HIJOS organized with assemblies, making decisions through direct democracy in an effort not to reproduce dominant hierarchies in their own practice. As the *Grupo de Arte Callejero* (Street Art Group, GAC), a group of street artists that participated in organizing the escraches along with HIJOS, reflects:

> The Mesa de Escrache [Escrache Organizing Committee] starts from an idea of equality and its practice points to a social condemnation that appeals to the participation of society as a whole, oriented toward an encounter between the feeling and desire for a just society. Its organizational structure is reflected in each weekly meeting; a round table where opinions and discussions come together, decisions being made through consensus, with a clear tendency to horizontalism. (2009, 59).

This commitment to internal democracy and non-hierarchical forms of organizing would be replicated in different movements across Argentina in the '90s and early 2000s, including the movements of unemployed workers.

The escraches evolved to become more than media spectacles, calling out crimes that had been committed and not punished, but also a mode of performing popular justice. The escraches made no demands on the Menem government, the government that had already showed which side it was on, but, knowing that justice would not come from the state, enacted its own justice. HIJOS conducted neighborhood meetings and territorial organizing, which served as an alternative to a state-sponsored trial, allowing for justice to be directly decided by the people affected by the crimes and terror of the dictatorship. In this sense, escraches are a form of politics that does not make demands on the state but rather enacts its own justice in the here and now. According to Colectivo Situaciones:

> The escraches of HIJOS produced a concrete apparatus for the production of popular justice that gives up on representative justice and, by contrast, turns to the neighbors, the memory of the survivors, and the young people that do not accept any complicity with those who participated in the genocide. (2012, 148).
In other words, the escraches were fundamentally a non-state-centric and non-representational form of politics.

The escraches demonstrated a different understanding of justice understood as a *condena social*, based on enacting justice in the present rather than institutions of justice. Here justice is a social and collective act, something that comes from below and from struggle, rather than something that is decided from above. According to the Grupo de Arte Callejero:

> There is a powerful idea that promoted by the escraches, an idea of justice that overflows the representation of legal justice: it is a justice that people build day by day, through rejecting the genocider in the neighborhood, reappropriating politics and reflecting on problematics of the present. (2009: 59).

Beyond their effects in bringing media attention to the continued impunity of the architects of genocide, participants saw the escraches as working fundamentally on the level of subjectivity, creating a new collective subject that not only fought for justice but lived justice as a daily practice. The GAC explains their understanding of justice: “Justice is a transformation: it is the collective present of a subjective transformation, as the process of construction of a new body fighting against the social alienation of contemporary capitalism” (ibid., 63). In other words, the escraches must be understood as more than a tactic for demanding justice but as part of a larger political process aiming to produce new social relations and subjectivities.

**Unemployed Workers' Movements**

The unemployed also began organizing independently and developing a non-state-centric politics during the mid-1990s. While the escraches were mainly concentrated in urban centers and involved mostly middle class activists, the piquetero movement consisted of people who were traditionally excluded from formal politics, including the unemployed, women, youth and migrants. This composition enabled the movement not only to include more people, but also to
create new ways of doing politics that challenged the exclusionary forms of traditional politics that often ended up reproducing hierarchy and oppression. Like the escraches of HIJOS, the new forms of politics developed by the piquetero movement decentered the state as the site of political power and instead sought to create their own autonomous counter-power. This counter-power is based in building organizations and practices that allow people to collectively intervene in the matters that affect them and meet the conditions for their material reproduction, as well as producing new values, subjectivities and social relations. Autonomy, here, is understood as fleeing not only the institutions of the state, but also, the state's logic that limits the realm of what is considered legitimate political intervention.

To begin, I must reiterate that it is impossible to speak of one *piquetero movement*: there was never a centralized, unified movement of the unemployed, but from its beginning consisted of many different organizations with important ideological and practical differences. Groups of unemployed people began mobilizing around the country in 1996, first in small towns in the countryside, and then in major urban centers, nearly simultaneously, without any centralized body to coordinate actions or to put down a strict party line. It was, rather, the practice of the *piquete* that spread across the country as local movements of the unemployed formed in different places, sometimes joining or allying themselves with broader political organizations, and other times remaining formally autonomous. In most cases, these movements formed strong organizations on the local (neighborhood or municipal) scale, while developing a more networked or rhizomatic set of shifting relations between different organizations on a larger geographic scale.

*Colectivo Situaciones,* highlights the heterogeneity of the piquetero movement and the impossibility of unifying it:
As the ‘piqueteros’ began to speak out, it became possible to see the extent to which ‘piqueterismo’ was grouping a multiple and heterogeneous variety of social practices. At the same time there were also attempts to unite the entire, essentially multiple under a homogenizing and institutionalizing pretense. All these attempts have failed. The piquetero movement is a true movement of movements. As such it has produced an authentic revolution in the collective perception about the popular capacities to create new forms of social and political intervention. (2012: 97).

Thus, the piqueteros challenged the idea that a strong, centralized, unified organization is necessary to be politically successful and demonstrated that this more rhizomatic form of organization was actually much more suitable in the current moment. This heterogeneity reflects the diversity of the unemployed themselves, as discussed in the previous two chapters, diversity in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity, but also in terms of experiences and expectations of work, political histories and subjectivities.

While certain groups, those more influenced by a traditional labor organizing model did maintain that unity would be necessary, those groups ultimately failed in their attempts to establish a long-lasting unified body representing all the piquetero groups. Various attempts to unite different piquetero groups into a national body did not manage to last very long, although the two “Piquetero Congresses” held in the late 1990s and early 2000s were important for the overall development of the movement. Additionally, various, usually regional, “blocks” or “coordinators” were created, bringing together piquetero groups with similar ideological frameworks, lasting for different amounts of time and with varying effects. Over time, some political parties and trade unions, recognizing the political potential of the unemployed, attempted to either incorporate already existing organizations of the unemployed into their structures or started their own unemployed wing to organize the unemployed along their own lines.

Colectivo Situaciones, originally writing in 2002, divides the piquetero organizations
according to how they conceptualize political change, looking at two general positions that emerged at the National Piquetero Congress in 2001. On the one hand, the more hierarchical and structured organizations, often affiliated with political parties, such as the *Federación Tierra y Vivienda* (Land and Housing Federation, FTV) (connected to the CTA), the *Corriente Clasista Combativa* (affiliated with the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party), the *Polo Obrero* (affiliated with the Trotskyist Workers' Party), and the *Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez*. Colectivo Situaciones characterizes these organizations as those whose:

> Thought derives its premises from terms such as 'globality,’ 'socio-economic structure,' and 'conjuncture'. Their way of thinking is constructed in terms of 'inclusion/exclusion.' Their positions are not homogeneous. They are crossed by the traditional axis of 'reform or revolution.' (2012: 97).

These organizations, for the most part, think of politics and emancipation in state-centric terms, in terms of taking state power or occupying state institutions in order to bring about social change. On the other hand, Colectivo Situaciones identifies an autonomous wing of the piquetero movement, including the *Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón*, the MTD Solano, and others, which is:

> no less heterogeneous [...] In their thinking, these social practices assume, as both condition and term of their elaboration, the bonds that constitute the materiality of their experience. In this way they subtract themselves from the classical terms of the debate between reform and revolution. The characteristic of this operation is self-affirmation and practices of counterpower. (2012: 97-8).

These organizations are explicitly uninterested in taking state power, and instead focus their energy on creating forms of “popular power” or “counter-power;” they refuse representational politics and are committed to internal practices of direct democracy and horizontality. They refuse to let their politics be defined by terms and debates set by others (e.g., reform versus revolution), and instead develop their own concepts and ways of evaluating their struggles. The new forms of organization and understanding of the political created by these organizations
deeply influenced the entire political scene in Argentina and set the stage for the 2001 uprising.

**Re-theorizing Power and Enacting Counter-Power**

One of the main characteristics that sets the autonomous wing of the piquetero movement apart from other organizations of the unemployed is its insistence on *not taking power*. In other words, the autonomous movements do not want to take over the institutions of the state, either through reformist or revolutionary means, nor do they want to become a new state. This insistence on not taking power, on not wanting to occupy the position of the state, comes with different visions of alternative forms of power that range from seeking to build alternative institutions and forms of power to a rejection of power or anti-power. What these different concepts of power share is, on the one hand, the awareness that power does not lie exclusively with the nation-state (this does not mean that the nation-state has become irrelevant or that power solely resides in supranational bodies, but that power is dispersed and distributed throughout the social field), and, on the other hand, the recognition that the profound change that these movements are seeking cannot be imposed from above or through the same forms of politics as have been tried in the past. New forms of political and social organization, that create new values and subjectivities, are fundamental for creating movements capable of opposing capitalism and creating a new society.

Counter-power, in this case, then is an autonomous power developed from below that does not seek to become a centralized, hegemonic power. Colectivo Situaciones describes how the concept of counter-power changes the very idea of what is considered politics:

*Counter-power does not become central power. There is no longer a happy ending, nor a definitive social – state – form, at the end of the path. But nor is there failure or collapse, but rather more or less luminous moments, exhaustion of the hypotheses that allow us to work inside of one epoch and the emergence of other new ones. Effectively, if politics exists as a separated activity that has to do with the issues of management of central power, then what*
do we call the forms in which men and women play out our creative capacity of

Following the lead of the movements emerging in Argentina at that moment, Colectivo
Situaciones argues for understanding politics not in the limited sense of the management of the
existing from a site of central power. Instead, they argue, the political must be thought of in
terms of the development of human capacities and the creation of new forms of life.

Negri, in conversation with Colectivo Situaciones, describes three elements of counter-
power, “resistance against the old power, insurrection, and constituent potencia of a new power”
(Colectivo Situaciones and Negri 2001, 83). According to Negri, constituent power:

is the power (potencia) to give form to the innovation that resistance and insurrection have
produced; and to give them a historically adequate, new, teleologically effective form. If
insurrection pushes resistance to transform itself into innovation (and therefore represents the
disruptive productivity of living labor), constituent power gives form to that expression (it
accumulates the mass power (potencia) of living labor in a new project of life, in a new
potential for civilization). And if insurrection is a weapon that destroys the enemy’s forms of
life, constituent power is the force that positively organizes new forms of life and of
happiness of the masses. (Ibid., 84).

Negri concludes that in order for constituent power to be effective it must be “consistently
implemented in an irreversible process of transformation of forms of life and affirmation of
desires of liberation” (ibid., 85). This relationship between counter-power and forms of life is
essential: in order to be effective, counter-power must not only oppose the dominant power, but
also create alternative forms of life. At the same time, opposition and insurrection are necessary
to create new forms of life since capitalism will not pacifically allow alternatives to co-exist.

Colectivo Situaciones, looking at the experience of the MTD Solano, describes their
understanding of counter-power:

It is the capacity to point directly at sociability, values and how people resolve all the
problems of life. Honestly, we have always thought that a concrete counter-power is not a
political force but a power (potencia) of the production of values, modes of existence, better
than those that capitalism produces in situation. (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano

142
Like Negri, they emphasize the importance of creating different “modes of existence,” as well as different values and social relationships, understanding that these are what allow capitalism to be reproduced. The MTD Solano describes how it sees counter-power enacted in its own struggle:

There have been several discussion meetings in the neighborhoods, and what comes out from the compañeros is a bit of the confirmation that the commitment to a movement that not only struggles over economic and subsistence issues, but that we are also convinced that this is the seed of a new society, where we are going to go beyond all of the bullshit that we have in our heads, selfishness, etc. And there the fact comes out strongly that today we are not interested in taking power, nor in disputing political power, but rather starting to live like we have wished to for a long time. And that is now; we are not going to have to wait for a revolution, nor great transformations in the world, but that we can go ahead and start living and applying this [...] It is very important to know that it is not about changing the municipal government, or the police chief, among other things, but that that these things exist today as things that we don't want, that we refuse, that we reject. We don't want to substitute anything for this system, we want to construct something new. And that is what we are thinking, building. This is counter-power. (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002, 90).

For the MTD Solano, counter-power is not merely the power to resist the state and capital, but is based in the struggle to create something new, new social relations, new ways of life. This understanding of counter-power is behind the MTD's emphasis on creating non-hierarchical forms of decision-making within the organization, as well as their decision in 2002 to focus less on oppositional acts, such as piquetes, and instead concentrate their energy on developing alternatives within the territories they inhabit.

**Autonomy and the State**

This concept of counter-power is closely tied to how the MTDs understand autonomy. Autonomy, for most of the MTDs, does not consist in complete separation from the state either spatially or in financial terms, but in constructing an autonomous power that does not depend on the state or other institutions. In practical terms, autonomy refers to independence from political parties and labor unions, as well as government institutions and agencies. Sitrin discusses this
form of autonomy as “challenging 'power over' and creating 'power with' - sometimes using the state, but at the same time, against and beyond the state” (2012, 4). Colectivo Situaciones, on the other hand, emphasizes a meaning of autonomy as a form of situational thinking:

This capacity is what radical groups, such as the MTD of Solano, call *autonomy*: to think independently and according to the concrete situation. This implies knowing how to ignore the *extraneous urgencies* projected by media circuits and militant microclimates in order to reencounter themselves with their own capacities to understand and intervene. [...] Radicality is the effective capacity to revolutionize sociability by producing values that overcome the society of the individual. This option, in the case of the MTD of Solano, implies also an investigation into the forms of organization of the movement, the possibilities of practicing an alternative economy, the development of training programs, the type of relationship with the state administration, etcetera. (2012, 109).

Here autonomy has a material element in terms of creating an alternative economy that does not depend on capitalist institutions, as well as autonomous forms of thought and knowledge production, the autonomous creation of values and social relations. Autonomy is closely linked to investigation and knowledge production, to being able to think from one's own *situation*, in one's own terms and based on one's own objectives.

When thinking about autonomous movements in Latin America, the first that come to mind are usually the Zapatistas in Chiapas and then other indigenous or rural groups that have been able to create autonomous, self-governing communities, far from state power. In an urban setting, however, autonomy necessarily means something different. Ouviña defines “autonomous” MTDs as those that “start from a daily territorial construction of new social relations, that do not depend on any political party or trade union, and aspire to become increasingly autonomous from the state as well as the market” (2011, 257). Here autonomy is characterized by independence from political parties and labor unions, a commitment to territorial organizing, and, above all, as a process and a desire to live autonomously from the state and market. Ouviña however, emphasizes the differences between the urban movements in
Argentina and rural and indigenous movements in Chiapas and elsewhere, focusing on the
different space of the city: urban movements do not have their own geopolitical or linguistic
territory but spatially co-exist with other political actors, urban spaces are necessarily dependent
on rural spaces, making complete self-sufficiency impossible, and urban spaces are much more
heavily and intensely controlled by the state. Whereas the state could reasonably be considered
absent in many rural areas of Latin America, both materially in terms of providing goods and
services, and in symbolic terms, in urban settings the state's presence, even if it is primarily in
terms of policing and repression, is impossible to ignore, making some sort of relationship with
the state necessary. Despite these differences in settings, Ouviña does note important similarities
between the autonomous MTDs and experiences such as Zapatismo: direct action tactics, a
critique of vanguardism, a prefigurative and assembly-based dynamic, the creation of a new
socio-political institutionality, a territorial rootedness and reconstruction/defense of
communitarian ties, recuperation of public space in non-state terms, transformation of
subjectivity and counter-hegemonic vocation.

The MTDs emphasize that autonomy cannot be thought of a total self-sufficiency or
complete disengagement from the state; autonomy is not a fixed state nor something pure.
Alberto from the MTD Solano echoes this understanding of autonomy as a process, criticizing
any notion of political purity that would have them make their decisions based on abstract
notions of horizontality and autonomy removed from the material conditions of their territory
(MTD de Solano 2011, 197). Here autonomy is understood as a commitment to the situation,
which is always in flux and not as a clearly defined end goal. Autonomy is a refusal to let the
state and the market set the terms of the debate, to let them set the priorities for action; autonomy
it is the creation of new values and social relations beyond the state and market. In the words of
Neka Jara: “autonomy and horizontality are not lines, formulas or recipes, they are practices, forms of life. Autonomy is not an established thing, it is the modification of certain logics of life, of internal relations and external relations” (ibid., 195-196). Despite being labeled by outsiders as purely “autonomist,” various members of the MTD Solano question this characterization of their project, reiterating that autonomy is not a fixed state, but a process. Maba Jara reflects: “we think of autonomy as a type of permanent construction and discovery. But there were moments in which they treated us like we had already achieved autonomy, as if our lives were already totally autonomous” (ibid., 200).

Here political struggle is fundamentally thought of as a process, not defined by a pre-determined objective (in the short or long term), but rather by enacting new social relations in the present and combating the forces that would seek to make that impossible. As Spagnolo from the MTD Solano summarizes:

> Often it was important to work on the collective element than what we were producing. Making bread was not the end. In fact, it would have been cheaper to get things from a bakery or buy vegetables in the Central market, instead of making a garden. But the fact of being a collective that proposes an idea and goes about developing it, is extremely importantly for our mental health and the reconstruction of our sociability, which has been so broken by the processes of poverty. (MTD de Solano 2011, 201).

In this sense, the MTD's project has a prefigurative element as it aims to create new forms of living in the present, rather than focusing their energy on conquering an objective in the future. This prefigurative element, however, does not mean that they eschew the struggle against the larger structures of capitalism. As the concept of counter-power makes clear: their struggle must simultaneously resist capitalism and create new forms of life.

Other MTDs, however, have more literal understandings of autonomy. The MTD La Matanza, for example, defines autonomy as “independence from the state,” and herald their
policy of not receiving any state funding nor distributing welfare plans as the only true form of autonomy. According to Jorge Lasarte from the MTD La Matanza, the government subsidies “have as their goal domesticating, pacifying and transforming thousands of workers into clients of the current politics.” Therefore, the MTD opted not to distribute the Plan Trabajar benefits and not to accept other government subsidies for their projects. This position of not receiving state funds limits the organization's autonomy in other senses as they have turned to opposition political parties, NGOs and local businesses for funding. This funding comes with its own conditions, sometimes even more strict than those imposed by the federal and municipal governments, and also imposes its own rhythms and spatialities on the movements, often requiring members to travel outside their neighborhoods more and limiting the internal decision-making power of the movement. Despite these differences in their concept of autonomy and the relationship between movements and the state, the MTD La Matanza does still share some similarities with other MTDs with regards to their insistence on struggling for autonomy and the means to materially reproduce themselves independently from the state and capital.

While the MTD La Matanza's understanding of autonomy meant that they did not enter any formal relationship with the state nor receive any form of funding from the government, other piquetero organizations developed a range of different relationships to state institutions in the period before 2001. Piquetes demanding unemployment subsidies usually targeted local or provincial governments, those most likely to immediately respond to requests and where local movements were more able to exert political pressure. These piquetes often came into conflict with local political party apparatuses as well as union leadership, but in some cases were able to effectively collaborate with other organizations. A few events organized on a national scale would target the federal government, through marches in Buenos Aires or demands coming out
of the national piquetero congresses or regional coordinators. Piquetero organizations based closer to Buenos Aires were also more likely to target the national government in their demands based on geographic proximity and political responsiveness. On a more general level, the different piquetero organizations displayed opposition to Menem and the neoliberal project, often participating in large mobilizations against neoliberalism or specific trade agreements, and employing an anti-neoliberal rhetoric in their discourse. Once the piquetero movements were successful in winning unemployment benefits, a more complex relationship with the state began as organizations began distributing benefits and thus depending on the state to a certain degree. Despite the initial reluctance of certain movements of the unemployed to accept state subsidies, today, nearly all of the organizations, with the notable exception of the MTD La Matanza, have accepted one or another form of state subsidy or participated in one of the government funded work programs (although even the MTD La Matanza participated in managing a government funded micro-credit program for a few years).

Internal Organization: Direct Democracy and Horizontality

Internally the MTDs use forms of radical or direct democracy in order to directly produce new social relations within their organizations. Direct democracy implies a commitment to horizontality, challenging hierarchies within the organizations and tendencies for leaders to emerge. Decisions pertaining to all aspects of the group's functioning are made collectively in assemblies, in which all of the movements members' participate, usually without voting or resorting to delegation (Sitrin 2005). For example, during the piquetes, rather than sending delegates to negotiate with state representatives, protesters would demand that government officials come to the street where they could be negotiated with collectively (Chatterton 2005). Most MTDs have assemblies about once a week (sometimes more or less often giving specific
circumstances), where everyone in the movement is welcome to participate, and topics are
discussed and debated until consensus is reached. Consensus is more than a tool to be used to
coming to decisions in a group but also requires a change of attitude, challenging the neoliberal
capitalist subjectivity. For consensus to work, it cannot be about winning or competition,
participants must give up ideas of individual ownership over ideas or positions, in order to create
something new that is able to benefit the collective whole.

In general, the MTDs are permeated with a sense of openness and transparency and a
commitment to sharing knowledges and skills, which allows for this horizontality and direct
democracy to function. Both the MTD La Matanza and the MTD Solano The assemblies are part
of the larger struggle: they help produce the subjectivity necessary for participants to collectively
control other aspects of their lives and are part of an alternative project in and of themselves,
allowing for the production of social relations not constricted and controlled by capital. The
MTD Solano describes the assemblies as moments of “collective thought,” which serve not only
to collectively arrive at decisions but also to form new social relations and values, relationships
of friendship that are essential for maintaining the movement (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD
de Solano 2002, 46).

This commitment to creating new social relations, not determined by the market or
capital-labor relations, permeates all aspects of the MTDs’ organization as they take their
struggles beyond the workplace to the spaces of everyday life. Sitrin describes these experiences
as “everyday revolutions” referring to a wide-range of movements that emerged around the
period of 2001 in Argentina that prioritized the creation of new social relations in their struggles.
She describes this “revolution of the everyday” as a combination of: horizontality, self-
management, sustenance projects, territorial practices, changing social relationships, affective
politics, self-reflection, and autonomy (2012, 3–4). This recognition that politics takes place in the space of everyday activities, the refusal to acknowledge a separate realm of the political, to separate the political from the social, is key to understanding the MTDs. Politics is ultimately about social relations, the many social relations that make up our daily existence. Therefore, YSP’s school is a site of political intervention itself: the goal is not to create subjects that will one day be able to intervene in politics, training and education are not thought of as separate from politics but are political in and of themselves. The MTD’s health clinic aims not only to care for people in the community, ensuring healthy subjects that can participate in politics but is also seen as a form of political intervention itself.

Crisis and Insurrection

In 2001, Argentina’s neoliberal economy entered into crisis as the country was forced to default on its rising public debt. More than an economic crisis, however, 2001 was also, primarily, a political crisis. Zibechi understands 2001 as a crisis of the state, the culmination of a “process of progressive weakening of the state,” which began with Menem in the 1990s and reached its climax with De la Rúa (2011, 304). As more and more people saw that the state was unable to solve their problems, that power did not lie with the national state, they began rejecting state-centered politics and turned to different forms of self-organization, such as those already being experimented with by social movements such as the piqueteros and the new human rights movement. In this way, the protests of December 2001 can be seen as a collective “No,” a refusal not only of neoliberal economic and social policies but also of the illusion of representative democracy.

In early December, in response to a run on the banks after months of growing economic instability, the government effectively froze banks accounts, leaving many middle class people
unable to access their savings. In response to this freeze on their bank accounts, as well as the years of increasing inflation, political corruption and general economic instability, people began taking the streets in large numbers. These more or less spontaneous mobilizations of the middle class joined with the social movements, such as the piqueteros and HIJOS, that had been organizing for years, in major protests in cities across Argentina. Despite the government's declaration of a state of emergency, protesters filled the streets for two consecutive days of massive protests on December 19th and 20th, chanting, “que se vayan todos/que no quede ni uno solo” (they all must go, not one can stay). Despite heavy repression, these protests were successful in driving President de la Rua out of office, as well as bringing down four successive interim governments.

The insurrection in 2001 was marked by a profound heterogeneity of participants, in terms of class, ethnicity, gender and age, as well as prior political experience and ideological commitments. No organization called or even predicted the spontaneous mobilization, yet many human rights organizations, labor unions, Leftist political parties, movements of the unemployed, student and cultural organizations participated. These organized groups of people participated alongside individuals not belonging to any political or social organization, filling the city streets, parks and plazas, eventually fighting to take control of the Plaza de Mayo. Each group protested in their own way: political parties marching in orderly lines while groups of young anarchists fought off the police a few blocks away. Neighbors took the streets in small groups, banging pots and pans, calling for the government to step down, converging on city corners and plazas without any prior call or organization. Barrientos and Isaía describe the scene:

Each person, from their place, did what they could, and what their horizon, their relationships, their history, and their possibilities allowed or directed them to do. Each group demonstrated as it could, it those circumstances of social fragmentation. In the streets, you
would meet up with a relative, not because you had planned the meeting, but because each person, from their place, from their own motivations, without any plan, without agreeing upon anything with anyone, went out onto the street and protested. There was a sort of synchronization. It's true, there were many groups, more or less organized, and people that exploded, they became fed up, and went out to break with history. (2011, 20).

It was this decentralized, non-hierarchical mixture of different forms of organization with spontaneous protests that marked the 2001 rebellion and that would continue to mark the deepening mass political participation for years to come.

León Rozitchner highlights the importance of those December protests in terms of subjectivity and the creation of new social relations:

It seems, however, as if that which kept us separate was broken after the 19th and 20th. Suddenly, something different happened: breaking the crust, going out, encountering others, recognizing ourselves in the common suffering, and thus being able to activate the powers of our bodies to the extent that we began to feel that we could build a common powerful body. collective encounters are, precisely, moments in which the corporeal presence of the other gives me the necessary strength so that I can break the mark that terror left in me, at the same time that I help the other to do so with my presence. We are witnessing how the expression of a rupture of an unconscious and subterranean process that previously limited us become visible and emerge in social reality. (2012: 49)

The individualist, neoliberal subjectivity was challenged on a massive scale when people took to the streets, putting their bodies in danger but also beginning to engage in collective actions with others. These encounters would serve as the basis for the neighborhood assembly movement which emerged in Buenos Aires and other cities in the following months, as well as many other common projects that would allow people to survive the crisis.

Other participants in those protests also focus on the affective qualities, qualities not experienced in previous protests. Scolnik from Colectivo Situaciones describes the atmosphere on the night of December 19th: “I remember the faces of happiness on everyone. It was not a dark moment, it was a total party: people banging pots, everyone walking and singing” (Colectivo Situaciones 2011, 321). Sztulwark continues, “More than the quantity of people, it was the
insurrectional character that impressed me. The chaotic character in the city and the idea that this was not governable or controllable. Nobody was out in front, not Hebe de Bonafini, nor Víctor de Gennarao, not anyone” (ibid.). Andrés Braconi highlights the interplay between spontaneity and organization: “It was a spontaneous, democratic organization, nobody gave orders to anyone else. But, at the same time, it was in dialogue with more recent forms of organization, such as the piquete and the escrache, for example” (ibid). Gago emphasizes the decision not to “take power”: “I was very moved by the indifference toward the Casa Rosada, rather than a possible attempt to take it over. It would have only been a deception to enter in there and see that there wasn’t anything anywhere that could give us power” (ibid.). What sticks in everyone's minds is the festive nature of the protests, as well as their uncontrollable and unpredictable qualities: the insurrection was a moment when people discovered that together they were capable of defying the government and that there could be a joy in doing so.

Neka Jara, from the MTD Solano describes the meaning of the December protests for her:

The 19th and 20th meant putting on center stage the idea of not being able to expect anything from that type of representation. There was that euphoria of finding one another in the plazas, on the streets, on the corners. Suddenly, the streets became the fundamental arteries of all that social fabric, of that encounter. (MTD de Solano 2011, 193).

Maba Jara, also from the MTD Solano, describes the aftermath of those insurrectional days:

Only a few days later did we realize that we had not only overthrown a government but also a form of governing and of doing politics, or of believing that that was doing politics. There we said that the moment had arrived to start to take charge of politics and the projects, to think our own lives from ourselves. (Ibid.)

In other words, the rebellion was not only a rejection of a particular economic order, of neoliberalism, but also an entire way of doing politics and limitations on what was considered the legitimate field of political struggle and intervention. At the same time, the protests served as an opening for new forms of political and social organization.
One of the most important characteristics of the December protests was their refusal of representation and centralized organization:

The movement of the 19th and 20th dispensed with all kinds of centralized organization. It was not present in the call to assemble nor was it in the organization of the events. Nor was there any at a later moment, at the time of interpreting them. This condition, which in other times would have been lived as a lack, manifested itself as an achievement precisely because this absence was not spontaneous. There was a multitudinous and sustained rejection of every organization that intended to represent, symbolize, and hegemonize street activity. In all these senses, the popular intellect overcame the intellectual previsions and political strategies... The multitude disorganized the efficacy of the repression that the government had announced with the explicit goal of controlling the national territory. The neutralization of the power (potencias) of the state on the part of a multiple reaction was possible precisely because there was not a central call to assemble and a central organization. (Colectivo Situaciones 2012, 47).

The rejection of centralized power can be seen as much in the demand made by the uprising ("they all must go") as in the very form that the protests themselves took: non-centralized, non-hierarchical and not seeking unity but rather valuing diversity: a form of protest corresponding to the neoliberal moment and seeking to avoid the mistakes of earlier movements that ended up reproducing oppressive relations within their own structures. The December protests overflowed any attempt to control or corral them, with small groups making their own decisions of where to go, what to target and how violent to become. Colectivo Situaciones describes the protests of the December 19th and 20th in terms of multiple collective becomings:

There were no individual protagonists: every representational situation was de-instituted. A practical and effective de-institution, animated by the presence of a multitude of bodies of men and women, and extended later in the 'all of them must go, not a single one should remain.'[...] These demonstrations had abandoned certainties with respect to a promising future. The presence of the multitude in the streets did not extend the spirit of the 1970s. These were not insurgent masses conquering their future under the socialist promise of a better life. The movement of the 19th and 20th does not draw its sense from the future but from the present: its affirmation cannot be read in terms of programs and proposals about what the Argentina of the future ought to be like... Consequently, there was not a senseless dispersion, but an experience of the multiple, an opening towards new and active becomings. In sum, the insurrection could not be defined by any of the lacks that are attributed to it. Its plenitude consisted in the conviction with which the social body unfolded as a multiple, and the symbolic world constructing its own history. (2012, 48).
Colectivo Situaciones continues, this process of de-institution "does not imply an a-politics: to renounce support to a representative (sovereign) politics is the condition – and the premise – of situational thinking and a series of practices whose meanings are no longer demanded from the state" (ibid., 52-3).

Lewkowicz defines the change that took place that December in terms of the emergence of a postmodern, post-state subjectivity and mode of thinking in the country. The state was decentered as the primary site not only of political power, but also, perhaps more importantly, of identification, which would allow for the emergence of a new political subjectivity. Lewkowicz describes this subjectivity in terms of a new collective body, a new we, based in the assemblies:

In December 2001 and its aftermaths, we appears as a primordial subject. We cannot be decomposed in simple parts; it is not a composite of me and you, me and her, me and them; nor is it a name summarizing a class, but it is directly us. It is worthwhile postulating that we is a current concept in thought, but not only a concept, rather also a current subject of thought. This we was spontaneously – and very actively – invented in that very strange and precarious dispositif of the assemblies in the plazas and street corners of the cities. They were not attended by previously constituted groups; nor were they institutional assemblies defined by previous belongings. Without warning, the assembly is those who go to the assembly: and the assembly thinks – when it thinks – through a mechanism that I will try to describe later. Both features – that it is only its meeting, that it thinks, are very foreign to our assembly customs. These assemblies come together only to think. Nothing more and nothing less. They do not have a pre-constructed apparatus of management capable of executing effective decisions but rather, in principle, only the capacity to manage what that collective can think. They do not take power; they configure what they can. (2004, 221).

It was the emergence of this new collective subject that became the lasting mark of the 2001 insurrection.

While the protests of December 19th and 20th were not called for nor organized or even anticipated by the piquetero organizations (nor anyone else), it was their struggle that helped set the stage for the multitudinous protests that gripped the country. The piquetero organizations and the other movements that emerged in the mid-1990s were essential in starting to overcome the impotency and individualism that characterize neoliberal subjectivity by showing that mass
mobilization and collective organizing were not only possible but also able to have concrete effects, such as winning welfare benefits and territorial control for the organizations of the unemployed. The piqueteros had stood up to state repression for many years already, defying the military police in piquetes through massive participation of large segments of the population, showing that the government no longer held the upper hand. In this way, they marked the beginning of the end of the legacy of dictatorship through challenging the culture of fear that still gripped the country and left much of the population afraid to publicly express dissent. The MTDs’ ways of organizing, without a centralized hierarchy and privileging internal practices of democratic decision-making greatly influenced the December uprising which adopted a similar form and led to a proliferation of practices of direct democracy rather than the formation of a unified representative body. Additionally, the MTDs’ focus on creating new forms of life and alternative economic practices that would allow them to survive without waged employment then began to spread to the middle classes as more and more people felt the effects of the economic crisis. Therefore, while the 2001 insurrection involved a much larger segment of the population than the movements of the unemployed, the following period saw a diffusion of many elements of the piquetero struggle across the population as a whole.

In the weeks following December 19th and 20th, public protests forced one and another interim president out of office. There was, however, no attempt to “storm” the Casa Rosada by the movements, they were not interested in occupying this centralized place of power, but rather returned to their neighborhoods to construct something new. With all faith in the representational political system lost, a new climate of social experimentation took hold in the country – as the government and financial sectors collapsed, people invented new ways of governing themselves and fulfilling their needs. These were usually informally organized at first, neighbors coming
together to help one another out, but soon took on more concrete forms of organization and
spread throughout the country. Barter clubs and alternative currency markets created networks of
exchange not based on a state-backed currency, but rather on face-to-face relations and the trust
they generated. These barter clubs quickly expanded into two different nationwide alternative
currency networks in which at least 200,000 people participated during the height of the crisis
(North 2005). In urban centers, neighbors came together in assemblies to start discussing and
then trying to directly solve the problems facing their neighborhoods. Many of these assemblies
started soup kitchens or social centers, as well as regularly meeting in public spaces to talk about
the political and economic situation. When owners attempted to shut down their factories,
workers took them over and began to collectively them themselves, growing into a movement of
hundreds of “recuperated factories” (Lavaca Collective 2007).

The period between 2001 and 2003 was a moment of intense political innovation. Not
only did thousands of people take the streets and overthrow a government but they also
experimented with different ways of organizing themselves and developed different ways of
understanding political and social change, from the neighborhood assemblies and barter
networks to the recuperated factories and alternative economic practices of the organizations of
the unemployed. With the state in complete disarray and clearly unable to provide for the needs
of the population, these different movements began directly organizing to provide for people's
needs through food banks, community kitchens, health services, and educational and cultural
activities. These were practices that the poor and unemployed had already experimented with in
previous years what was remarkable about the moment of crisis was that these activities became
widespread across the population as a whole, including much of the former middle class. These
alternative practices did more than allow people to subsist during the period of crisis but were
also a different form of political intervention. Politics in this case is not seen as something that happens on an abstract level or in debates between politicians but is seen in the everyday actions of people, in creating new social relations and forms of life.

Sztulwark synthesizes the political importance of these different political experiments and how they embody a new form of politics:

The bottom line is that people went from no being able to struggle to being able to do so, because there wasn't a model. That was important, because it showed that one could take charge of his or her life, of collective struggles, and of proposing what had to be proposed, without having the idea that there was a socialist model – or any model – that was going to unify everyone, and that someone in some moment was going to take responsibility there. That allowed for taking charge of things in a more intense way that previous forms of politicization where there very clearly was delegation or the idea that in the future a large number of things would be resolved that in the present had to be postponed. Suddenly, you had to take responsibility for things that had to do with daily life and that were fully included in the form of politicization; it wasn't that politics was on one side and everything else on the other side. (Colectivo Situaciones 2011, 318).

The importance of 2001, thus, lies in this experimentation outside of the formal political sphere, in forms of social organization, the new modes of organizing that the movements developed, and the alternative forms of social reproduction. These forms of organization do not differentiate between “the political” and “the social,” the separation of a distinct political sphere and the delegation of political decisions to others. Instead, politics lies precisely in the realm of everyday life, in meeting material needs and creating social relations, values and subjectivities. The power of the 2001-era movements comes from their capacity to engage in politics on this sphere and transform daily life for so much of the Argentine population.

**Return of the State? New Governmentality**

This period of intense political innovation lost much of its momentum with the election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003. However, it was the movements and mobilizations of the previous two years that were responsible for bringing Kirchner to power and thus forced Kirchner to
recognize them as an important political force. Therefore, we can see the Kirchner government as the beginning of a new form of governance and new relations between the state and social movements in response to the 2001 rebellion. Néstor Kirchner began his presidency by paying off the majority of the country's debt to the IMF, thus relieving the country of the demands of structural adjustment considered responsible for the 2001 crisis. In place of these policies, Kirchner and later Fernández de Kirchner increased state spending on social welfare and public infrastructure and began re-nationalizing services and industries, in what some have termed the neo-developmentalist state. The Kirchner governments have actively taken up the discourses and demands of different social movements, especially the human rights movements, as well as a general anti-neoliberal discourse. Overall, it is clear that the Kirchner state has attempted to incorporate many of the innovative and creative elements of the 2001-era movements and derives much of its energy from them, while at the same time attempting to pacify and neutralize the most radical and rebellious sectors so that they no longer pose a threat to governance.

The Kirchner government presents itself with a certain discourse of the “return of the State,” in opposition both to the diminished role of the national state during the neoliberalism of the 1990s and to the chaos that characterized the 2001 rebellion. According to this narrative, neoliberalism implied a weak state and therefore a non-neoliberal regime implies a strong, centralized state, as symbolized by paying off external debt and renationalizing certain industries. For the government, the use of this discourse does the work of erasing the history of the movements of the '90s and the experience of 2001, to return to a classic conception of politics, with clear divisions between friends and enemies (Hupert 2011). It recenters politics around the state, effectively making invisible any non-state-centered forms of politics. The innovations of the 2001 moment are lost, as they are coded “anarchic” or “pre-political,” as
opposed to “real politics,” and no longer considered appropriate in the current political context.

Despite what would appear on the surface as the return to normalcy and political and economic stability in Argentina, there are elements of the 2001 uprising and the new form of politics it brought to light that are irreversible. That is, they left profound marks on the social body that do not disappear even with the return of an elected representative government and economic stability. In other words, there are traces of the crisis that still exist in the current moment, despite the rhetoric of the government and many social movements that the crisis has been overcome. Indeed, the “return to normalcy” should not be read as a return to the past. The 2001 uprising fundamentally transformed the relationship between social movements and the state, causing a new form of governmentality to emerge that does not exactly replicate the neoliberal governmentality of the 1990s. These lasting effects of 2001 can be seen in terms of subjectivity, forms of political organization, and the relationship between movements and the state. While the Kirchner state has attempted to capture and harness this energy, incorporating it into its own governmental strategies in various ways, the insurrectional energy always overflows and exceeds those attempts at capture (Colectivo Situaciones 2014).

In opposition to the return of the state discourse, Hupert (2011) speaks of a “postnational” state, different from the nation-state, where government is not based on a logic of representation, but rather on one of management. This form of government recognizes that a post-Fordist, heterogeneous population cannot be molded into a unitary body nor can it be represented through traditional liberal democratic means. The state no longer operates through permanent, stable institutions but through a form of ad-hoc institutionality, constantly reinventing itself in response to different political pressures. Gago, et. al. call for us to abandon a “metaphysical” approach to understanding the state, which gives it a fixed and unchanging essence and propose a concept of
“open institutions” (2012). This is a form of government that recognizes the power of movements and seeks to capture and control it.

Colectivo Situaciones identifies five ways through which the new modes of governance regulate the production of subjectivity: 1) through the complex and sometimes contradictory handling of social movements going from recognition to direct confrontation; 2) “symbolic centralization of state action and dispersion of collective action;” 3) “knowledge production as a form of government,” primarily through incorporating the knowledges of social movements; 4) a new security policy based on these knowledges and biopolitical control through the distribution of benefit packages; and, 5) “social benefit packages as producers of a new form of citizenship” based on consumption more than work (2014). It is through these different forms of incorporation that the government is able to capture and make use of many of the innovations of the 2001-era movements, while also developing new ways of controlling and managing rebellious populations. This incorporation goes well beyond bringing individual activists and organizations into the government or Peronist party agenda, but also includes adopting the forms of social organization and knowledges developed by the movements throughout the struggle against neoliberalism and the crisis.

Confronted with this new state form, social movements have taken different positions in regards to the government in the current moment: indifference, cooperation or confrontation (Colectivo Situaciones 2011). However, the same movement can take these different positions at different moments, showing they are not hard distinctions but tactical differences. These tactics correspond to the ad-hoc, project-based construction of the government as described above. Zibechi refers to this an “instrumental” relationship with the state, in which movements do not seek to be represented by the state but rather negotiate specific benefits from the relationship
Recognizing that movements engage in tactical and instrumental relations with the state requires moving beyond simple assumptions of co-optation. To speak only of co-optation is to promote a vision in which the state possesses all of the power: it is the state that co-opts the movement, the movement is only ever passively co-opted. Within this framework, there is no possibility that movements might be using their relationship with the state tactically, that the decision to engage with the state might be one that movements have taken with total awareness of the dangers. Assuming co-optation demonstrates an a priori definition of the state, a predetermined definition that reproduces the hegemonic binary logic and limits the development of an autonomous understanding of the state and power. Taking a non-metaphysical approach to the state and recognizing its post-representational managerial logic requires recognizing the complexity of interactions between movements and different state institutions in different places and at different scales.

The unemployment benefit packages and other government social programs play an ambiguous role in this context. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kirchner governments continued many of the benefit programs previously won by the piqueteros, while seeking to centralize and expand those programs, most notably through the Universal Child Allowance and expansion of the jobs program *Argentina Trabaja*. Most of the organizations of the unemployed are involved in distributing these benefits or, in many cases, make use of the benefits of *Argentina Trabaja* to finance their own micro-enterprises, meaning that many movements rely on the state to materially finance their projects. For this reason, Zibechi understands the subsidies as an important element of the governance strategy of the post-neoliberal state, a clear effort to pacify movements, by making material gains dependent on certain movement behaviors (2008). This governance strategy, however, does not eliminate the possibilities of resistance, but rather,
makes it clear that all moments of daily life are sites of struggle. These subsidies were demanded and fought for by the movements, and, in this sense, represent clear victories for those organizations. Movements understand the subsidies not as something that has been “given” to them, but rather something they have taken from the state, that they have won and is now a right. On the other hand, none of the subsidies yet come close to what would be needed for a living wage, nor are they universal or free from political manipulation (Féñiz and López 2010). Despite the risks, however, many movements have been able to use the subsidies, along with other resources, to build their own power and construct alternative forms of living.

While the state has not totally abandoned repressive action toward struggles, in general, it attempts to enact a much more sophisticated form of control, because it recognizes that much of its own legitimacy is due to those movements. This leads to the emergence of gray areas between the state and social movements:

The social movement's power (potencia) is so great that the state needs them in order to do certain things. If the state wants to work in the territory, in a villa or a neighborhood of the urban periphery, it has to rely on social movements. You can say that the state does it to domesticate the movements, but it is also clear clear that it has to do so. Currently, there is a very gray zone between heteronomy and autonomy. For example, a bachillerato popular today demanding accreditation and a salary for the teachers. But, also, the state is influenced by the movements. There is a dispute of grays, that is normal and that is going to be normal for a long time. It is not that great flow of movements, but a process of war of positions, that are very micro and everywhere. There are very interesting, sometimes creative disputes that show that the cycle is not dead. (Zibechi 2011, 311).

This gray area between the state and movements, where they fight over control of resources, has emerged as a key political battlefield where the state does not always have the upper hand. Recognizing that its political legitimacy relies largely on the support of popular movements and the government's proclaimed resistance to neoliberalism, the Kirchner administrations have been keen to meet many of the movements' demands in order to retain their support.

The government and forms of governance have also been transformed by the movements.
and rebellion of 2001. The Kirchner government and Peronist political party, responding to the powerful movements that emerged during the previous decade, and in order to create some legitimacy for itself in the public eye, not only met many of the movements' demands but also began increasingly organizing itself like a social movement and adopting the movements' organizational forms. The government and different Peronist organizations now operate social centers that offer many of the same services as the movement social centers, such as free educational and cultural activities, libraries, and soup kitchens. On a local scale the government and Peronist organizations have started to function more horizontally, sometimes even using assemblies or other forms of direct democracy. The government has also adopted the movements' territorial form of organization, especially in the urban periphery, a process which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

The government's strategy of capture and incorporation has been effective in many cases. It is true that many movements and organizations, especially piquetero organizations, have pledged their full support to the Kirchner government, and that even more receive subsidies or are involved in managing and distributing welfare payments. It is also true that many former activists now work for the government, either locally or on the federal level, and that the number and intensity of street protests has declined significantly in comparison with the 2001-2002 period. Therefore, many on the Left now speak of the piquetero movement in the past tense, claiming that their struggle is over and that it failed precisely because it was unable to take power or lead to the formation of a revolutionary or socialist state (c.f., Petras and Veltmeyer 2005). Those that support Kirchner, however, proclaim that those same movements were victorious precisely because they brought about the Kirchner governments, which put an end to neoliberalism and now represent the movements. Either of these two positions, however, see the
struggle as finished, see the 2001 moment as closed; they both rely on predetermined and limiting definitions of what constitutes success and center their idea of political power around the state. Another reading, that keeps the 2001 moment open, on the other hand, does not focus on the institutions of the state or state power but recognizes the expanded arena of the political fought for by the movements. This reading looks at the on-going struggles over forms of life and subjectivity in the territories where they take place.

**New Cartographies of the Piquetero Movement**

To better understand the current political moment in Argentina and the new form of governance that emerged under the Kirchner governments, I will outline a general cartography of the movements of the unemployed, looking at how they relate to questions of power today. Again, the movements of the unemployed cannot be taken as a homogeneous entity, but have continued to diverge along different theoretical and practical lines, some of which have been more prone to incorporation by the state while others have been more successful at resisting capture. Here I will look at the trajectories taken by different organizations since 2003, seeking to identify the limitations and possibilities for going beyond the state-centered political logic in the current moment. Svampa and Pereyra identify three general currents in the piquetero movement today: a nationalist-populist one aligned with Kirchnerismo, a second aligned with traditional Leftist parties in opposition to the government and a third comprised of the “new lefts,” including autonomous sectors of the movement (2009). The first two of these categories maintain a more traditional, state-centered understanding of politics, those that think in terms of globality, as described by the Colectivo Situaciones earlier. It is the third category of organizations that continues, despite substantial setbacks, to continue pushing for new understandings of politics and social change.
Many of the largest organizations of the unemployed, such as the FTV and some of the MTDs that formerly belonged to the Coordinadora Aníbal Verón, have now aligned themselves with the Kirchner government, in more or less official ways. This move is not surprising not only because of the material benefits of aligning with Kirchnerismo but also because of the ideological foundations of the organizations. The organizations aligned with Kirchner have the most access to state subsidies, different welfare and work programs, subsidies for productive enterprises, etc. and many have been given positions within the government. This, of course, has led to a reduction in their level of street protests and oppositional activity, normally limited to protesting against the opponents of the governments or mobilizing for large party-sponsored events. Perhaps even more important, submitting themselves to the complete control of the party and official leadership structures has led to an often hostile climate for innovative thinking. A member of one such organization, Juan Cruz Daffunchio, from the MTD Florencio Varela and a city councilor with the coalition New Encounter, in an interview in Página 12, explains the organization's decision to support Fernández de Kirchner's candidacy as the decision to take the route of “politicization” (Vales 2012). Here, again, is a definition of the political defined by electoral politics and centered in the state, wherein the actions of the 2001 are seen as merely “resistance,” “protest” or “pre-political.” The councilman recognizes the necessity of those acts of rebellion but argues that now is the time for construction, to consolidate the new “model.” According to this perspective, the construction of something new must occur through the state, while struggles are only capable of resistance and opposition. Despite this view, these organizations have not abandoned neighborhood organizing, yet they tend to describe this work as “service” or “social”, distinct from “politics,” which means that they make little effort to consciously politicize people or build autonomous bases of power (Barattini 2010).
On the other hand, certain sectors of the piquetero movement are aligned with the traditional leftist parties and forms of organizing, such as the Maoist CCC and socialist Movimiento Independencia de Jubilados y Desocupados (Independent Movement of Pensioners and the Unemployed, or MIJD). Despite being in the opposition, these organizations have generally not been the site for much political innovation either. Holding an analysis that considers the Kirchner government to be the same as earlier neoliberal governments leaves them unable to recognize the novelties of the current situation and the new forms of governance and act accordingly. Their repertoire of actions remains limited to street actions and protests, which have lost much popular support in recent years, leaving the movements isolated. The government discourse of the return of the state and the necessity of leaving protest aside to construct, together, a new model also serves to delegitimize these movements and has caused them to lose popular support (Svampa and Pereyra 2009). The focus on opposition to the government means that these organizations commit less energy to creating alternatives within given territories and often reproduce the state's binary logic. Many of the groups, however, do still manage government unemployment programs, distributing benefits to their members in turn for attendance at marches and rallies (Ferraudi Curto 2009). Unlike the more autonomous MTDs, however, they do not use these subsidies to construct something new, but rather continue demanding social integration and representation from the state (Zibechi 2003).

The MTD La Matanza, originally defined by its autonomous position, its independence from political parties and the government, now more accurately falls into the second category of opposition to the state. It is one of the only MTDs to not participate in the social benefits packages, regularly participate in protests against the government, claiming that the government is becoming increasingly authoritarian and that the subsidies produce relationships of
dependency. Instead, they continue to operate a couple of self-managed businesses – a textile workshop and a bakery –, a community kindergarten, and a social center with cultural and educational programming. Originally not affiliated with any political party, the MTD joined the Coalición Cívica (Civic Coalition), a heterogeneous, but largely right-of-center, alliance centered around the presidential candidate Elisa Carrió, in 2007. Toty Flores, one of the movement's leaders, served in Congress under the Coalición Cívica from 2007 to 2011. Direct participation in party politics changed the group's internal organization: decisions were no longer made in assemblies, a clear hierarchy emerged as some were given jobs with the party, and dissenting members were forced out of the organization. The MTD continues to call for social inclusion and opposes government assistance programs, while their cooperatives function largely based on support from the private sector, international and local NGOs, and collaborations with celebrities, such as celebrity chef Maru Botano and well-known designer Martin Churba. The movement's political stance, however, caused them to lose much support in the neighborhood where Fernández's government is extremely popular and many people rely on government assistance for their day-to-day survival.

Despite the different relations to the Kirchner government of the groups discussed above is a perspective that privileges the state as the site of politics. Reproducing the binary logic of either with or against the government, this perspective sees the state as the sole guarantor of rights, responsible for representing the people and sustaining full employment and social inclusion. Most of these organizations hold onto a traditional understanding of labor and economic change, often calling for “genuine work,” for the creation of “real” and productive jobs, as described in the previous chapter. These demands depend on the state and inhibit the construction of alternative forms of life. Regardless of political affiliation, the decision to align
with political parties tends to transform the movements’ daily activities and rhythms in profound ways, submitting them to the rhythms of the electoral process, to campaigning, voting and the debates laid out by the corporate media. Doing so detracts heavily from community and territorial organizing, which necessarily follows its own rhythm (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008; Zibechi 2006). When Flores ran for Congress, workers in the MTD La Matanza’s textile cooperative stopped working for weeks to campaign for him. Other movements have had similar experiences, as neighborhood projects lose priority for the perceived urgency of electoral politics. Becoming enmeshed in party politics means movements no longer control their own rhythms but are subjected to an external temporality. Additionally, the party structure institutionalizes a division between thinking and acting, between intellectual and manual labor, that the autonomous MTDs initially sought to combat.

The third category of piquetero organizations is perhaps the smallest but also the most heterogeneous and innovative: groups that are neither aligned with the Kirchner government nor any other Leftist political parties, including most of the MTDs. According to Svampa and Pereyra, these organizations “privileged the temporality of the neighborhood problematic, concerned with the creation of environments for political formation and spheres of production of new social relations” (2009, 216–217). These are the organizations that adhere to principles of autonomy and horizontality, as described earlier in this chapter, and are committed to the creation of new forms of life within given territories. While many of these movements do use and distribute the government unemployment benefits, they attempt to use them in a way that allows them to maintain a certain political autonomy, control over their own actions and decision-making. In most cases, they have distanced themselves from national and electoral politics, preferring to concentrate on construction within their territories. In general terms, this means that
they do not officially align themselves with any political parties, whether the governing or opposition parties, do not participate in campaigning or incorporate themselves into any government institution. Different organizations, however, do develop a variety of relationships to specific government agencies and institutions from the municipal to the national scale. The key concern for the movements when engaging in these relationships with the state is to be able to retain their decision-making autonomy and for the relationships to allow enough flexibility for the movements to work towards their own goals.

For example, the former MTD Solano now under the name of the Movimiento de Colectivos (Movement of Collectives, MDC) focuses its energy on managing a health clinic, community farm and cultural and educational activities in the peripheral neighborhood where they work. The movement includes many people who are expressly anti-Kirchner along with others who show support for the Kirchners, but as a whole the movement does not make statements or take positions regarding the national government. They do sometimes express opposition or support to local political leaders or specific government policies but remain formerly independent from any political party. Politics, for the Movimiento de Colectivos, is not located exclusively in the institutions and spaces of the state and electoral politics, but is something that cannot be separated from everyday life and the territory where everyday life happens. Understanding capitalism fundamentally as a type of social relation, they remain committed to creating new social relations in their neighborhoods through community organizing and the creation of non-capitalist spaces in their territory. These spatial practices will be explored in more detail in the following chapters but here it is important to emphasize the decentering of politics from the spaces of the state to the spaces of everyday life. This does not mean that the MDC can ignore the state, however, as the state constantly seeks to encroach upon their
autonomy through different means. The MDC tries to make use of friendly government agencies and officials when they can, using the unemployment benefits and subsidies for cooperatives to fund their community garden and other collective initiatives. Yet, they attempt to not get tied up in the bureaucracy surrounding these initiatives, do not work as one of the many organizations to merely handout the benefits to members but only make use of subsidies when they can aid collective projects. They emphasize retaining their own autonomy, not only in terms of how to specifically use funds but also in setting their own objectives and creating their own values.

YSP’s situation is slightly messier as they are more involved with different state institutions and Kirchnerista organizations. In order to register its school program as an official, degree-awarding high school, YSP had to work with a number of neighborhood Kirchnerista organizations with close ties to the local Kirchnerist government. YSP organizers, however, maintain that these relationships are purely tactical and do not mean that they are now officially a Kirchnerist organization. Indeed, like the MDC, YSP includes Kirchneristas and non-Kirchneristas, Peronists and non-Peronists, even a number of people who self-identify as anarchists and have strong critiques of Peronism. The lack of an official relationship to any political party allows these different perspectives to co-exist within the same project despite their disagreements. The group’s ties to different Kirchnerist organizations are seen mainly as a way to obtain resources, based more on personal relationships with local organizers than ideological or political agreement, and organizers maintain that they would cut ties with these organizations if they ever put unfair requirements on them. As one activist from YSP explained to me, “we decided to work with the government for the moment. If conditions change, we can change our policy. Of course, they want to co-opt us, but we’ve decided that its worth the risks right now for the benefits we obtain” (interview, Buenos Aires, July 2009). In reality, this means negotiating a
number of relationships with different Peronist-affiliated organizations and different government agencies and institutions since the state is not a monolithic entity. Activists cultivate personal relationships with individuals working in different government agencies, often family members or friends of members of the organization, that give them access to certain resources. Yet, YSP does sometimes organize buses to attend Peronist rallies in Buenos Aires and many of the organizers publicly express support for Fernández de Kirchner. However, in the school itself, diversity of opinion is taught, well beyond a government-sponsored curriculum. History classes focus on Che Guevara and armed resistance to repressive governments in the 1960s and '70s; lessons about Peronism focus on its revolutionary history more than its reformist and institutional legacies. In general, independence and critical thinking are valued in the classroom. The mode in which the school is organized and how it differs from a more traditional public school will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

Overall, while specific organizations may make different tactical or strategic choices in regards to their relationship with particular state institutions, what all of these independent or autonomous movements share is their insistence that politics is not and cannot be limited to the realm of the electoral and the state. But rather, politics is rooted in everyday experiences and practices, social relations and subjectivities. This does not mean that the state can be ignored, but that the state and existing hegemonic powers cannot be allowed to set the agenda, to set the scene and terms of debate and struggle. It is this understanding of the political that is behind the MTDs' emphasis on territorial organizing, which will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

Conclusion

As movements across Latin America show, emancipatory struggles take place in a different time and space than state-centered politics; they follow their own rhythms, only
sometimes visible from the outside, and not measurable by their relationship to the state (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008). The different initiatives of the organizations of the unemployed demonstrate a form of politics that takes place on a different scale from what is traditionally conceived of as the political. The Kirchner government recognizes this and develops new forms of governance to bring increasingly more forms of politics and moments of life into its control. Within this context, it is not merely a question of whether an organization supports or opposes the government, but precisely how movements manage (or do not) to break out of this limited notion of politics and assert their own values and agendas. The following chapters will address in more depth how movements have been able to do this through territorial organizing and practices of commoning that allow them their own temporalities and forms of organization.
Chapter 5: Return to the Neighborhood – Reterritorialization of Struggle

This chapter specifically examines the spatiality and spatial strategies of the movements of the unemployed. Svampa and Peyeyra contrast the "new sense of the political," "constructed from below" both with an understanding of politics as centered around formal representation and electoral politics and with other understandings of social movements that are centered around their actions in the plaza or formal protest activities (2009, 19). This new politics, they say, is located "between the route [highway] and the neighborhood," where these experiences of the assembly and collective self-management occur, pointing to the interplay between working to directly meet people's most urgent needs, demanding broader structural changes, and creating alternative practices (ibid.). The previous chapter sought to understand this “new sense of the political” in terms of a non-statecentric politics rooted in the problems and activities of everyday life and committed to the creation of new subjectivities and social relations. In this chapter, I look at the spatial elements of this new politics, from the piquetes as a form of disruption of urban spaces and the hegemonic social relations embedded in those spaces to territorial organizing as the creation of new social relations rooted in specific places. This territorial approach to analyzing the MTDs allows us to better understand the new form of politics created by these movements and how they place questions of daily life, care, and reproduction at the center of their practice.

This chapter tracks a shift in the spatiality of power and governance from the deterritorialization of neoliberal and post-Fordist capitalism to reterritorialization under the neo-
extractivist model in response to the territorial organizing of movements. If neoliberalism can be characterized by the deterritorializing effects of capital, the subsequent shift in Argentina after 2001, has seen a reterritorialization both of economic activity and political struggle. This shift was discussed in economic terms in Chapter Two, as the proliferation of forms of labor and production in spaces such as the urban periphery. Much of this reterritorialization was the work of the movements of the unemployed and other organizations of the poor that created their own self-managed economic activities in order to survive during the economic crisis. In recent years, these economic practices have become a key part of the country's economic recovery and those formerly marginal spaces have become important sites for the increase in consumption as well as credit and debt. Political conflict has also moved into these formerly peripheral spaces, as well, with the Kirchner government using new forms of territorial governance.

I begin the chapter by exploring the spatiality of labor and production under post-Fordism and neoliberalism, followed by a discussion of the spatiality of resistance, giving a brief overview of the literature on geographies of resistance. I draw on theories from Latin America that point us to a non-statecentric way of understanding the concept of territory itself, which allows us to better understand the importance that contemporary social movements place on territory. I then look at the specific spatial practices of the movements of the unemployed, including the piquetes as a form of disruption of urban space and territorial organizing as a form of the production of new spatial relations. Building on the previous chapter, I show how these spatial practices force us to rethink what we consider to be the space of politics and our very definitions of “social movements.” I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the spatiality of struggle today: the Kirchner governments' new forms of territorial governance, the role of territory in contemporary capitalism, and responses by the unemployed workers' organizations.
Deterritorialization under Neoliberalism and Post-Fordism

As discussed in Chapter Two, neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism involves important spatial transformations in the operations of capitalism and governance. The post-Fordist mode of production has been described as deterritorializing: production is organized through global supply chains, in which many different places might be involved in different steps of the production of one good, international finance capital plays an increasingly important role on the world scale, and immaterial labor that is not fixed to one place becomes ever more important.

Hardt and Negri describe these changes in the spatial configurations of labor:

On the one hand, the relations of capitalist exploitation are expanding everywhere, not limited to the factory but tending to occupy the entire social terrain. On the other hand, social relations completely invest the relations of production, making impossible any externality between social production and economic production. The dialectic between productive forces and the system of domination no longer has a determinate place. The very qualities of labor power (difference, measure, and determination) can no longer be grasped, and similarly, exploitation can no longer be localized and quantified. In effect, the object of exploitation and domination tend not to be specific productive activities but the universal capacity to produce, that is, abstract social activity and its comprehensive power. This abstract labor is an activity without place, and yet it is very powerful. It is the cooperating set of brains and hands, minds and bodies; it is both the non-belonging and the creative social diffusion of living labor; it is the desire of the multitude of mobile and flexible workers; and at the same time it is intellectual energy and linguistic communicative construction of the multitude of intellectual and affective laborers. (2000, 209).

In other words, production is decentered from a specific place to occur throughout the social field on a global scale.

While production is dispersed and decentered, this does not mean that it is placeless. Urban space plays an especially important role in this new regime of production, as the site of encounter and social cooperation underpinning all production:

The metropolis has become the primary locus of biopolitical production. By this we mean that the production of capital is no long limited to the factory or any other separated site but rather spreads throughout the entire social territory. The qualities traditionally associated with the metropolis such as communication, unexpected encounters with social difference, access to the common, and the production of collective forms of life today increasingly characterize both urban and rural environments, and moreover these qualities are central
factors in biopolitical production. In this metropolitan territory, social life produces and is produced. (Hardt and Negri 2009, 244).

This builds on Lefebvre's (2003) intuition that the entire urban fabric has become productive. Biopolitical production happens throughout the urban fabric (which, according to Lefebvre includes all rural and urban space that has been affected by urbanization), through the forms of social cooperation and life that take place there.

Along with the multiplication in forms of labor described in Chapter Two, comes a spatial proliferation of labor where work is not restricted to an enclosed workplace and often not even to any fixed, permanent workplace but spatially diffused, especially throughout the urban fabric. Contemporary forms of labor are better characterized by temporary and mobile work, work takes place in different places at different times. The work of reproduction takes place in the home but also in shared spaces in the neighborhood, in schools, in health clinics, etc. Informal and illegal work is often even more spatially fragmented, taking place at different places at different times: odd jobs at different locations, selling goods at different corners of the city. Illegal work must constantly move in order to avoid being detected. The spatial transformations have implications for labor organizing as well. Precarías a la Deriva (2004), a Madrid-based collective that has also collaborated with precarious workers in Buenos Aires, focuses specifically on the spatial dynamics of precarious labor: women and migrants traveling long distances for work, childcare, health care, in many ways the entire city becomes the workplace. Precarious work lacks any geographic stability, workers constantly travel from one work-place to another, often within the same day, and often move from one house or another. Returning to the discussion of precarity in Chapter Two, to look at precarity both temporally and spatially, we can see that it breaks down the space-time boundaries between work and non-work, while simultaneously fragmenting
workers in space and time, thus making it more challenging for them to collectively organize (Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social 2008).

This new spatiality of capital accumulation and the spatial multiplication of labor have important subjective effects: spatial relations are disarticulated and people lose much of their sense of belonging to a place, creating a sense of placelessness. Not only are workers expected to be more mobile in their search for jobs, but places themselves become more similar as capitalism seeks to erase spatial differences. These two processes combine so that people tend to have less of an identification with the places where they live, social ties of solidarity amongst neighbors break down, and political organizing based on a shared space becomes increasingly difficult. The MTD Solano discusses this lack of social cohesion specifically in the urban periphery of Buenos Aires:

Here in Buenos Aires, social ties are extremely disintegrated: if you are unemployed and you go out to block the highway, your neighbors who have to go to work will run over you with their car. Here people are more fucked, their heads are busted, individualism is total. Here is where capitalism did the most damage, where we really suffered the great ideological defeat. Is it most noticeable in large urban areas, in the capitals, where consumerism, selfishness, technological advances and all the promises of capitalism are. In Mosconi it's not like this, people are better integrated and the fate of community is very common. (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002, 67).

For the MTD, this social disintegration is felt most strongly in urban areas, with large migrant populations and more competition for jobs and resources. They claim that this creates additional challenges for urban-based movements that similar rural movements do not face. Therefore, (re)creating social bonds of solidarity becomes a principle element of the movement's urban territorial organizing.

**Reterritorialization through Struggle**

The unemployed workers' movements in Argentina must be understood in the broader context of movements responding to neoliberalism, and developing spatial strategies specific to
this struggle. Lefebvre provides a starting point for the geographic analysis of contemporary anti-
capitalist social movements by identifying contemporary conflicts as struggles between the
abstract space of capital, defined by exchange value and the separation between different spheres
of life, and the social or concrete space of use values. Lefebvre (1991) develops the concept of
differential space as the alternative social space produced by resistance to capital's abstract space.
Recognizing the differences between abstract space and differential space, we can see how anti-
capitalist struggles must not only try to control existing spaces but must produce a fundamentally
different type of space and ways of relating to territory. This framework allows us to understand
how space is produced through struggle and how movements can actively produce their own
territories. Producing their own spaces means requires that movements move beyond occupying
an existing territory or redistributing land to creating their own ways of inhabiting and relating to
one another in specific spaces.

Recognizing the importance of urban space for contemporary capitalism as discussed
above, allows us to see how the common encounters of the biopolitical multitude provide the
basis for the production of differential space and urban struggles become increasingly significant
(Hardt and Negri 2009). Originally coined by Lefebvre in 1967, the discourse of “the right to the
city” has made a resurgence in recent years, as shown by the drafting of the World Charter to the
Right of the City in 2005 and social movements that have taken up the call around the world
(Harvey 2009; Soja 2010). Many of the struggles around the right to the city and other urban
movements are seen as struggles over public space – places that are accessible, open to public
use and free speech (including political speech and action), as well as campaigns for the right to
live in the city (for affordable housing and against abusive real estate speculation). Recently,
struggles over public space have emerged to resist state-imposed restrictions on the uses of space
in the name of security and the increasing privatization of space, for example main streets turned into shopping malls and neighborhoods turned into gated communities (Low and Smith 2006). There are limits to the discourse of public space however: public space as it understood today can only exist in opposition to private space, and therefore is specific to a capitalist mode of production and property rights. Additionally, the public has different meanings in different places and is always subject to some sort of regulation and exclusion. While struggles for the right to the city and for public space are extremely important in the contemporary context, we must also confront these limitations and move beyond a rights-based discourse, to find struggles for a common space. The “right to the city” discourse is most effective when it is seen as a call to change daily life in cities, to create new types of cities, or, as Harvey puts it, “only when politics focuses on the production and reproduction of urban life as the central labor process out of which revolutionary impulses arise will it be possible to mobilize anti-capitalist struggles capable of radically transforming daily life” (2012, xvi). It is in this sense that some of the movements of the unemployed have taken up the right to the city discourse as part of an effort to form broader coalitions against the effects of privatization and gentrification in the city.

In response the deterritorializing effects of neoliberal and post-Fordist capitalism described above, the defense of place has been identified as one key spatial aspects of the resistance to neoliberal globalization in recent decades (Escobar 2001). Movements in defense of place take different forms, from advocating for local food consumption and the protection of biodiversity to struggles for cultural autonomy. Many of these movements are attempts to defend local political and economic sovereignty against the forces of international financial capital or even forces at the national level. The defense of place can be seen as an attempt to create or defend the means for communities to make their own decisions over the issues that affect them,
and therefore are an important part of struggles for autonomy.

The phrase "defense of place" is not free of problems, however, especially in cases such as that of the urban periphery, as it assumes that the 'place' is already constructed, and the existence of a pre-established and static community. Indeed, many other movements do fall into the trap of defending a closed, regionally bound sense of "community" (Lepofsky and Pickles 2007). These movements can end up reproducing racism, xenophobia or other forms of exclusion. Therefore, when discussing the "defense of place," it is essential to remember Massey's relational definition of place, in which place is always open and under construction, defined by how it relates to the outside, not in opposition to it (1994). Neither space nor place are fixed and static, but are always fluid and in motion (Massey 2006). Escobar demonstrates how movements for the defense of place develop place-based strategies based on attachment to territory, as well as "glocal" strategies based on multi-scaled networks (2001). Many researchers of rural and indigenous movements, those often thought to be most invested in the defense of place, demonstrate that more than defending ties to a specific place, these struggles are demanding the autonomy to determine their own relation places and space, including rights to mobility and to be able to make claims on more than one place (Bebbington 2000; Escobar 2008; Porto Gonçalves 2001).

Gonçalves defines a social movement spatially, proposing the term “societies in movement” as opposed to social movements, as movements that break out of their assigned place in society to create new spaces of resistance and expression (2001, 81). This definition places mobility and spatial autonomy at the center of a renewed analysis of movements. Zibechi draws on Gonçalves to call for us to: “enter the analysis of social movements from another site: no longer from the forms of organization and the repertories of mobilization, but rather from the
social relations and the territories, in other words, from the flows and circulations and not the structures” (2008b, 30). Zibechi claims, referencing Lefebvre, that the Latin American movements, such as indigenous, landless and campesino movements, are territorialized movements that produce differential space through the production of non-hegemonic social relations and subjectivities. Gonçalves (2001) similarly analyzes how social movements are producers of their own spatialities. He understands geography as a verb, “to graph the earth,” and territory as the relationship between people and the land, including specific places and more general ways of relating to space. This understanding of territory has three aspects: territory as physical location, territorialization as the form of taking hold of that space, and territorialities as the identities involved in those processes of taking hold of the space. This concept of territory allows Gonçalves to recognize movements in the Brazilian Amazons as active producers of their own ways of relating to space and living in multiple places. These struggles go beyond struggles for access to land or property rights because the territory is already conceptualized differently in a way that does not allow for thinking about it as a fixed entity to which one can grant or be granted rights. Along these lines, Escobar understands territory as "the fundamental and multidimensional space for the creation and recreation of the social, economic, and cultural values and practices of the communities" (2008). Here territory is not a pre-given, clearly delimited entity, but rather a field of struggle. This project of producing territory arises in direct opposition to the processes of global capitalism that seek to delink people from places and recreate space in forms more conducive to capitalist valorization.

Reyes and Kaufman show how the Zapatista struggle demonstrates the importance of territory for contemporary anti-capitalist struggles:

The territorial aspects of the Zapatista conflict allow us to understand that despite the fact
that sovereign functions have been deterritorialized (from the territorial nation-state), this does not mean that territory in and of itself has ceased to be central to social struggle. On the contrary, the production of space lies at the very heart of contemporary social antagonisms. It has become apparent, however, that space is inextricable from the social relations created on it (something that was at least somewhat disguised by the nation-state). (2011, 518)

They argue:

In the case of the EZLN land occupations, what was enabled was not simply traditional 'land redistribution' in favor of a peasant class or even the 'revolutionary' act of 'taking the means of production' into one's hands, although the latter certainly played an important role. Rather, the new Zapatista territory became not only an escape from direct labor exploitation and an independent means of subsistence, but the literal ground for the creation of autonomy, for the creation, sustenance, and growth of a self-organized collective subject. The development of the Zapatista autonomous municipalities essentially created a rupture in the system of representation configured by the state and the possibility of social relations unmediated by state stratification. Autonomous territorialization created a spatialization of struggle that essentially, or at least tendentially, disallowed the sovereign relation and provided the possibility for another kind of government—'good government' in Zapatista terms. (Ibid., 519).

In other words, the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas demonstrates the importance of reterritorialization for struggles against neoliberal capitalism and for the creation of autonomous forms of self-organization in particular places. In the following section, I will show how the unemployed workers' movements attempted to follow a similar strategy of reterritorialization and the creation of autonomous spaces.

**Spatial Practices of the MTDs**

Now I turn to the specific spatial practices of the unemployed workers movements. In this section, I will first give a brief history of the emergence and spread of the tactic of the piquete across Argentina during the 1990s. Then, I will examine different aspects of the piquetes, focusing on how they disrupt urban space and flows of capital, how they challenge spatial segregation of the city, and how the piquetes serve as a space of encounter and creation of the new. Next, I turn to the MTDs' practice of territorial organizing, which seeks to make these new spaces of encounter more permanent through creating alternative institutions in the
neighborhoods where they work and building strong territorial networks of solidarity and support. I look at how this territorial organizing relates to earlier forms of neighborhood organizing in the urban peripheries, especially the clientelist networks of political parties. I then analyze territorial organizing in terms of the creation of new social relations and autonomous methods of social reproduction.

**Geography of the Piquete**

The unemployed workers' movements initially gained visibility and became known for their tactic of *piquetes* or roadblocks, protests that stopped traffic and blocked the distribution of commercial goods around the country. While roadblocks are far from a new protest tactic, their generalization during the 1990s by the organized unemployed represented a new phase of struggle in Argentina. In 1997, roadblocks overtook strikes as the most frequent and important form of protest related to work, demonstrating the decline of industrial labor unions and the Peronist syndicalist model, and the increasing importance of the unemployed, both in terms of numbers and political power (Svampa and Pereyra 2009, 37).

The first major piquetes of the unemployed took place in 1996 in the cities of Cutral-Có and Plaza Huincul in the province of Neuquén and in Mosconi and Tartagal in the province of Salta. Employment in these cities was highly dependent on the state-owned oil company YPF, leading to rising levels of unemployment after the company's privatization in 1993. In June 1996, there was a massive uprising in Cutral-Có and Plaza Huincal as the unemployed, their families and other supporters blockaded the national and provincial roads leading into both cities, with five main barricades and dozens of smaller ones, for six nights and seven days. The protesters demanded “genuine sources of employment” and that the governor himself come to the roadblocks to discuss their demands (Auyero 2003, 2). During this week, entire families camped
out on the highways, creating a new form of political protest and organization in the process. Although initially leaders from a local opposition party appeared to be in control of the roadblocks, by the second day, protesters with little or no political experience formed the “Committee of Pickets – Representatives” and effectively took over control of the action (ibid., 19). This committee called for a much more democratically organized protest and was behind the demand that the governor come directly negotiate with protesters, thereby effectively sidestepping the interference of other, likely corrupt, politicians and allowing people to directly communicate with their leader without excessive mediation. Following the success of these first roadblocks, the tactic quickly spread across the country, in Svampa and Pereyra's words, like a “contagion,” without official coordination between different piquetero groups or actions and spreading to heterogeneous sectors of the unemployed population (2009, 20).

The first piquetes in the Buenos Aires urban region took place in 1996 in Florencio Varela in the southern edge of the urban region in La Matanza to the west. The roadblocks in La Matanza quickly became especially massive – involving hundreds to thousands of people and lasting for days or weeks at a time – due to the highly concentrated population, the large number of former factory workers. Generally the roadblocks were set up on major highways (in La Matanza the National Route 3 or 21) or accesses to the city (to the south of the city, especially the Pueyrredón Bridge). Because it is surrounded on most sides by water and access to the city is limited, these piquetes had a devastating effect, stopping goods from entering the city from the provinces and blocking commuters from reaching their workplaces, and therefore forced the government to respond quickly. When initial repression was not enough to stop these mobilizations, the government of the Province of Buenos Aires began giving in to their demands and creating the different social programs for the poor and unemployed discussed in earlier
chapters.

While there are significant continuities between the piquetero movement and the labor movement, there are also major differences in terms of their make-up and spatial practices. One of these important differences, as discussed in Chapter Three, is the composition of the piquetes: the piquetes tended to have a much more heterogeneous make-up than a strike or any other workplace protest could ever have, in terms of gender, age, race and ethnicity, and previous political experience and ideology. A diverse range of unemployed, under-employed or informally or precariously employed people participated in these roadblocks, with different experiences and expectations of employment. The spatiality of the piquetes also marks another important difference: moving protests outside of the workplace to take place in the streets and public spaces of the city. Many commentators have remarked that the piquetes are the unemployed's version of the strike or work stoppage, the only available tactic once denied access to this privileged form of workers' revolt (Mazzeo 2004). Another perspective does not start from the assumption of lack or characterize the piquete as a less effective strike but sees that the piqueteros took their protests not to the factory doors, but rather, to the streets of the city, understanding the city as the crucial site of capitalist production. Returning to the argument discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2, then, this form of protest demonstrates an understanding of the importance of the urban space for contemporary capitalism production through the wealth produced through forms of urban social cooperation. For this reason, Hardt and Negri exemplify this tactic as a “wildcat strike against the metropolis” (2009, 259). Ferrara elaborates:

The roadblock attacks one of the central necessities of capital: its circulation. The blocked roads are both a strangulation of the mercantile process and a blow to the legal foundations of the system. If traffic is disrupted, freedom of trade is curtailed, conducting business is prevented, the economic flow is detained, capitalist legality is questioned, giving a dismal impression to investors around the world. Therefore, it is an important measure that hits the system in its vital centers. Capitalism cannot withstand roadblocks for very long. (2003, 38).
Thus, for these commentators, the piquete is the an entirely effective form of disruption and protest of contemporary capitalism.

Colectivo Situaciones highlights the different knowledges and experiences that contributed to organizing the piquetes, showing that they draw on more than only a past experience of labor organizing:

The roadblocks did not inherit knowledges exclusively from working class struggles. They also constitute levels of elaboration of more recent struggles. In 1993 began a cycle of insurrections and urban revolts (puebladas) in several provinces of the interior of the country. The roadblock appears as a higher level of the organization of the unemployed and contributes to channel those struggles. The roadblock is the weapon of those who do not have any other means than their capacity to control territories with their presence. In this sense it is the common heritage of the unemployed, indigenous peoples, evictees, and a broad conglomerate of people that neoliberalism calls 'the excluded.’ (2012, 124).

In other words, one of the reasons that the piquetes were so effective was that they were able to bring together a wide range of participants, a more heterogeneous group than would be included in a workplace strike, and draw on their collective knowledges and experiences.

The spatiality of the piquetes also allowed them to build bridges with and include the community as a whole and made the labor of social reproduction central to their actions, important elements of any successful workplace strike. In the interior of the country, whole towns would participate in the roadblocks, making the highway into their new living space. In the urban peripheries of major cities, such as Buenos Aires, Rosario and La Plata, the roadblocks would bring together a diverse array of residents from a particular neighborhood or sometimes various neighborhoods, allowing these residents to begin building connections and creating more of a sense of community (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD Solano 2002). Ferrara describes the roadblocks:

The piquete is a concentration of families, not only men or women. Family groups camp beside the roadblock, with their children, their belongings, their blankets, and even their pets. This allows the action to last longer. There, alongside the highway, they stand guard, ignite
tires, they eat, drink mate, sleep, talk, community life occurs intensely. A roadblock is a demonstration of life in a full, collective sense, life happens there as contingents organize resistance and protest for their demands. The groups spread out in the shoulders of the highway. A multitude of neighborhoods turns public space into their settlement. (2003, 40).

Including entire families and all elements of daily life in the organization of the piquete was one of their essential features and would continue to define the movements of the unemployed as they shifted their focus onto territorial organizing.

Grimson argues that one of the important elements of the piquetes was breaking down the spatial borders of the city by literally occupying those borders that separated the "employed" and the "unemployed", the "inside" and "outside" and "laying siege to the city" through the major piquetes blocking bridges and other accesses to Buenos Aires (2009, 29). The piqueteros took things a step farther when they went inside the city itself, in the large marches to the Plaza de Mayo. These challenged the segregated geography of the city, that geography where the rich and even middle class did not have to come into contact with the growing mass of poor and unemployed, who, without employment, were confined to the neighborhoods where they lived. Grimson highlights how for many of the piqueteros these marches were seen as "going out," they would dress up, apply make-up, as if they were going out dancing or the theater, since they were leaving the spaces they were usually confined to (ibid., 31).

The piquetes also represent a spatial disruption in another way: they put the questions of hunger and unemployment, generally relegated to the private sphere into public space and thus politicize those problems. As discussed in Chapter Two, at first, many people, especially men who had been laid off, experienced unemployment as a personal, individual problem, along with feelings of guilt and embarrassment. These feelings thus made it more difficult to build a collective and public movement around the question of unemployment. It was women then who
first challenged this spatial division of the problematic by bringing the question of hunger into the public sphere with the *ollas populares* or popular community meals. The *ollas populares* were simultaneously a way to tackle the immediate problem of not having enough to eat while staging a public protest to politicize the question of hunger. Later the piquetes would take up this same importance as they would often include collective meals in the middle of the highway, addressing hunger in an even more disruptive way as they blocked transit. Women's participation in *ollas populares* and piquetes was important because it was a way from women to break out of the spaces to which they traditionally had been confined (the household and by extension the neighborhood) into the public spaces of plazas and highways. One young woman who began participating in roadblocks in La Matanza at the age of sixteen, describes how, “the piquete was the first place where I experienced where people would listen to me, where I could be a leader, before I thought my destiny would be to clean or cook for other people, I never saw that woman could take leadership in something that big like the piquetes” (interview, Laferre, Oct. 2011). In many ways this process went full circle with the piqueteros' return to the neighborhoods and privileging of those spaces which are traditionally considered to belong to women.

The roadblocks were such an effective tactic because they simultaneously served as a form of protest and the beginnings of an exodus, of the construction of new social relations and communal values. The piquetes were encampments in the middle of the street, bringing together people who were largely isolated from one another due to a lack of common spaces, and where people took care of each other, shared food and other responsibilities for maintaining the space (A. Dinerstein 2009). Since the piquetes would often last for days or week at a time, daily life had to be organized within them: food and medical care had to be provided for participants. Participants organized informal forms of education and knowledge-sharing; singing and music-
making were common occurrences and contributed to building a sense of community within the roadblocks. Accounts of the early piquetes emphasize not only their success as an oppositional tactic, but also the different space they produced. As Sitrin argues, “the intention of the piquete […] is to shut down that major artery but also to open up a new space on the other side of the blockade” (2012, 175). They are compared to a carnival, a space where power relations are turned upside down, and new social relations are formed based on solidarity and trust (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002).

Zibechi identifies three important characteristics of the piquete, emphasizing their micro-political elements: 1) a challenge or disruption to public order and established authority, 2) a generator of solidarity, of the collective capacity to do together, as a "festival," and space of mutual care; 3) their uncertain and unpredictable nature (2003, 142). He especially highlights the importance of the piquete for creating new, non-hierarchical social relations and communal values:

The piquete thus becomes a space of strong coexistence, a micro-society that must guarantee the essential elements for surviving and struggling. It is a space-time that enables the deepening of human relations and allows for the emergence of non-hegemonic relations. Some massive piquetes carried out in La Matanza, where diverse social sectors participated, have been revealed as true communitarian spaces. But, very important features of the movement are also shown in the piquete. Some appear merely outlined: the piquete also functions as a form of self-affirming struggle. It is very clear when they say 'we feel like owners' of the street, or when they affirm ‘the piquete is the only place where the police don't harrass you.’ The piquete creates power (potencia), power as capacity. But the self-esteem that is shown in the roadblocks is constructed step by step and day by day in the everydayness of the movement. (Ibid., 143).

In other words, the force of the piquetes is not only as a method to disrupt the space of the city, but also to create a different, even if temporary space, and new of collectively inhabiting that space. From the experiences of creating a sense of community in the roadblocks, came the commitment to continue this work in the neighborhood.
Territorial Organizing

Following the moment of rupture represented by the piquetes, many MTDs decided to focus their efforts on organizing in the specific neighborhoods where most of their members lived, building strong organizations and new social relations and forms of life in those neighborhoods, in what they refer to as “territorial organizing.” The MTDs were always organized territorially by neighborhoods or municipalities, drawing their membership from a specific geographic zone and often naming themselves after this place. Therefore, even when they concentrated efforts on organizing piquetes outside of their neighborhoods or making demands to higher levels of government, there was always a territorial element to the MTDs' struggle. By deciding to focus primarily on territorial organizing, the MTDs dedicated themselves to directly addressing the needs of neighborhood residents, without waiting for state intervention, first to survive the crisis and then to create new, collective ways of life. In this way, the MTDs decenter the experience of waged labor and instead put the spaces of everyday life in the center of their struggle.

This focus on neighborhood or territorial organizing is very closely related to the transformations in the spatial organization of labor discussed in the beginning of the chapter. For people engaged in these precarious forms of labor, work is no longer the primary place of socialization, of building relations and community, is no longer the privileged site for political organizing. As one woman participating in the MTD La Matanza explained: “I work cleaning houses in Capital, but I work alone, I don’t see anyone there, that's not where I socialize, it's when I come back home, to the neighborhood, that's where my life is, that's why we fight to make the conditions better there, in the neighborhood, where we live” (Interview, April 23 2012, La Matanza). It is this sentiment that is commonly shared by participants in the MTDs and that is
behind their emphasis on territorial organizing. Without a consistently shared site of work, labor organizing cannot be limited to or centered around the workplace. It was with this in mind, and looking for new places from which to base their struggles, that the MTDs began organizing in the specific neighborhoods where members *lived*. It is in these neighborhoods where the most important work takes place: that labor of social reproduction. Additionally, the MTDs struggle against this spatial fragmentation through occupying and producing their own spaces. The MTDs themselves have recognized this transition with the popular slogan and organizing mantra, “the neighborhood is the new factory” (Mazzeo 2004). This recognizes not only that production and labor are not limited to the factory, but also that struggles cannot be confined to the factory.

Thus, the MTDs' commitment to territorial organization can be seen as a way of expanding the struggle to produce new social relations outside of the workplace and into the spaces of everyday life. That is precisely what the MTDs aim to do through establishing a physical presence in a given neighborhood or territory and seeking to collectively manage as many of the elements of daily life as possible. Territorial organization as practiced by the MTDs means organizing around the basic needs of community residents, food, clean water, housing, education and the desire to form community in neighborhoods that are socially and ethnically fragmented. The MTDs attempted to build on what they had won with the piquetes through establishing more permanent spaces, such as social centers, clinics and schools, as well as cooperative productive enterprises, which serve to house the movements' activities and meetings, and more generally as spaces of encounter, where movement participants can come together for any or no reason whatsoever. These spaces and activities allowed the movements to build up a presence and support in their territories, by understanding and intervening in the most urgent needs of neighborhood residents in a new form of politics as discussed in the previous chapter.
Territorial organization implies opening up all the spaces of daily activity to critique and as possible sites of organization (Zibechi 2008b). These movements recognize and more fully value the different types of labor that go into producing a territory, thus placing an emphasis on practices of care and education. Ultimately, territorial organization seeks to build on the self-activity of the working class as expressed through the practices of everyday life and social organization in the neighborhoods.

This creation of more permanent movement-controlled spaces is what Lefebvre refers to as the appropriation of space, which he claims is necessary in order to institute new modes and relations of production (1991). It is in these spaces where the MTDs can develop their own forms of territoriality and thus, their own forms of subjectivity and life (Zibechi 2008). Movements are not defending an already existing place or territory, but rather actively constructing a new territory, creating new spatial relationships and subjectivities. Drawing on the experience of the movements of the unemployed, Monteagudo equates territory with habitat, noting, "human territory is not just a physical space as the notion of habitat might suggest, as it is laden with multiple meanings and is the object of intense struggles over its control" (2011). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, she describes the piqueteros processes of neighborhood organizing as "reterritorializing," as they "effectively disputed discursive and material power with the 'punteros'" (ibid.). Looking at the territorial organizing of the unemployed, we can thus see how they wrestled control over neighborhood spaces from corrupt politicians, but also produced new ways of being in those very territories.

For Svampa and Pereyra (2009), it is this territorial organization that sets the movements of the unemployed apart from traditional forms of union organizing. They differentiate territorial organizing from traditional forms of union and political party organizing, in which leaders from
poor neighborhoods would try to take the “leap” and move out of their neighborhood as soon as they could. They also differentiate it from forms of middle class or university activism in which activists from outside would go into the slums or poor neighborhoods and attempt to organize there. In the case of the majority of the organizations of the unemployed, the “referentes” are from the neighborhood where they organization is based, sharing the living conditions and experiences of the other group members. Despite differences, this territorial organization is not new but follows on a long tradition of neighborhood-based political organizing in Argentina, most effectively carried out by the Peronist party, but also to a significant degree groups based in liberation theology and other political parties and Leftist organizations. However, Svampa and Pereyra identify important changes in how this work was carried out beginning in 1980. They claim that compared to the earlier “movimiento villero,” which was linked to either radical elements of the labor movement or to Peronism, this new territorial work tended to obtain a “relative autonomy” (2009, 48). According to Svampa and Pereyra, starting in the 1980s, “the new forms of urban self-organization and collective action that these generated, linked to the struggle for housing and basic services, configured a specific framework for action, and, at the same time, its own network of relations, disconnected from the world of trade unions” (ibid., 50).

Svampa and Pereyra (2009) argue that the movements of the unemployed in the Buenos Aires conurbano were as influenced by the struggles over land in the peripheral neighborhoods surrounding the city as by official labor union and Peronist organizing. Throughout the 1980s, there were numerous illegal land takeovers in the peripheries of major cities by the poor and unemployed who had little access to formal housing in the cities. For Svampa and Pereyra, these land settlements marked the “emergence of a new social configuration that signals the process of territorial inscription of the popular classes” (ibid., 39). In other words, they were an independent
move by the popular classes to root themselves in the territory in response to de-industrialization. Participants in these settlements would self-organize not only to take over and win control of the land but also to build informal housing and later pressure the local government to provide services, such as water, gas and electricity. Svampa and Pereyra continue, “one of the first consequences of this territorial inscription is that the neighborhood appears as the natural space for action and organization; it becomes the place of interaction between different actors and grassroots organizations, ecclesiastic communities, and, when it is the case, non-governmental organizations” (ibid.). Therefore, the unemployed who had participated in these land takeovers already had experience and an inclination toward territorial organizing that would strongly influence many of the urban organizations of the unemployed.

By the time the MTDs were coming together, the Peronist Party had already developed a complex and extensive territorial network. Peronism went through important internal structural changes in the late 1980s, moving from a system where participation was organized through official labor unions to one that relied on the direct election of leaders and candidates (Levitsky 2003). This change led to the development of territorial “patronage” networks, most notably in the Province of Buenos Aires, where Peronist leaders would exchange money and goods for votes. With Antonio Cafiero’s election to governor of the Province of Buenos Aires in 1987, the provincial government began intervening in social problems through focalized programs designed to help the poor (Delamata 2004, 16). These territorial patronage networks were further institutionalized under successive governments of the province, especially under the leadership of Eduardo Duhalde (governor of the Province of Buenos Aires 1991-1999). Duhalde handed control of the province’s social programs over to his wife Hilda González who was responsible for the establishment of one of the most extensive Peronist territorial networks. Under González,
the benefits of the social program *Plan Vida* – milk, eggs, and other basic goods – were distributed to over half a million people daily through the network of women who became known as “manzaneras.” Through control of this program and this network, which included 30,000 manzaneras by 1999, Duhalde was able to establish “complete hegemony over Peronism in the province of Buenos Aires” (Delamata 2004, 17). As unemployment grew throughout the 1990s, many people in the poorer neighborhoods of Buenos Aires came to rely on the goods distributed by the manzaneras and similar programs for their subsistence, giving local political leaders increasing control and power over the territories.

The unemployed who began self-organizing would often find themselves in direct conflict with these patronage networks and the local political “punteros,” as they attempted to wrest territorial control away from them. The movements of the unemployed sought to organize in the territory in a fundamentally different way from that of the political parties. There are two key differences between the MTDs’ territorial organizing and that of political parties and similar organizations: 1) it does not assume that political power lies somewhere else and that only purpose of organizing in the neighborhood is to eventually access this other, more legitimate site of power, and 2) the MTDs explicitly challenged the corrupt and vertical forms of political clientelism and patronage, mostly famously practiced by the Peronist Party but also practiced by all major political parties (Auyero 2001).

While territorial organization is an important feature for all the piquetero groups, some organizations have focused on it more than others. Specifically, the FTV, the CCC, and the different MTDs and other groups that formed the CTD Anibal Veron and now the FPDS have been more inclined toward territorial organizing (Svampa and Peyreya 2009, 39). On the other 12

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12 These women were informally referred to as *manzaneras* because they were organized according to blocks (*manzanas*).
hand, those tied to leftist political parties, especially those affiliated with the Revolutionary Communist Party (Party Comunista Revolucionario, PCR) and Workers' Party (Partido Obrero, PO), never demonstrated as much commitment to territorial organization. Since it has proven to be immensely successful, today many Kirchnerista organizations, whether movements of the unemployed or not, have also taken up territorial organizing. The autonomous MTDs have been at the forefront of this insistence on territorial organizing. Both the MTD Solano and the MTD La Matanza gave up organizing piquetes (although they continued to occasionally participate in those organized by other groups against specific cases of repression) in the early 2000s in order to concentrate more fully on their territorial work.

Although the first piquetes occurred in the interior of the country, it was the urban organizations of the unemployed that developed this form of territorial organizing. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many of these urban movements identify social fragmentation and lack of solidarity as one of their principle difficulties, noting the violence and poverty common in the urban periphery, the fragmentation of labor, and the lack of social ties due to migration and fragile community structures (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002). However, rather than see this as an insurmountable challenge, these movements actively work to create community and a shared sense of place. For these territorial and place-making efforts, Zibechi calls them, “the first strategic response to capital in the period of globalization” (2003, 163). The MTDs resist the forces of neoliberalism that produced the urban periphery as such through the construction of a new spatiality that includes the common use of space and non-hierarchical social relations.

Zibechi describes the relationship between space and social relations in some of the settlements created by different social movements in Latin America:
Spatial configuration cannot be separated from the social: the social is represented in the physical space. Unlike traditional neighborhoods, the settlements do not have a center. At most this role is played by the spaces allocated to community work, like the communal hall, the school and others spaces. Often settlements where it is difficult to detect a hierarchical center are seen. In many neighborhoods, that role tends to be occupied by the market or the space for shopping around a plaza. What occupies the center is a collective space, the agora. Something similar happens in the settlements of the landless: the houses form a horseshoe around a communal hall where they hold meetings, where the school, the church, the event and party hall operate. The family homes are oriented around and look toward the collective space and the rest of the houses in a sort of interaction that represents inter-subjectivity in the physical space. (2003, 171).

In other words, the different social relations that these movements strive to create are embodied in the physical space they inhabit, just as capitalist social relations are inscribed in the spaces we normally inhabit.

For Zibechi, the territorial work of the organizations of the unemployed is explicitly linked to the formation of new identities and subjectivities. He argues that a subject cannot exist without territory, and for this capital works to deterritorialize. Zibechi locates the antecedents to the territorialization of the piquetero movement in the movement of land takeovers and squatter settlements of the 1980s. He goes further, however, by arguing that it is in the settlements where the beginnings of an autonomous working class culture is able to develop as residents have much more control over their spaces than in most places. They are not subject to formal property law or building codes, thus construct their dwellings where and how they want to, they name their own streets, and in some cases even have their own forms of governance and justice (2003, 164-5).

Delamata, looking specifically at the experience of the MTD Solano, explains the meaning of territorial organizing:

Carrying out territorial work in this case, not only means, to strengthen the collective's work in the local space, but rather, above all, attribute to the possibility of social change to these community activities. First, the work in the territory is proposed as the production of new values of solidarity that reconstitute interpersonal relations and the existential dimensions of
people who have been broken by unemployment, poverty, and the forms of authoritarianism that permeate society in different ways. Secondly, this communitarian construction aims to produce a new society, that does not directly antagonize the places of constituted power in order to impose itself, but rather it projects itself and affirms itself as 'non-state sovereignty.' (2004, 48).

Territorial organizing is based on the fundamental recognition that power lies in the forms of life in the territory and therefore, does not attempt to “scale-up” or privilege larger scale politics as being more effective forms of achieving social change. Above all, territorial organizing is based on a commitment to changing social relations in a particular place, attacking capitalist reproduction at its most fundamental level, and working to enact a new society and create new subjectivities in that place.

**Experiences of Territorial Organizing**

In order to better understand what this process of territorial organizing entails, I will now describe the practices of the two MTDs I worked with in more detail. While I focus on the specific experiences of these two movements, they are far from the only groups engaged in territorial organizing. As described above, this shift toward territorial work was widespread across many social movements in Argentina as the crisis developed and worsened, with the movements of the unemployed taking a lead role, especially in areas of the urban periphery. The MTD La Matanza split into two organizations in 2007, allowing us to see more concretely the differences between organizations that prioritize territorial forms of organizing and those that do not; while the MTD Solano has retained its commitment to territorial organizing since its beginnings.

The MTD La Matanza realized the importance of establishing a territorial base and physical presence in the neighborhood where they worked after a few years of dedicating themselves to organizing piquetes and other protests in public spaces. A member of the MTD La
Matanza in describing this decision on their part, described feeling like “protest mercenaries going from piquete to piquete” and needing their own space (Interview, Laferre, Oct. 2011). Having their own space seemed crucial for the reproduction of the movement as well as an important step in being more autonomous. The focus on organizing piquetes and protests meant that they were mostly reacting to external factors, making demands on the state, and more susceptible to repression. Having their own space, on the other hand, however small to start, was a necessary step toward beginning to organize on the basis of their own needs and desires, developing autonomous forms of production, and not depending on the state.

After several unsuccessful attempts at land takeovers the previous year, the MTD La Matanza instigated its period of territorial organizing in September 2001 by occupying an abandoned school building in the neighborhood of La Juanita. After doing research into the building's status, a core group of militants entered the space and slept there for a period of two weeks until it was officially expropriated to them in the name of an NGO. The group slowly began refurnishing the space, which had been abandoned for many years, and eventually was able to open the community center CEFOCC (Centro por la Educacion y Formacion de Cultura Comunitaria, Center for Education and the Formation of Communitarian Culture) the following year. This space would become the basis for the organization's work in the neighborhood of La Juanita and they would eventually take over other nearby abandoned spaces and move into surrounding neighborhoods. CEFOCC hosted a variety of activities, including the MTD's internal assemblies and meetings, the group's various cooperative enterprises (a bakery, textile workshop, screen-printing workshop, and publishing house), educational activities, including a pre-school and kindergarten, adult literacy classes, and various reading groups, and many cultural and community events open to the general public. CEFOCC was also home to a weekly
legal clinic and health clinic and housed the neighborhood barter club's market. All of these activities were directed at meeting the needs present in their neighborhood and working to make the neighborhood itself a better place where to live.

When the MTD La Matanza split in 2007, one of the consequences was that the original MTD became less dedicated to territorial organizing as they began focusing increasingly more on electoral politics, while those that left the MTD to continue the work of the school Yo Sí Puedo carried on the work of territorial organizing. While theoretically, an organization could carry out both territorial and electoral organizing, and indeed many organizations claim to do precisely that, the experience of the MTD La Matanza demonstrates the difficulties of this path. If territorial organizing is about privileging the spaces and rhythms of the neighborhood, of daily life, electoral organizing requires that that time be subjected to electoral rhythms as defined by the state. Once Flores was elected to Congress, many of the organization's key organizers started spending more time in city center and less time in their neighborhood of La Matanza. This created a physical, as well as political separation, between the key organizers and the movement's base, the leaders spent most of their time in the city, spent less time interacting with normal neighborhood residents. This meant that the leaders had less of the crucial information about neighborhood dynamics necessary for territorial organizing, were unable to quickly respond to new or changing problems, and leaders lost the trust of many residents. All of these factors combined to make the organization less effective on a territorial level, even when they while having a presence in the national government.

The activists that left the MTD La Matanza to continue the work of the popular school Yo Sí Puedo took a different route and decided to remain committed to territorial organizing. The organization's school building serves as the epicenter for this territorial organizing. The building
itself has three main rooms, a small kitchen, and a patio, and is open from approximately nine in
the morning to nine at night weekdays (most days it closes for a siesta for a while in the
afternoon). The two largest rooms serve as classrooms during the morning and evening class
sessions. A third room houses the organization's office: a desk, an old computer, various
bookshelves and a stack of plastic chairs. At least one of the organization's principal organizers
in the space throughout the day, receiving people that come seeking their help, or just to chat.
Before and after class time, various members of the organization and their friends use the class
rooms, the patio and the space in front of the building to hang out. People drink mate or soda,
share snacks and talk about anything from the latest movies to national political conflicts to
current problems in the neighborhood.

At least a few nights a week, the teachers, organizers, and some students/participants stay
in the building and cook dinner together, sometimes inviting their families and other neighbors.
Everyone contributes a few pesos towards the cost of the meal and helps in its preparation. While
seemingly banal, these shared meals and the conversations that accompany are an essential part
of the work of building community and territorial organizing. They provide an opportunity for
the different participants in the project to get to know each other outside of the many tasks
involved in the day-to-day running of the school. Here conversations would range from people's
romantic lives to national and international politics.

The space also regularly hosted parties and cultural events organized by the students and
teachers. In these ways, the space was more than just a school but rather a gathering space for the
entire community of participants and a space for the forging of new social relations and
subjectivities. Yo Sí Puedo's physical presence in the neighborhood is not limited to that one
building, however. They also use various spaces throughout the neighborhood of La Juanita and
are expanding into the adjacent neighborhood América Latina. The movement contributes to the rent of a house where a young participant and his family live and the house is used the organization's daycare facility during the day, they also use a small building down the street from the school as additional office and meeting space. In the adjacent America Latina neighborhood they rented another building in 2012 which they used as extra classroom space starting in the second semester of the year.

Territorial organization is not only, or even primarily, about having physical spaces in a particular neighborhood or territory. It is about concrete relationships with people in that territory and a deep commitment to the problematics at play in it. In one sense, it is about territorial knowledge: knowing what happens in a neighborhood, who is doing what, where and how. The organizers at Yo Sí Puedo demonstrate a great deal of territorial knowledge in two ways: first, the information that anyone living in the neighborhood knows: which areas the police control and which they do not, where drugs are sold, where to get the best pizza, etc; and secondly, knowledge about the lives of the organizations members and the movements that make up their lives. For example, they know the family history of each student, who that student is dating, any family or medical problems the student might have. This gives them an important advantage when it terms of encouraging participation in the movement and resolving specific conflicts when they arise, but more importantly it gives them a type of embeddedness in the neighborhood that allows them to be more fully aware of people's everyday struggles and desires. All of the organizers live either in the neighborhood of La Juanita or nearby ones, and spend most of their day at the school building or traversing the neighborhood, thus allowing them to gain this sort of knowledge. Additionally, it is this sort of territorial organizing that makes it hard to draw distinct lines between the organizers and the base.
The MTD Solano, which now goes by the name *Movimiento de Colectivos* (Movement of Collectives, MDC), is also dedicated to territorial organizing. The MTD Solano was always heavily rooted in a specific territory, coming out of the struggles over land occupations and access to services and unemployment benefits in specific neighborhoods of Quilmes and Florencio Varela. Also, their initial relationship to the Catholic Church tied them to the territory of the congregation. They did, however, at first, took part in piquetes and other actions throughout the urban periphery and occasionally in the city of Buenos Aires itself and participated in the Coordinadora Aníbal Verón. They decided to leave the Coordinadora shortly after the murders of Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki, citing different organizational priorities from the other MTDs in the coordinator. On leaving the Aníbal Verón, the MTD Solano decided to focus almost exclusively on territorial organization.

The MDC organizes territorially on a number of fronts, all aimed at responding to direct, urgent needs in their neighborhood while also working toward creating new social relations and forms of life for neighborhood residents and movement participants. Much of this work is focused on neighborhood youth, some of the most marginalized residents in the current situation and therefore also the target for the expansion of consumption, especially of drugs. Therefore, the MDC conducts a number of projects with youth, such as martial arts and traditional dance classes, music groups, and other cultural and educational activities. Besides teaching young people new skills and providing them with educational and cultural opportunities they would otherwise not have access to, these programs serve as a way for youth to form a sort of community and foment the production of new values. In discussing why they organize these programs, which might not be considered political in the traditional sense, MDC organizers

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13 Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki were two piquetero activists from the CTD Aníbal Verón murdered by police in a piquete on the Puente Pueyrredón leading into Buenos Aires on June 26, 2002.
emphasize the importance of creating other values and ways of socializing that do not have to do with consumption (whether legal or illegal). While the hope is that these neighborhood youth will continue to participate in other political activities that the movement organizes, they are not considered something like a mere first step to another form of more important or more political participation, but are considered an essential part of the movement's political work in themselves.

Along with these activities focused toward neighborhood youth, the MDC also organizes a community farm and health clinic. These projects will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter but here it is important to note their significance in terms of territorial organizing. Both of these projects came out of an assessment of the needs of neighborhood residents: for healthy and sustainably-farmed food and for accessible and comprehensive health care. The health clinic works closely with neighborhood families to address specific health needs that they might have. Some of their key focuses have been on issues of mental health, sexual violence and substance abuse, issues indicated as important by neighborhood residents with few state resources dedicated to their solution. The movement's form of addressing these problems also differs from the institutionalized health care system and demonstrates how territorial organizing functions. Rather than treat these as individualized problems, requiring individual solutions, all of these issues are considered to be collective and community problems. They organize group therapy sessions that explore what it is about life in this neighborhood that contributes to mental health problems, and explore how people can collectively organize to change this situation.

The territorial organizations that these movements engage in, however, is not conflict free in the slightest. Many different organizations have always co-existed in the same territory, including the piquetero organizations and those coming out of more traditional political party
Alongside these political organizations, depending on the specific zone, are also a whole host of different government agencies, church-related groups, and NGOs, all supposedly working to improve people's standards of living. Often organizations of the unemployed compete with each other, the Peronist party apparatus and semi-official government agencies to distribute the benefit packages and administer other government subsidies. Since families cannot receive more than one subsidy and subsidies are distributed to organizations according to their membership, movements and organizations fight for members in order to be able to have access to more funds, as well as more local political power. In some cases, this is not pure competition but rather a complex set of negotiations between different organizations, even those with different political lines. Ferraudi Curto (2009) describes how, in one neighborhood of the urban periphery, many families are signed up with different organizations in order to receive more than one plan per family. In her fieldwork with one piquetero organization, the movement participants and leaders were well aware of which families did this, yet did not complain as long as they kept up with their required activities for the movement.

A territorial understanding and definition of movements allows us to take the perspective of people occupying space rather than solely looking at official membership criteria. Ferraudi Curto argues that a focus on movement spaces and who spends time in them moves us beyond trying to identify an inside and an outside of the movement, since in the case of the piquetero organizations that is usually not so clear. Spending hours in the Yo Sí Puedo schoolhouse confirmed Ferraudi Curto's argument: throughout the day a regular stream of people would pass through the building, some attending class, some coming for help or advice related to specific problems, some coming to work, and others just coming to hang out or say hello. Not all of these people would identify as part of the organization, only half would participate in assemblies, yet
they all expressed some sort of affinity with the organization and would come to its events and relied on it to a differing degrees for their well-being. This does not preclude them from participating in other organizations, occasionally, even rival organizations, mostly with the goal of receiving more benefits.

**New Territorial Conflicts**

In the current moment, under the new form of governance and the neo-extractivist economic model, there has been an intensification of territorial conflict as social movements are not the only ones interested in territorial organizing. Recognizing the effectiveness of this move toward territorialization on the part of social movements, under both Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the government made a concerted effort to move into the neighborhoods as well. Municipal administrations and later the national government followed the movements into the territories in an attempt to establish control over those previously peripheral spaces. This new form of governance goes hand in hand with the emergence of the neo-extractivist economy based on capturing value from the common as described in Chapter Two. In urban territories, neo-extractivism relies on the capture and extraction of the value produced through practices of urban social cooperation, primarily through mechanisms of debt and credit, as well as the increased commodification of urban land through the privatization of private lands and increased real estate speculation. In the shift from the neoliberalism of the 1990s to the neo-extractive economic model of the contemporary moment, the urban peripheries have gone from being marginal territories, largely excluded from capitalist accumulation, to the new frontier of capitalist expansion.

Much of the innovation and success of the Kirchner governments stems from their recognition of the political and economic importance these previously marginalized. The
Kirchner governments have based much of their new form of governance on a territorial approach that seeks to replicate and capture energies from the movements' forms of territorial organizing. Zibechi discusses the ways in which progressive governments across Latin America have attempted to expand their control into the urban peripheries: “the social programs and militarization of the poor peripheries are two sides of the same policy that seeks to control populations that are outside of the states' power” (2008, 14). Zibechi identifies the social programs implemented under progressive governments as a form of biopolitical control. This new form of governance emerged in a moment of a crisis of legitimacy of the previous form of governing, as was seen clearly in 2001. The emergence of these new social movements, or in Zibechi's term “societies in movement,” had to be met with a new “art of governing the movements” (ibid., 104). He argues that in Argentina (and Uruguay), social programs aimed at the poor and the unemployed are the basis of this new form of governance and allow the state to more effectively intervene in new territories. These practices “go beyond disciplining bodies in enclosed spaces, and take on something as complex as governing the population” (ibid.). Unlike disciplinary forms of control that are based on a negative form of control, limiting and repressing what bodies can do, the more complex form of control that has emerged under the progressive governments is based on already-existing practices, supporting some to the detriment of others (ibid., 104-105). Zibechi elaborates further, “the Panopticon is no longer the fundamental form of control, now there are more subtle forms that act, not through a relationship of exteriority, but rather a relationship of immanence in respect to the movements, […] including street mobilization as one of their techniques (ibid., 105). Rather than being imposed from above, this new form of governance acts just as much “from below,” throughout society as a whole and even through social movements. Instead of repressing social mobilizations, as the neoliberal
government of the 1990s tended to do, the new government actually encourages the population to mobilize, while attempting to control the causes and forms of those mobilizations. For example, the federal government organizes and promotes marches against the human rights abuses of the dictatorship, while casting more unruly forms of protest as violent and illegitimate. Rather than oppose or try to detain the many alternative practices that social movements carry out in their territories (alternative forms of production, education, health care, etc.), the current government often makes minimal amounts of support available for these projects, as long as movements meet certain requirements and report to the government. In this way, the government is able to draw on the vastly greater territorial knowledge and organizing capacity of territorially embedded social movements to enhance its governance in these territories.

The Kirchner apparatus has inserted itself into these territories through a number of methods: investment in infrastructure, social programs to help the poor and unemployed, and creating new forms of territorial organization itself. The investment in infrastructure is the most visible of these means, with considerable funding going to build new and improved roads, expanding gas, electricity, sewage and water systems, schools, hospitals and clinics, and subsidized housing. While many of these infrastructure projects have not been finished and are far from meeting the needs in these territories, they do serve to effectively increase the image of the national government's presence. These efforts are also accompanied by a media campaign, including billboards campaigning for Kirchnerist politicians alongside new construction projects, television advertising, and other more subtle practices, such as new street signs marked with the national government's logo on each corner. As many of these neighborhoods previously did not have street signs and residents often did not know or refer to the official names (but rather local nicknames based on the businesses or graffiti), naming and promoting official names serves as a
way of ordering these neighborhoods, bringing them under the state's spatial control. The national government's logo also serves to remind people of the power of the federal government and give it a visible, more positive, presence in these neighborhoods where previously the state was only visible through its absence (in terms of services) or through violent repression (from the police, military). Besides the infrastructure itself that is being built, the way these projects are implemented also plays an important role in the roll out of the new form of governance.

In order to increase its territorial presence, as well as to take advantage of the territorial knowledge of local organizers and activists, the government and the Peronist party, under Kirchner leadership, have developed a number of their own territorial organizing programs and groups. These are often structured similarly to a social movement and directly employ or incorporate many local activists. The Peronist party has also created new organizations, such as the Movimiento Evita, that, despite not coming out of a piquetero history, use much of the same language of mobilizing for social change and organizing territorially (Natalucci 2008). The use of territorial organization is an attempt to make the state more present in the marginalized spaces of the country, with the recognition that the most effective way to do this is through social movements. This gives another indication that the Kirchner administration recognizes the power and value in territorial organizing and movements committed to doing so and therefore attempts to bring them under its control.

In another example, the Ministry of Social Development operates a program called Promotores Territoriales para el Cambio Social (Territorial Promoters for Social Change) whose stated goal is to “strengthen and accompany the processes of organization and communitarian participation with the objective of articulating the different social programs implemented by the Ministry, in connection with other ministries, civil society organizations and local and provincial
governments” (Ministry of Social Development 2012). These promoters are usually local community leaders and activists from different groups whose job it is to: “promote citizen protagonism in the achieving new rights, trains teachers from the perspective of popular education, form work teams that encourage community organization and participation, and secures the population's access to social programs” (ibid.) According to the official language, this program “contributes to the 'bottom-up' construction of the Federal Network of Social Programs, based on the capacities installed in the territory. In this way, network's work makes the existing resources and programs at different state levels more efficient.” More than co-optation, programs such as these are attempts by the government to capture and incorporate the organizational capacity and territorial knowledge of social movements. While political clientelism always acted on a territorial level, this new form of governance displays important differences from the traditional clientelism. It is much more diffused and networked, and incorporates a variety of actors from NGOs and civil society organizations, social movements and different and varied government agencies. In many ways, these new organizations and forms of territorial governance are organized much like the social movements themselves and take up many of these same methods and practices. They have “assemblies,” talk about horizontality, democracy and grassroots participation, and make extensive use of all the techniques of popular education, such as carrying out “diagnoses” of neighborhood problems. In other words, the government does not merely seek to bring these movements into its already-existing plans, but seeks to model itself off the movements, incorporating their energy and forms of organization.

The government also establishes a territorial presence through the creation of “integrated community centers” throughout the country. These centers are similar to the social and community centers created by the MTDs and other movements in different neighborhoods, but
with considerably more resources and better facilities. The centers are defined by the Ministry of Social Development on their website as “public spaces of community integration, constructed throughout the country, for the encounter and participation of different actors that work in an inter-sectoral and participatory way with the objective of promoting local development in pursuit of social inclusion and the improvement of quality of life of the communities” (2012). These centers take on many of the same activities as social movements do in their territories, as well, listing their aims as: the coordination of social development policies and primary health care services (prevention, promotion, social-sanitary assistance); care and support to the most vulnerable sectors; integration of institutions and community organizations to promote networking; and, promotion of cultural and recreational activities and popular education. Other government programs and initiatives, while not acting as specifically on the territorial level, follow this same logic of aiming to capture and incorporate movement energies and capacities, promoting some activities to the detriment of others in order to pacify the most radical and confrontational elements of struggles. This points to a territorialization of conflict, as movements and the state, and increasingly financial capital, try to take control the urban space, including formerly peripheral neighborhoods.

**New Social Conflict**

The government is not the only actor to follow social movements into the territory, as discussed in Chapter Two, finance capital has also increasingly moved into these peripheral territories, through the increased availability of different forms of credit, from micro-credit loans to start “small businesses,” to credit cards backed by commercial banks and the unregulated loans to purchases goods in informal markets. Under the neo-extractive economic model, previously marginal territories increasingly enter directly into the productive process, from the
rural land used for agricultural production and the extraction of natural resources, to the urban
territory which is increasingly being financialized through practices of real estate speculation and
urban development (Gago and Mezzadra 2015). These rural and urban elements of neo-
extractivism are not distinct processes but directly linked as the profits from natural resource
extraction and the drug trade are invested in land and construction in the urban territory (IIEP
2013). In this way, financial capital becomes invested in fixed capital and illegally
generated profits become invested in legal entities.

In terms of the urban periphery, there are two very real effects of these processes: the
territory itself becomes more highly valued and therefore struggled over, and financial capital,
once restricted to the city center, enters the neighborhoods in the form of different types of loans
and credit, an increase in consumption and debt. These two conditions have greatly affected the
unemployed workers’ movements and other organizations operating in the urban peripheries,
putting them in the middle of a new set of conflicts. Land that was once considered the least
desirable, the home of the marginal and excluded, is now at the center of disputes between
multiple actors: different movements and organizations, different government agencies, and
different agents of capital (both legal and illegal). As population increases and property prices
rise in the city of Buenos Aires, developments, especially of gated communities or other elite
suburbs, are on the rise throughout the urban periphery. If this territory is deemed desirable at all,
it is only because of the efforts of certain social movements and the urban poor in general to
make that territory livable, turning what was once considered barren, urban wasteland, more
suitable for landfills than housing, into vibrant, thriving communities. It is not only the physical
land itself that is under dispute, however, it is also the social relations and subjectivities
connected to those territories that are at the center of this “new social conflict.”
One case that illuminates the broader conflict is that of the Movimiento de Colectivos: in August, 2012, leaders and co-founders of the movement had their home burned down by local drug dealers. The house was built on land occupied by the movement since 2005 and several other movement members had their homes damaged in the fire. The arson was part of a series of escalating threats that neighborhood drug dealers had made to MDC leaders Jara and Spagnolo. The MDC saw these threats and the attack as an attempt to drive their organization out of the territory where they had been effectively organizing since the 1990s. On the one hand, the drug dealers literally wanted the movement's land: the small plot of land where various members of the MTD Solano/MDC lived happened to be located across the street from an apartment building where the dealers were based. These dealers hoped to be able to claim this land once the residents had been driven from it in order to expand the base of their operation. It is also important to note that this land is in an area that is seeing increasing property values as it becomes a sort of bedroom community for people working in Buenos Aires. Even though the neighborhood where the house was located was still on the margins of these new developments, there still has been increasing real estate speculation in the neighborhood, due in part to drug dealers investing money in land as well as developers buying land. On the other hand, the attack on the Movimiento de Colectivos was an attempt to drive the organization out of the neighborhood altogether because their territorial organizing was considered a threat to the drug trade in the neighborhood. Although the MDC has never organized against drugs and previously had never entered into direct confrontation with local drug dealers, their territorial organizing and especially their work with neighborhood youth interfere with drug dealers' efforts to control the neighborhood space, to force youth to work for them and make local residents dependent on them.
This violence goes hand in hand with the growth in consumption based on the increasing availability of different forms of credit in the territories, especially the urban peripheries. As described in Chapter Two, while during the neoliberalism of the 1990s, the urban peripheries could be seen as the home of the most marginalized, excluded populations, this new form of neo-extractive, financial capitalism seeks to include even those low-income residents of the urban peripheries. This occurs in a number of ways: through micro-credit loans from government agencies and NGOs, the expansion of debit and credit cards often linked to government benefits programs, and “under the table,” predatory loans offered by drug dealers and sweatshop owners. This is a reterritorialization of capital, an attempt to exploit and capture that common created by the movements in opposition to the neoliberal policies of the 1990s. It is an attempt to directly appropriate the results of reproductive labor, of the care work that goes into producing the territory and the social relations that make the territory. The IIEP describes the processes behind this territorialization of finance:

Proliferation of finances in the reproduction of existence. Perhaps the principle cause of the opacity that we were talking about is the proliferation of a financial dynamic, on diverse scales, in all levels of society. Additionally, the state's intervention in the market promoting consumption, the increase in monetary circulation (and the multiplication of currencies) has other causes. One of them is the set of legal restrictions – pushed by the FATI (Financial Action Task Force) – that prevents the entry of illicit capital into the regulated banking circuit. This illegal capital puts pressure on the territories to multiply business opportunities. The same applies to banking operations consisting of allocating capital outside of any regulations for usurious credits designed to put a part of the population without regular access to credit into debt.

The financial system, frequently associated with high finances, also develops, and ever more so, as “low” finances, or popular finances. Investigating this double formation of the financial market supposes broadening our understanding of finances no longer only towards above but also toward below, based on the multiplication of articulations (legal and illegal, debt and credit) between the banking system and the economies of popular sectors, which are not usually seen as financial. (2014).

One of the key effects of this proliferation of finance in the territories, according to the IIEP, is a
confusion of terms and difficulty of understanding situation, making it hard for social movements to know how to act in the current conjuncture and resulting in the loss of common language developed around the 2001 crisis. Therefore, the IIEP calls for more investigation into how these processes operate in specific territories, as well as collaborations between social actors in different places to understand the broader processes at work here. Toward this end, the IIEP itself is organized as an independent research institute bringing together movements and organizations from different parts of Argentina to investigate the dynamics at work in this new social conflict. Additionally, the MDC emphasizes the need for practices of self-defense in the territories, as well as stronger networks across territories, to protect the alternatives they have created and sustain their struggle.

**Conclusion**

The trajectory of the unemployed workers' movements and emergence of new social conflicts demonstrate the changing role of space today. The shifts from Fordism to neoliberalism to the contemporary neo-extractive economy have increasingly integrated more and more territory into the productive process, both in terms of a territorial expansion of capitalist relations and in terms of an intensification of exploitation. This process has broken down many of the earlier borders that limited and defined capitalist accumulation, challenging the sovereignty of the nation-state and leading to the emergence of global Empire. This does not mean that space has ceased to matter or that borders cease to exist, but rather that new borders are enacted on multiple scales. In this process, urban space and the scale of the city play an increasingly important role in value production and the organization of social life.

Faced with these new spatial configurations of capital and governance, social movements have invented new spatial strategies, attempting not only to disrupt capital but to create
autonomous spaces and new spatial relations. These movements have sought to resist the deterritorializing effects of neoliberal capitalism, through practices rooted in specific territories and creating new socio-spatial relations. The movements of the unemployed developed their spatial practice in two parts: first, the piquetes aiming to disrupt urban flows of capital, and second, territorial organizing focused on remaking the spaces of everyday life in the neighborhood. The piquetes demonstrated an understanding of the importance of urban space for contemporary capitalist production and therefore sought to interrupt the very functioning of the city. These roadblocks had a huge impact, bringing the plight of the unemployed into the public sphere and winning many of the movements' initial demands for subsidies and unemployment benefits. The piquetes also served another purpose: creating a space for the unemployed to begin organizing themselves in new and innovative ways. After the initial successes of the piquetes, the unemployed workers' movements began a new phase concentrated on territorial or neighborhood organizing. While not abandoning public protest and inter-neighborhood collaboration, the movements focused their efforts on problems specific to life in the neighborhoods of the urban periphery and building strong organizations in those territories.

The movements' move into the territories has not been uncontested, however. Following the election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003, the government began developing its own form of "territorial organizing," attempting to capture and incorporate much of the movements' energies. This territorial governance includes the creation of new social programs and institutions that have adopted many of the same forms of territorial organizing as the unemployed workers' movements. This has been followed by an increasing reterritorialization of capital, most notably finance capital's penetration into these previously peripheral neighborhoods, through diverse forms of credit often funded by illegal industries. This territorialization of capital and governance
has led to the emergence of what some movements are referring to as the “new social conflict,” marked by new actors and increased violence in the territories, where social movements find themselves being attacked from all sides.

The piqueteros’ struggle from the neoliberalism of the 1990s to the neo-extractive economic model in force today points to the continued relevance of space and territory for capitalist reproduction and the importance of producing new spaces in order to confront the capitalist production and valorization of space. The MTDs themselves emphasize the importance of territory for constructing new subjectivities and social relations, explaining the logic behind their commitment to territorial organizing. The following chapter will explore the construction of alternatives, ranging from worker-managed cooperatives to community gardens and housing collectives to popular education and collective research initiatives. As I will show, these projects are an essential part of territorial organizing and the creation of new forms of life rooted in specific spaces.
Chapter 6: Constructing the Common and Creating New Forms of Life

Much of the strength and inventiveness of Argentina’s MTDs comes from the alternative visions and forms of life they created in their territories. While the worker-managed enterprises have perhaps received the most academic and media attention, they must be understood within a larger context of the creation of alternative institutions aimed at meeting the needs of reproduction and transforming everyday life. Together these include movement-organized schools, health clinics, community kitchens, gardens and housing cooperatives. These projects are struggles for autonomous biopolitical production – the autonomous creation of subjectivities and social relations and cooperation – or the production of the common. The MTDs aim to create new forms of life: not only narrowly defined economic practices, but also new ways of organizing and producing the spaces they inhabit. Building on the argument in Chapter Four that social change does not come from occupying the institutions of the state or exerting power from above, and the argument in Chapter Five about the importance of territorial organizing for challenging neoliberal capitalism, here I take a closer look at the concrete alternatives being created by movements.

In a sense, this chapter takes us back to where we ended in Chapter Two: contemporary capitalism as sustained by the extraction of the common, the fruits of social cooperation outside of the control and organization of capital. In that chapter, I explored how the social labor of the poor and unemployed is an essential element of the current workings of capitalism in Argentina
and especially the economic recovery following the country's crisis in 2001. While that chapter discussed the social labor of the poor and unemployed in general, in this chapter I want to concentrate on the ways in which that social labor is organized in, against, and beyond capitalism. The common, however, always exceeds capture, something always escapes. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the struggles of the unemployed workers' movements as struggles around the common – not only its defense, but also its very production – as the key to a political struggle that ultimately aims for the abolition of work and for the creation of new forms of life.

This chapter first looks at the theories underlying these efforts to produce new forms of life and analyses that might allows us to understand them better. I start with a brief overview of literature and the debates around the common, focusing on those perspectives that highlight the production of the common and understand commoning as a verb. Next, I turn to three concepts that have been particularly important for the movements in Argentina: autogestión (collective self-management), the solidarity economy, and buen vivir (collective well-being). The chapter then turns to the specific practices of producing and promoting the common in by Argentine movements. First, I give a broad overview of the diverse economic practices that emerged during the height of the economic crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as barter networks and recuperated factories. Together these diverse economic activities form what has been referred to as the “solidarity economy,” or economic practices that prioritize use value over exchange value. I show how these practices first developed as survival mechanisms for the poor and unemployed during the height of the crisis but later adopted more explicitly political elements and connections to other movements. Next, I look more specifically at the commoning practices of the unemployed workers' movements, including worker-managed cooperatives, food sovereignty
initiatives, alternative health practices, struggles around housing, and education and research.

**Theorizing the Common**

Globally, concepts of the common, commons and commoning have made a noteworthy resurgence in recent years, both in terms of social movement practice and in intellectual conversations. Contemporary movements around the world have been motivated by different ideas of the common: whether “in defense of the commons,” to defend against neoliberalism's new enclosures and privatizations or in terms of urban commons or digital and immaterial commons. In these cases, the common functions as a way to talk about collective control of resources without relying on a centralized power, thus aligning itself with a non-state-centric politics. The common becomes necessary for building autonomy, by providing the resources to sustain an anti-capitalist politics without relying on the state and the market, as well as forming the foundation for the immaterial elements of autonomy — shared language and values.

Hardt and Negri define the common in opposition to both the private and the public, focusing on its immaterial as well as material aspects:

The common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty — which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together. We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledge, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common. (2009, viii).

Here the common includes not only pre-existing natural elements – land, air, water, etc. – although these are considered to be held in common, but also, the labor and knowledges involved in managing and producing the common. Hardt and Negri emphasize that the common is based on the forces of social production, such as affect, knowledge, and language (and other shared
forms of communication).

Caffentzis (2010) dates the renewal of interest in the commons in both capitalist and anti-capitalist discourses to the 1980s as a response to the recognition of the limits of both neoliberalism (e.g., using the commons to “save neoliberalism from itself”) on the capitalist side and existing communism/socialism on the anti-capitalist side. Enclosure of remaining commons, especially land and natural resources, was a key component of the neoliberal structural adjustment policies of the 1980s. By the 1990s, however, resistance to these new enclosures was widespread, forcing neoliberal institutions to rethink their position (Caffentzis 2010). This rethinking led the World Bank and other development institutions to promote some forms of local common ownership and management of natural resources, but with the same overall aims and goals of earlier neoliberal measures. In other words, there was a recognition that the commons can be a more efficient way of managing resources and labor cooperation for capital.

Caffentzis argues that contemporary anti-capitalist notions of the commons bring together different temporal and spatial ideas of the commons:

The commons has been used by anticapitalists to show that collective non-capitalist forms of organizing material life are alive and struggling throughout the world in two senses: (1) the precapitalist commons still exist and the subsistence of billions of people depend on them (indeed the forms of social cooperation implicit in these commons make it possible for all those ‘living’ on $1 a day – a literal impossibility – to actually live); (2) the rise of a new commons, especially in ecological-energy spaces and in computational-informational manifolds. In other words, the commons brings together pre- and post-capitalist forms of social coordination in a sort of time warp that evades the totalitarian logic of neoliberalism. (2010, 24).

Caffentzis continues:

The notion of the commons is attractive to anti-capitalist elements of the anti-globalisation movement since it has allowed them to say to activists that one need not wait for some mythical ‘beginning of history’ - after a centuries-long march through war and deprivation – to achieve the goal of a cooperative ‘free association’ of producers (as envisioned by both Marx and the anarchists of the First International) … it was already here and working (though often in the so called marginal areas of the world economy and with many
Here Caffentzis highlights both historical and contemporary forms of commons that serve as a source of subsistence or reproductive commons that allow people to live and survive without relying on waged labor. Therefore, if enclosure functions, not only as the original accumulation of capital, but also as the creation of workers by separating people from their means of reproduction, then the commons becomes a necessary element of any sustainable anti-capitalist politics. Caffentzis continues, speaking of the pre-capitalist commons: “These commons functioned in an objectively anti-capitalist manner, for they made it possible for potential workers to refuse to become actual workers, or, if they did become objects of exploitation, the access to some means of production and subsistence gave them more power to resist their exploitation” (2010: 34). Thus, access to the commons, a collective means of subsistence, is an essential element of any refusal of work or exodus from capitalist relations. This is the motivation behind the MTDs' insistence on creating alternative economic practices.

Rather than speak exclusively of the common as a noun, other authors and movements have emphasizes the act of commoning, as a verb. Speaking of commoning highlights the fact that what we discuss today as the common is not a pre-existing entity but that it is produced. This allows us to shift our focus to the practices and acts of producing the common through different forms of social cooperation. This production of the common refers to the immaterial common of language and social organization, as well as the material commons that also require knowledge and organization in order to put them to use. As Linebaugh argues:

The activity of commoning is conducted through labor with other resources; it does not make a division between 'labor' and 'natural resources.' On the contrary, it is labor which creates something as a resource, and it is by resources that the collectivity of labor comes to pass. As an action it is thus best understood as a verb rather as a 'common pool resource.' (2014, 13).
Caffentzis and Federici speak of these commoning initiatives as “the seeds, the embryonic form of an alternative mode of production in the make” (2013, 87). In other words, projects based on the common and commoning practices can serve as the basis for a non-capitalist mode of production.

Focusing on the immaterial aspects of the common also requires a focus on questions of the organization and production of the common. The common is produced through encounters and cooperation between subjects as they share their knowledges and abilities in order to collectively create something new. It is sharing these capacities and potential that produces the common, in turn increasing our own capacities even more. Producing the common is necessarily a collective process:

In the biopolitical domain the production of the common is more efficient the more people participate freely, with their different talents and abilities, in the productive network. Participation, furthermore, is a kind of pedagogy that expands productive forces since all those included become through their participation more capable (Hardt and Negri 2009, 304).

Therefore, struggles around the common are not only about obtaining common access to some good, or against new enclosures, but also must include struggles over the production process and for new forms of collective association. While most of the commoning practices that emerged around 2001 in Argentina started rather spontaneously, as ways to survive the impacts of the economic crisis, it was their organization into more stable and sustainable forms that gave them so much political and economic power. Again today, as they are increasingly threatened by new forms of governance and capture, these movements seek to create new ways of institutionalizing their practices, through decentralized, networked forms of institutions.

Self-Management of Space

When the unemployed began organizing in the 1990s, their primary motivation was the
lack of employment and the lack of state support for the unemployed, leading to demands for “genuine employment” and unemployment benefits. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, for an important sector of the movement, their mobilization was based around the desire for a different kind of work, a different relationship to work, for “work with dignity.” In that chapter, I discussed work with dignity in terms of autogestión (self-management), internal organization according to horizontality and direct democracy, and privileging communitarian values over market values. Creating work with dignity was the goal of the cooperatives and other productive projects that the unemployed workers' movements initiated in their territories after making the shift to territorial organizing after 2001. In this, these movements form part of a long tradition of experiments in alternative organizations of labor, most notably the long history of experiences in workers' control and cooperativism.

De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2010) understand worker cooperatives as a form of the common in three senses: with the workplace being an organizational commons, the labor performed in the cooperatives as a commoning practice, and the surplus generated as a commonwealth. They name five aspects of ideal-type worker cooperative practices: associated labor, workplace democracy, surplus redistribution, cooperation among cooperatives, and (controversially) links between cooperatives and socialist states. However, workers' cooperatives are also critiqued, on the one hand, for failing to successfully compete with capitalist firms and for the “inefficiency” of self-management, and, on the other hand, for failing to provide a revolutionary alternative to capitalist labor relations, as competing in a capitalist market often leads workers themselves to decide to continue capitalist practices (c.f. Ness and Azzellini 2011). These critiques of a limited form of cooperativism, as well as the general understanding of the transformations in the organization of labor and production discussed in earlier chapters, have
clear implications for struggles for self-management and workers' control. If labor is now
dispersed throughout the urban territory, then, to be effective, this sort of self-management must
be distributed throughout the urban fabric as well. For this reason, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter
argue that individual cooperatives must become part of a wider “circulation of the common,”
networking with one another and integrating into wider struggles to create forms of life in
common.

Sitrin argues that autogestión, which she defines as “a form of self-management with an
implied form of horizontalidad,” (2012, 3) is an important element of the many of the
movements that emerged in the 2001 moment. For Sitrin, autogestión refers to more than "self-
management" because it "implies the concepts of horizontalidad and autonomy," showing that
projects that are “autogestionados”: "are self-created and self-managed... are run collectively,
directly democratically and horizontally, often using decision-making processes based on
consensus" (ibid., 10). In describing his vision for an alternative to the capitalist mode of
production, Lefebvre also uses the concept of autogestión, which Brenner and Elden describe as
more than “self-management” but more accurately referring to “workers' control” or “grassroots
control” (2009, 14). Lefebvre emphasizes that autogestión cannot be limited to the factory space,
and calls for a generalized autogestión, when people take over all aspects of their own lives
through radically democratic means that imply the withering away of the state. Lefebvre calls for
“the occupation of space as an offensive strategy of the working class” with the aim of “the
collective management and social appropriation of the space of production and the space of
eyeveryday life,” specifically calling for the autogestión “of material and intellectual production, of
territories, which is to say of the entirety of space” (2009, 120). In this sense, autogestión is
explicitly linked to the territorial organization discussed in the previous chapter, as the ultimate
goal of a movement must be territorial *autogestión*. Sitrin also discusses autogestión in specifically territorial terms:

Autogestión, the creation of alternative values and new territories, occurs not just in recuperated workplaces in Argentina. Part of the uniqueness of autogestión in Argentina is precisely that it is a production-based social relationship that is a broader phenomenon: people are creating together, pushing at the boundaries of the dominant power of the state and the economic dictates of the capitalist market; it is a new social relationship to production, but not one limited to the confines of a workplace or factory. (2012, 160).

Zibechi argues that the productive projects created by Argentine social movements put in question the very terms and categories of political economy making it necessary to develop new theoretical understandings of how these processes work, and especially new forms of evaluating them. Zibechi argues that workers' ownership of the means of production and “de-alienating” the production process (through challenging the division of labor and democraticizing decision making) are necessary but not sufficient for creating non-capitalist economic practices (2008a, 176). For Zibechi, the decisive moment is that of exchange: what happens to the goods after they are produced, that rather than producing commodities, goods for exchange on the market, these projects exchange their goods through networks based on personal relationships and solidarity. He describes a cooperative bakery organized by a group of unemployed youth in Buenos Aires: “there is no hierarchy between production and circulation, between productive and unproductive labor, etc. In this point, even sales holds some advantages to production. It is what allows for weaving social relations with the neighborhood, which, in practice, is what ensures the project's survival” (2008, 175). Zibechi defines production in these projects as not primarily the production of merchandise, goods for the market, but as “producing non-capitalist social relations, or non-capitalism” (ibid.).
Solidarity Economy

Recognizing that *autogestión* must go beyond the workplace, and include more than the common ownership of means of production and workers' control over decisions in the workplace, points to the necessity for an entirely new economic system. In other words, not only must forms of production be transformed, but also forms of circulation and consumption, and the relationships between these different activities. The concept of the “solidarity economy” is therefore useful for thinking about an alternative economic system where solidarity rather than accumulation is the motivating factor. Coraggio (2009) defines the solidarity economy as one that emphasizes use value and meeting the needs of its participants over exchange value and the accumulation of wealth. This type of economic organization recognizes that all economies are already social and cannot be separated from the political and cultural aspects of life, nor from nature and the biological. Acosta (2009) similarly emphasizes that the solidarity economy is one that is not ruled by the market or the state, where solidarity is the basic economic value, and the market functions to reproduce solidarity, not the other way around.

Along with worker-managed forms of production, such as the cooperatives discussed above, the solidarity economy also refers to alternative forms of exchange and distribution, pricing mechanisms, and property arrangements. This is what the MTD Solano has in mind when it defines its vision of an alternative economy as one that creates common and communitarian forms of life, in which meeting the basic needs of their members comes before the question of how much profit the different enterprises generate (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002). Therefore, they focus not only on productive enterprises – farming, workshops, bakeries – but also on housing cooperatives and popular education. The MTDs' objectives are not merely to autonomously produce economic wealth, but also to challenge notions of value that place
individual economic wealth over collective economic and social well-being. In Argentina, the
concept of the solidarity economy has been used to describe the range of alternative economic
practices that emerged during the period of economic crisis, including the barter clubs,
alternative currencies, recuperated factories, and other cooperative enterprises, as well as the
more diffuse networks of aid and mutual support. These practices allowed the poor and
unemployed to survive when they were excluded from the dominant, formal economy and denied
support from the state. Hundreds of thousands of people across the country participated in these
different activities and they grew to become an important part of the national economy.

Recently, the federal government has recognized the importance of these alternative
economic activities and begun officially promoting the solidarity economy, with the creation of
the Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social (National Institute of Associativism
and Social Economy, INAES), under the Ministry of Social Development, and the promotion of
a new national “economic solidarity law,” which would create more legal structures for
cooperatives and mutual aid societies. Additionally, INAES offers workshops, training courses
and other resources for cooperative workers or those seeking to start a cooperative. Perhaps most
important, are the subsidies and “unemployment benefits” tied to cooperative enterprises
discussed in earlier chapters. While these government programs do provide important resources
for solidarity economy projects, and also, importantly, provide a sense of legitimacy for these
projects, they also demonstrate the limits of the concept of the solidarity economy. In these cases,
the solidarity economy is considered a parallel economy to the hegemonic capitalist economy,
that functions to meet the needs of those who are excluded or marginalized from the dominant
economic system. The solidarity economy does not challenge the market economy nor does it
challenge principles of economic growth or the eurocentric ideals at the heart of ideas of
development and progress (Dinerstein 2014). In this way, the solidarity economy, on its own, is not meant to challenge capitalism, only to alleviate some of its worst features.

**Buen Vivir**

For the autonomous MTDs, as well as other more radical sectors involved in the alternative economic practices mentioned above, their vision goes well beyond the limited notion of the solidarity economy as understood by the state. These movements want to challenge the very terms by which “the economy” is understood, the separation between “the economic” and “the social” and notions of growth and development as necessary goals. In this context, the concept of *buen vivir*, which roughly translates to living well or collective well-being, is useful for understanding the MTDs' struggles to create alternative practices beyond a strict definition of the economic and toward the creation of common ways of life. Walsh defines *buen vivir* as: “a system of knowledge and living based on the communion of humans and nature and on the spatial-temporal-harmonious totality of existence. That is, on the necessary interrelation of beings, knowledges, logics, and rationalities of thought, action, existence and living” (2010, 18). Acosta reminds us that *buen vivir* is not the same as Western notions of well-being but that the concept puts forth a different idea of what the good life consists of and how it can be collectively obtained (2009). The solidarity economy is an important element of *buen vivir*, but not the only element; *buen vivir* also implies reworking the relationship between people and nature, valuing cultural and knowledge production differently, and creating new forms of politics and social organization. Esteva, Babones, and Babcicky discuss *buen vivir* as “an idea based on a verb: it is life lived well, a principle realized in action. It puts the emphasis on doing, rather than consuming” (2013, 20). They lists five key elements of buen vivir: eating, learning, healing, settling, and knowing (ibid., 21). They understand a focus on rethinking these five elements of
life as a shift away from a “needs based” development approach to one based on “the recovery of personal and collective agency towards autonomous paths of social transformation” (ibid., 101).

While *buen vivir* in the Latin American context developed from movements of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendents, and now some of the progressive governments (Walsh 2010), the concept shares many elements with notions of the common developed by other movements and theorists. Similarly, Acosta (2009) emphasizes that *buen vivir* does not only depend on a different way of appropriating natural resources but, more importantly, on cultivating human potential and social capacities, similar to notions of the immaterial common. In Argentina, the concept of *buen vivir* is being increasingly used by the autonomous fraction of the unemployed workers movements, as well as indigenous and campesino movements in the countryside. Although *buen vivir* has been taken up, at least rhetorically, by the progressive governments in Bolivia and Ecuador, at its heart is a transformation of practices of daily life and a reworking (or overturning) of the role of the state, a non-state-centric politics as discussed in Chapter Four.

The concept of *buen vivir* allows us to see how the autonomous MTDs, through the various projects that make up territorial organizing, strive to create not only alternative economic practices to meet basic needs or maintain livelihoods, but also new value systems and new ways of life. The MTD Solano refers to *buen vivir* in regards to creating new relationships with land and nature (for example, through organic farming and environmentally sustainable housing drawing on indigenous customs and knowledges), as well as creating new forms of collective living (for example, through land takeovers and collective housing initiatives). Neka Jara, from the MTD Solano, discusses how that movement envisions autonomy and *autogestión*, as pointing to the construction of new ways of life:

*Autogestión* is not only a model for building productive forces, but it is also a daily problem,
it is about a conjunction of forces that aim to find new relationships to be able to create something. So we understand work as pure creation. It is that in reality, we were left with more than that; on not having work we had to think about how to create it. Not in the sense of having a boss that commands and a group that obeys but as creation in all levels of life. We say that autonomy is starting to take charge of all our life because it is our hands to think and construct how we want to live. (2008, 171).

Here autonomy refers to the capacity to collectively decide what counts as the good life, entailing a transformation in values, social relations and daily life. This implies a recognition that buen vivir is not the same for everyone everywhere, it is not a universal category but is closely tied to self-determination in all areas of life. Together, the expanded understanding of autogestión, along with radical visions of the solidarity economy and buen vivir allow us to understand the MTDs in terms of struggles for autonomy self-determination and collective control of all parts and spaces of life. These concepts point to the remaking of the economic, social and spatial elements of everyday life, in other words, to the production of the common.

**Commoning During 2001**

It was in 2001, when the economic crisis showed the failures and limitations of the neoliberal capitalist system, that the potential power and wide reach of alternative economic practices in Argentina became most apparent. Alternative economic practices had been developing in the country for years and became increasingly organized and politicized as economic inequality and unemployment rose drastically in the last years of the 1990s. As the state decreased spending on welfare and other social programs, and political parties and trade unions ceased to provide the sort of support they had provided in previous eras, people had to invent new forms of support. Many of these practices began as informal practices of solidarity and mutual aid between neighbors or co-workers, sharing food or even utilities and housing, in times of great need. These ad-hoc, often spontaneous forms of support and mutual aid became
increasingly organized when the rising rate of unemployment (as the crisis worsened, opportunities to access a wage through either formal or informal employment decreased) left more and more people without access to a wage. This situation meant that people were forced to expand their informal forms of support to create complete forms of social reproduction that did not rely on access to wages. Thus, these alternative economic practices were first of all aimed at resolving issues of survival, giving people a means to meet their basic needs without relying on a wage. As more and more people began participating in these activities, more formal organization was developed in many cases and the activities themselves adopted a more directly political character. If during the 1990s, it was only the most marginalized populations that participated in these alternative economic practices, as the crisis deepened in 2001, wider sections of the population, including large sections of the middle and working class started relying on these diverse economic activities to survive. In many cases, the alternative economic or commoning practices, especially those that have lasted throughout the Kirchner period, have become about more than survival, to become explicitly anti-capitalist political projects.

**Barter Clubs and Alternative Currency Networks**

One of the most widespread alternative practices that emerged during this time were different barter clubs (*trueques*) and alternative currency networks. Barter clubs emerged in response to the destabilization of the Argentine peso, rising inflation and high unemployment that left many people without the currency they needed to purchase basic goods. Barter clubs allowed participants to directly trade goods and services. While some barter clubs arose more informally, as neighbors getting together to trade goods and services, others were more formally organized as alternative currency networks or barter clubs with specific rules and practices, and had explicit links with other movements, such as the unemployed workers' movements and
neighborhood assemblies.

The first registered Argentine alternative currency network began in 1997 in the town of Bernal, in the province of Buenos Aires, by an environmental NGO Programa de Autosuficiencia Regional (Program of Regional Self-Sufficiency, PAR) to address poverty and unemployment in an ecological way. It originally involved twenty neighbors who traded “credit notes” modeled after Ithaca Hours, an alternative currency created in Ithaca, New York. Markets using these alternative credit notes spread throughout the country during the rest of the 1990s, with organizers claiming that 4500 markets were used by half a million people (North 2005). These markets spread even more after the full outbreak of the crisis in 2001 and were fundamental for helping people survive the crisis. The PAR markets were organized in nodes – markets where traders met and traded goods using the credit notes as payments – which usually met once a week in empty spaces like church halls or parking lots, and increasingly in spaces operated by other social movements. These nodes did not serve a defined, closed geographical area, there were no territorial limits to participation, and people would often travel across the city or region to attend as many markets as possible. The fundamental motivation behind participation in these networks, above any ideological or political critique of existing capitalism, was survival (ibid.). North emphasizes that the PAR did not prioritize or value the scale of the local over larger scale action, as seen by the fact that there was no geographical limitation to participation in a particular node and that the PAR notes circulated nationally.

Later, in response to critiques of the PAR network, another alternative currency emerged, known as the Red Global de Trueque Solidario (Global Network of Truque with Solidarity, RTS). The RTS argued for a community-controlled currency from below and favored local, community-based currencies as opposed to the nationally circulating PAR notes. In order to
participate, members had to be educated into the values of the network, which were enforced by
a management structure to ensure that the markets were well-organized and fairly operated.

According to North:

Solidarity, not locality, was the key discourse. What mattered was the effective management
of local nodes to ensure trust, transparency, order, and to manage prices and distribution –
not the geographical extent of the currency. Argentina showed that currencies that enabled
household members to trade with each other, and which were not local, could function
effectively for a time. (2005, 229).

As opposed to the PAR markets, the RTS network was fundamentally a political project, aiming
to create an alternative economic system based on non-capitalist values and controlled by
community organizations.

While these alternative currency networks were not initiated by the unemployed workers'
movements, there was strong overlap between the two movements. For example, the MTD La
Matanza hosted a trueque in the courtyard of their social center. The barter club was open to
participation by any member of the neighborhood, one simply had to register in order to sell
products at a stand and agree to abide by certain rules. While initially, the club worked through
direct barter and a system of local alternative currency notes, by the time I first visited La
Matanza in 2005, the club was mainly using the official Argentine peso (although the alternative
currency notes were still somewhat in use). Additionally, the club had once met every weekday
afternoon but gradually reduced its meetings to only a few afternoons a week. Items for sale
ranged from homemade goods, such as food and clothing, to resell items, such as cheap clothing
bought in bulk from a larger informal market or food items from the government subsidy
baskets. The MTD La Matanza also sold its bread and pastries and occasionally screen-printed t-
shirts at the market. While nobody became rich off of selling goods in this trueque, participants
commented that it did give them an important amount of extra income and access to other goods
By 2002, hundreds of thousands of people across Argentina participated in one of the two principal alternative currency networks. Many researchers and activists interested in alternative currencies, and economies more generally, tend to assume that these practices will be small-scale and local. Part of this comes from a commitment to ecological politics, recognizing the harmful environmental effects of mass consumption and globally transporting goods. Yet, this theory that prioritizes the local often has the effect of creating a small, closed, and exclusive community of people that use the currency, mostly limited to activists and middle class people that can afford to make the necessary commitment (Lepofsky and Pickles 2007). As explained above with the descriptions of the PAR and RTS networks, North (2005) argues that the alternative currency experiments in Argentina were successful because they were not based on serving a geographically defined territory or population and were based on an ethics of solidarity as opposed to an ethics of the local. These networks had important material effects, serving as the basis that allowed people to survive the economic crisis, but also as a political project promoting new values and subjectivities. As Gago (2015) notes, these experiences of creating and utilizing alternative, or quasi-false, currencies is at the basis of the current proliferation of large-scale informal markets and other economic practices on the margins of the formal economy. These experiences also had a profound effect by calling into question the formal currency and showing that alternative forms of exchange are possible.

**Recuperated Workplaces**

The “recuperated factories” are another example of a widespread alternative economic practice that emerged in Argentina in the late 1990s. As the economic situation in Argentina worsened in the late 1990s, many small and medium-sized businesses, especially in the
manufacturing sector, began shutting down. Often these closings would happen suddenly, the
owners would close the factories without warning, empty buildings of machinery and equipment
overnight, and declare bankruptcy to avoid paying severance pay to employees. Rather than
submit to the owners’ decision and join the growing masses of the unemployed, workers started
occupying the factories, barricading the doors, refusing to allow the owners to remove the
equipment, and then, re-opening the factories and restarting production.

The factory takeovers started around the same period as the unemployed workers’
movements, in response to many of the same conditions. In what is often referred to as the “first
militant expropriation,” which launched the movement, workers in La Matanza took over the
meat-packing plant Yaguané in 1996. Two years later, the Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas
Argentina (IMPA) factory in the city of Buenos Aires was taken over by its workers, leading to
the creation of the Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas (MNER), bringing together
recuperated enterprises around the country. By 2005, there were approximately 200 recuperated
enterprises across Argentina, employing around 15,000 workers (Lavaca Collective 2007). The
majority of these factories are still in operation under workers-control and new workplace
occupations continuing to occur despite the end of the economic crisis.

In many cases, the factory takeovers came out of previous experiences of worker
militancy and organizing. For example, the ceramics factory in Neuquén, formerly called Zanón,
now known as FASPINAT (Fábrica Sin Patrón, Factory without a Boss), workers had started
organizing well before the factory closed down in 2001. They started organizing in the late 1990s
against ever more precarious labor conditions, such as speed ups, dangerous working conditions
that caused multiple deaths on the job, and increasingly strict forms of control in the factory. The
official union representing factory workers did little to respond to this increasing precarity,
forcing workers to organize outside of the official union structures. Because of the strict control and surveillance at the factory, limiting the amount of talking and socializing that was able to occur between workers on the job, the Zanón workers started using the soccer field as an organizing space, first just to allow workers to talk to each other and share problems and later to begin organizing more militant actions. After a number of workers were laid off and another worker died on the job in July 2000, the Zanón employees organized two strikes, one of which lasted for over a month. Thanks to this experience of self-organizing, the workers were ready when the owners began disinvesting in the factory and their plan to shut it down became clear. The workers camped out in front of the factory for days, supported by neighborhood and community members, until they were able to take over the factory and put the machines back to work. The workers decided to reopen the ceramics factory as a worker-managed cooperative, using an assembly format (Barrientos and Isaía 2011). FASPINAT continues to be a successful ceramics factory and the workers were finally given complete legal ownership of the factory in 2009 (Trigona 2009).

While the recuperated factories often receive the most media and academic attention, this movement is not limited to factories or the manufacturing sector: a wide variety of workplaces have been taken over and self-managed by workers. One of the most emblematic examples is the Hotel Bauen, a fourteen story hotel in downtown Buenos Aires that was taken over by its workers in 2004. After an intense battle to take over the hotel, the workers have cooperatively self-managed managed this hotel and corresponding restaurant for more than ten years. Despite frequent threats to evict them from the property, the workers have managed to hold on thanks to strong support from the community and other social movements who blockade the street any time there is an eviction threat (Trigona 2014). There are also multiple recuperated and worker-
managed restaurants and retail sites in Buenos Aires and other parts of the country. This goes to show that the model of worker-control is not limited to factories or industrial manufacturing but actually has a wide appeal across multiple sectors.

There is a wide range of diversity in how the recuperated workplaces operate: in some, workers radically transform the relations of production, instituting non-hierarchical relations between workers, equally sharing responsibilities and tasks, decision-making power, and surplus, while others largely reproduce the same relations and divisions of labor in the factory as under the old bosses (Hudson 2011). In one sense, the recuperated workplaces are an example of the form of politics discussed in Chapter Four: rather than waiting for the state or some other external institution to resolve their problems, workers took over their workplaces, immediately resolving their problem of lack of employment and beginning to create alternative social relations, new, non-exploitative forms of labor and an alternative world. Yet, in the absence of a strong solidarity economy, these worker-managed enterprises must operate within the capitalist market, limiting their potential to challenge the capitalist system (Kabat 2011).

A more complete analysis, however, understand the recuperated workplaces as part of a broader struggle to produce the common. For this reason, the worker-controlled factories and other workplaces have formed various networks amongst themselves, not only to buy and sell from one another, but also to share knowledge and training (Hudson 2011). Therefore, it is important to emphasize the connections between the recuperated workplaces and other movements that emerged in Argentina during this time. Most of the recuperated workplaces relied on support from neighbors and other social movements to initially occupy the workplace and to protect themselves from eviction and later became hubs for other movement activities and alternative forms of socialization. Many of the recuperated workplaces now host popular
education programs for workers and other community residents, as well as other types of cultural programming, and as an organizing space for other groups. For example, Zanón houses a community library and popular high school, which operates in conjunction with a local teachers’ union, as well as training classes with support from the local public university, and other cultural activities. Well known Argentinean rock bands, such as Attaque 77, La Renga, and Bersuit Vergarabat, have performed at Zanón, helping to build popular awareness and support for their struggle. Additionally, Zanón has close ties to the local Mapuche community and movements of unemployed workers’. Similarly, Chilavert, a recuperated and worker-managed printing press in Buenos Aires, hosts a popular high school, archive of social movement documents, and a bar/cultural space that is open to activist groups to use for events.

Other Commoning Practices

While the barter clubs, alternative currency networks, and recuperated workplaces were the most visible alternative economic practices developed in the wake of the economic crisis, they are far from the only ones. There was also a proliferation of practices of mutual aid and solidarity as people helped one another out in order to meet their basic needs and survive the crisis. For example, the ollas populares or popular meals, initially organized by women in poor neighborhoods who could not afford to feed their families, served as a practical and direct way to meet this need. While not able to feed their families individually, people found that if they came together and pooled resources they could manage to feed all of their families. Participants in the ollas populares were not content to merely meet these needs, however, but were also interested in addressing the structural causes of hunger and protesting inequality. Therefore, they began holding the meals in public spaces, in parks or plazas, sometimes even in the middle of a blocked street or occupied government building. As discussed in earlier chapters, these ollas populares
contributed to the formation of the MTDs in the urban periphery, as well as the foundation of more permanent popular kitchens and other organizations explicitly committed to collectively addressing food insecurity.

The 2001 period also saw the proliferation of alternative media groups, experiments in popular education, and alternative cultural practices. For example, Indymedia Argentina, a collective, grassroots online media project was founded, in connection with indymedia centers around the world, in early 2001 as a way to report on the growing number of protests happening across the country that were being ignored by the mainstream media. Indymedia initially set up a physical headquarters in a squatted community center run by a neighborhood assembly, allowing it to build close ties with the neighborhood assembly movement, as well as nearby unemployed workers’ organizations. The Indymedia platform was essential in spreading news of the protests on December 19th and 20th, sharing news of the broken curfew, and enabling organizations and individuals to coordinate actions. It was around this time that the lavaca media collective was founded as well, growing to include a monthly magazine, a radio program, website, and bookstore/coffee shop offering an independent analysis of a range of struggles from the feminist movement to the unemployed workers’ movements, and more recently, environmental and indigenous struggles against extractivism (Acuña 2014). Lavaca was only one of many new alternative media collectives and platforms that arose in this period, along with many other community radio and television stations, and print and digital media. Most of these projects have strong connections to the other social movements, such as community radio stations based out of recuperated factories, or the unemployed workers’ organization Frente Popular Dario Santillan's news agency, Prensa del Frente (Basualdo 2014). Additionally, this period also saw the establishment of hundreds of community or social centers in urban areas across the country,
hundreds of popular schools linked to social movements, and other cultural and educational projects. The collective and communitarian nature of these projects challenged capitalist individualism and neoliberal subjectivity, by creating new social relations and subjectivities.

**Commoning Practices of the MTDs**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the MTDs’ decision to return to the neighborhood to focus on territorial organizing involved the creation of new ways of organizing and sustaining daily life in those territories. Many commoning practices had already been experimented with in the piquetes themselves: collective meals, health care and medical aid, popular education, all sorts of cultural activities and the common production of subjectivity. These commoning practices were as important as the disruptive element of the protests, both encouraging a broader range of participation and allowing the piquetes to persist by providing people with the material and emotional support needed to camp out on the road for extended periods of time. The development of these practices in the piquetes was, however, obviously limited by the fact that the piquetes were always temporary spaces and always subject to police repression. It was the desire to create more permanent and stable forms and practices of the common that was largely behind many organization’s decision to concentrate on territorial organizing, pointing to a clear link between territory and the common.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the commoning practices linked to territorial organizing in more detail. I start by looking at the alternative forms of work and production created by the unemployed workers’ movements: cooperatives and other self-managed productive enterprises. These are the practices most explicitly linked to the MTDs’ call for “work with dignity,” discussed in Chapter Three. I then look specifically at commoning practices related to food production and struggles for food sovereignty. Next, I move to
alternative forms of health care being created by the unemployed workers' movements in the neighborhoods where they operate, such as movement operated clinics, various forms of programming related to health and nutrition, and promoting new values and visions of health. These health care activities and institutions are an essential part of creating alternative forms of life because they address an unmet basic need of health services in low-income neighborhoods, are necessary for sustaining any form of life, and are an important element of alternative visions of the good life. Then, I take a look at struggles around housing and to create collective forms of housing. I conclude the chapter by examining the forms of alternative and popular education practiced by the unemployed workers' movements and struggles around knowledge production more broadly.

Cooperative Production

As a first element of creating new forms of life in their territories, the MTDs began creating worker-managed enterprises and cooperatives. In one sense, these cooperatives were a direct response to the problem of lack of employment/income, during a time where it was clear that the neoliberal government had abandoned the poor and would not be able to provide an adequate response to the crisis of unemployment. Thus, the cooperatives were initially seen primarily as a survival mechanism, to generate an income for the unemployed and for the movements organizing the cooperatives to use to fund their other social programming. Often these cooperative enterprises would develop from already existing informal practices of the poor and unemployed: for example, friends baking bread in their house to sell/trade at a local barter club would be organized into a more formal bakery with support of the movement. Other times, the cooperatives would form basically from scratch as the a specific unemployed workers' movement recognized the need/opportunity to create a cooperative.
These enterprises and cooperatives had two primary goals: 1) to produce some amount of income to help the movements sustain their other activities, and 2) to directly create work with dignity, one of the movements' main overall objectives. The self-managed productive enterprises are usually organized as cooperatives, where the workers or the movement as a whole collectively own the means of production, emphasizing workplace democracy and non-hierarchical forms of internal organization and the just distribution of surplus. They seek to challenge the division between intellectual and manual labor by including all workers in decision-making and, in many cases, rotating specific tasks (Matonte 2010). Rotating tasks helps ensure that hierarchies do not develop within the enterprise, even informal hierarchies based on skills and knowledges. For this reason, the enterprises also tend to put significant emphasis on internal skills training and knowledge-sharing, about all aspects of the business and the politics of worker self-management and cooperativism.

Like the rest of the MTDs' activities, the productive enterprises are organized through assemblies, where all decisions regarding production, distribution, pay and internal organization are taken collectively by all the workers. This does require a great deal more of workers' time and energy go into the administration and management of the enterprise but it also means that those decisions become political and politicized as well. When deciding where to obtain raw materials to make their textile products, for example, the MTD La Matanza can choose to purchase cotton from an organic cotton campesino collective rather than the cheapest provider. In this way, they are prioritizing the political struggle over market values or making the most profit. They are also building material connections with other projects (in this case, the campesino collective) that aid in the formation of a larger network of struggle and a robust solidarity economy. Within the cooperative, there is no differentiation between workers and management,
but rather, all the management decisions are made in weekly assemblies comprised of all the workers. In these assemblies, workers discuss the various issues facing the cooperative and then make decisions regarding all aspects of the cooperative's functioning from decisions about sourcing and marketing to decisions about how much workers are paid and internal discipline.

According to Flores of the MTD La Matanza, “cooperation not only represented an economic response to the needs of life, but was also the organizational form that we found to break with isolation and to counteract the politics of neoliberal individualism predominant in our society” (2005, 36). He discusses how self-management and cooperativism allow the movement to resolve issues of daily life, providing for basic needs, but also, and more importantly, they help the movement strengthen its organization in order to more effectively be able to confront capital. Flores continues, “for us, since then, [cooperativism] became a form of life” (ibid.). He sees cooperativism and self-management as “spaces for the construction of a double power […], where the transitional work of ‘workers’ control’ takes place” (ibid.). The MTD's interest in cooperativism was not without critiques, however. Flores criticizes what he refers to as “business cooperatives” for being organized too much like capitalist businesses and becoming another way of appropriating workers' efforts. Therefore, before starting their cooperatives, MTD members studied cooperativism with the Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (Movement of Occupiers and Renters, MOI), especially focusing on the experiences in the Zapatista territories in Chiapas and the landless movements in Brazil (ibid. 35). The fundamental element of these cooperatives, according to Flores, was that “they were built as tools for the social movement, and, therefore, had a qualitatively different character” (ibid.).

For the MTD La Matanza, the study of cooperativism, both in theory and the experiences of specific cooperatives across Latin America, preceded putting into practice their own
cooperatives. Along with the study group organized by the MOI, MTD La Matanza members participated in workshops and trainings with the Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, the Instituto de la Cooperación (Idelcoop), Fundación de Educación, Investigación y Asistencia Técnica del Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos and the Popular University of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. These educational experiences served as the basis from which the MTD La Matanza was able to start their own cooperative project. First, however, they had to take over a space in order to have somewhere to have a cooperative. Unlike the recuperated factories movement that took over already existing factories and put the machines back to work as worker-managed enterprises, the MTDs had to start from scratch with creating their cooperatives. This meant finding a building/space to house the enterprise, as well as obtaining the machines or any other necessary equipment. Thus, when the MTD La Matanza occupied the abandoned school building in La Juanita in 2001, it was already with the idea of starting cooperatives in mind. They soon started their first cooperative/worker-managed enterprise: a small textile workshop. Various members of the group already owned sewing machines and were doing small jobs (changas) on the side as a way to generate a small amount of income. On top of these machines they already owned, the MTD was able to purchase more sewing machines and equipment from a small grant from the Swiss Embassy. They received training from the company Casa Quintás, and initially received fabric from the Foundation ProTejer and the Arciel factory. The cooperative initially employed six women: members of the MTD who were without work and had prior sewing/textile-work experience. Originally paying all workers an equal salary, the cooperative's assembly later decided to take other factors into account, such as seniority and need, in determining pay rates, as the cooperative grew to incorporate more workers. The important thing, workers expressed, is that these decisions are made openly, in assemblies, where all the workers
are able to express their concerns and opinions.

One of the cooperative's most successful projects has been its collaboration with fashion designer Martín Churba started in 2004. Through common ties with the NGO Poder Ciudadano, Churba became acquainted with the MTD and its project, and decided to develop a project with them through the social wing of his brand Tramando. Describing his relationship with the MTD, Churba states, “I can't even say that I'm giving them work, I'm giving them a space where they develop their own capacities” (2007, 237). In their largest collaboration, the MTD's cooperative produced 1,500 fashion guardapolvos, which were mostly exported to Japan. Churba discusses the outcomes of this project:

The guardapolvo is a strong symbol, it speaks of reinstating the culture of work, but not with the old Peronist concepts, perhaps valid in that era, but rather with today's vision, that work is health, a possibility for social integration, a necessity of being able to create your own work in order to be able to change your reality. The idea behind the guardapolvo is that is has a ton of added value, because they made them and because we make the design, the stamps and the texts that tell that story, thus it ends up being a product for Tramando. What matters is that they [the workers] started to feel newly motivated by the work. (Ibid.).

Rather than Churba making the designs on his own while the MTD's workers do the manual labor, the entire production process is collaborative. MTD members participated in the guardapolvo design from the very beginning of the process, with Churba and his employees taking the time to work with the MTD not only to train workers in the cooperative but also to incorporate their ideas into the production. This project was immensely successful: it created decently paid employment for a number of MTD members, it generated a significant amount of profit for the cooperative, which was used to expand the sewing workshop and support the MTD's other activities, and the visibility from the project helped the MTD build connections for other projects. Following the guardapolvo project, the MTD's cooperative made uniforms for other companies, including a few recuperated factories, and bags and t-shirts for other social
organizations. In 2006, they began working with seven other workshops to make t-shirts for the Italian-based fair trade NGO Alto Mercado. Along with this textile cooperative, the MTD La Matanza also operates a screen-printing workshop and a computer-recycling project. The computer recycling project started with support from the Fundación Equidad, an NGO based in Buenos Aires, that donated old PCs and trained MTD members in computer repair.

Perhaps more important than the material production that takes place in these cooperatives is the production of new social relations and subjectivities as workers learn to collectively manage their own activities, without relying on an external authority and overcoming feelings of guilt and unworthiness from being unemployed (Flores 2005). The MTD La Matanza discusses their cooperatives as, not only an alternative method of organizing the economy, but also of organizing society, thus refusing to accept the separation of the economic from the social. The goal of cooperativism is “to try to construct through the basis of cooperation another culture, another subjectivity, other social relations, really another society” (ibid., 100). This alternative system necessarily engages with a dominant capitalist order as it fights against it, simultaneously creating ways for people to survive in the present and support long-term sustainable alternatives.

**Food Production and Struggles for Food Sovereignty**

While the cooperatives and other worker-controlled enterprises might be the most visible and obvious examples of alternative economic and commoning practices of the unemployed workers' movements, they are only the tip of the iceberg. As discussed earlier, for these commoning practices to be effective in radically transforming society and challenging capitalist hegemony, they must incorporate all areas of life. Therefore, securing the basic needs for survival must be one essential element of commoning projects (although not the only one). It is
with this in mind, that many MTDs have begun focusing efforts on autonomously producing their own food. For example, the MTD Solano, occupied a large tract of land in 2005, on which they raise poultry and grow grains and produce and workers are paid through the government jobs program. More than providing jobs for a few unemployed people, they aim for food sovereignty (Neka Jara, interview, Florencio Varela, Buenos Aires, July, 2009). They are conscious of the critique that this runs the risk of becoming an isolated practice, and therefore continuously seek to expand their engagement through connections with other local organic producers, indigenous groups, and campesino movements, to share non-genetically modified seeds and other sustainable farming techniques and knowledges. In this way, the farming practice is not only a local alternative to one element of the dominant capitalist system, but also part of a larger project to create a different form of life, distinct measures of value and knowledge, and new networks of exchange and relations.

The bakery operated by the MTD La Matanza while a cooperative/productive enterprise aiming to create work with dignity for movement members, also has the important task of providing bread to the community at an affordable cost. This has been one of their primary goals since the beginning of the project, recognizing the inaccessibility of basic food items due to rising inflation. The bakery's bread and pastry items are sold (out of the bakery itself and at local markets) to neighborhood residents more or less at the cost of production, showing that the basic goal of the project is to provide affordable food rather than making a profit. On the other hand, the bakery does make some amount of profit by selling specialized pastries to higher income residents in the city and selling a cookbook. The MTD also regularly organizes skills-sharing workshops and other activities designed to share different knowledges about bread and pastry production.
Health

Along the same lines as the projects oriented toward food sovereignty, some of the movements of the unemployed operate projects aimed at providing healthcare to residents of the territories where they function. These projects arise out of a very real need: while there are nationalized health services in Argentina, they are vastly underfunded in low-income areas meaning that users often have to travel long distances or wait for long times in order to access what is often substandard care. Many public hospitals in the low-income rural peripheries and rural areas of Argentina often lack basic equipment, doctors are underpaid and overworked, making it sometimes challenging to receive even basic healthcare services. Therefore, many of the MTDs have started different projects to improve the health and quality of life of their members and other neighborhood residents.

At the most basic level, the MTDs often provide a space for a healthcare provider to come on a regular basis and see patients. For example, the MTD La Matanza, in their community center CEFFOC would have a doctor visit for a few hours a week to provide basic care for patients. This small make-shift clinic was open to anyone in the neighborhood, users would have to sign up in advance for hours when the doctor was scheduled to be available. They also distributed some medicine, such as antibiotics and vaccines. While this clinic/doctor’s visits provides an important service to neighborhood residents who would otherwise have to travel a much greater distance for healthcare services and often struggle to get appointments in a timely manner, it also faces many of the same problems as the state-funded public healthcare and generally does not challenge conventional notions of health and care.

One of the principle activities of the MTD Solano/Movimiento de Colectivos has been its health clinic located in the neighborhood of Solano in Quilmes. On the one hand, this clinic
provides important healthcare services for neighborhood residents who otherwise would not have access to those services. The clinic relies on doctors and other healthcare practitioners who are willing to donate their time to serving low-income communities, as well as donations and government subsidies for some medical supplies. Many movement members have training in psychology or other health services and dedicate much of their time to working in the clinic. (This is in part due to the rich network of alternative education institutions, such as the Universidad Popular de Madres de Plaza de Mayo, which allows for activists to study these topics for free and with a social justice focus.) Besides providing services that the state is unable to provide, this clinic also struggles to create alternative notions of health and care. Recognizing how capitalist values have deeply affected the medical industry, in terms of prioritizing the profits of the pharmaceutical industry over the actual well-being of people, the clinic aims to promote a notion of health that is based on collective well-being rather than the distribution of drugs and diagnoses of illnesses. Much of the clinic's services focus around mental health, especially problems related to substance abuse and addiction. However, rather than reinforcing the mainstream medical approach that treats these issues as mostly psychiatric illnesses, to be treated by pharmaceuticals, the clinic workers adopt an approach that seeks to treat these problems in a more holistic manner. Therefore, for individuals to receive treatment, their family members (defined broadly meaning at least one family member or close friend) must also participate, in separate sessions, in an attempt to address the underlying causes related to issues such as substance abuse and to create a more healthy and supportive community for the afflicted person. Health care practitioners work in pairs, usually a medical doctor paired with a social psychologist, to treat patients (Interview with Neka Jara and Alberto Spagnolo, February 18, 2013). They also participate in various networks around alternative health, such as a women's
health group that meets in a social center and other groups working around indigenous ideas of health and well-being (interview December 8, 2012).

The school Yo Sí Puedo, while not formally operating a clinic, also focuses on health in many of its activities, especially health education. These activities also aim to challenge conventional ideas about what it means to be “healthy” and what constitutes adequate healthcare. For example, educational activities focus on the elements of a healthy diet and nutrition, as well as comprehensive sexual education, which often is not taught at public schools and an especially important issue in a country where abortion is still illegal. In weekly women's group meetings, women of all ages and different ethnicities and nationalities meet to share experiences and knowledges, ranging from contraceptive use, issues relating to childbirth and child-rearing, and other more general topics relating to nutrition and leading a healthy lifestyle. The group is facilitated by one of the volunteer teachers, a university student, but is not constructed as a space to impart “expert” knowledge, but rather for all the women to share their experiences, valuing different indigenous and local knowledges alongside Western medical conceptions.

**Housing**

Another area of intervention for many of the MTDs, and other 2001-era movements, is that of housing. Demands and projects around housing range from demands for better, affordable housing (in terms of quality of housing, access to basic utilities and services, and cost) to direct action in the form of land takeovers and the construction of new housing. In the Buenos Aires urban region, many of these struggles around housing are related to struggles against gentrification as discussed in the previous chapter. The effects of gentrification can be seen around the city: urban redevelopment designed for the upper class and tourists in more and more neighborhoods of the city, making them increasingly inaccessible to the popular classes, while
increased policing, especially through the newly formed separated police force of the City of Buenos Aires and the deployment of the Gendarme to certain neighborhoods of the city, make sure that the poor stay in the parts of the city to which they have been assigned (Taller Hacer Ciudad 2011). Meanwhile, as discussed in the previous chapter, the urban periphery is increasingly becoming desirable for people from different class backgrounds from the wealthy looking to live in private, gated communities, to the poor looking for any more affordable housing. The combination of these different processes, along with continued migration to the city from the countryside, makes housing and access to housing one of the most important political issues in the country. Some of the largest movements of the unemployed in the Buenos Aires region have explicitly focused around struggles over land and housing and developed a more autonomous approach to the issue. Housing in these cases is understood as more than a physical roof over one's head, but refers to the stability and self-determination offered by having a home and, also, as the basis for the construction of a new social relations and community. Thus, these autonomous struggles around housing are closely linked to territorial organizing, a form of not only organizing in a pre-established territory, but of actively producing new territory.

In 2005, members of the MTD Solano participated in the takeover and settlement of the neighborhood “Pico de Oro,” in the municipality of Florencio Varela in the southern regions of Greater Buenos Aires. According to one participant, “we were thirty to forty families that wanted to have the experience of living and constructing in community. The houses were built collectively, among all of us, we even made the [concrete] blocks that we used to build these houses” (Interview Sept. 8, 2012). She describes the situation leading up to the initial takeover:

After participation in various land takeovers in the southern region of Greater Buenos Aires (in Quilmes, Solano, Varela) since the 1990s with very intense movements of organization and community struggle, we started to think about what would happen if we won the land. In
general, very different logics were imposed than those that some of us wanted for ourselves, many times they went through moments of community, organization, assembly and collective logics to other moments where a more individual logic reigned. After the events of “Puente Puéyredón” the need to construct a communitarian space emerged, the desire to project a life with our friends. And in that moment the possibility of occupying the land in Pico de Oro emerged.” (Ibid.)

While also engaging in projects in other parts of southern Buenos Aires and incorporating members that live in other neighborhoods, this settlement of Pico de Oro was the MTD Solano’s main basis of operation for many years.

Nearly seven years after the completion of those houses in Pico de Oro, the MTD Solano (now the MDC) came under attack by local drug dealers as detailed in the previous chapter. The level of violence and unceasing threats against them caused the members of the MDC, to decide to move their dwellings to a different neighborhood in the urban periphery. The new neighborhood, in a more rural area farther south of Buenos Aires, is more removed from some of these violent conflicts and somewhat less densely populated, giving the group more physical and social space where to build alternative forms of life. Pooling resources and drawing on international contacts to fundraise, the organization was able to purchase a large tract of land in 2013 where they have so far constructed three houses and a large collective garden. They plan to eventually build additional houses and a common building in the middle that can be used for movement meetings and other activities. They are also looking into buying nearby tracts of land to set up a larger housing cooperative, allowing more movement members, as well as other friends of the movement, to build their homes there. The houses are constructed taking into account environmental principles, as well as the overall collective goals and values of the movement. Members of the MDC build the houses themselves, following the principle of the minga, or collective work sessions. In this model, popular in campesino and indigenous
communities across Latin America, participants help each other. These *mingas* are an informal sort of contract or work agreement between the participants: everyone helps one family build their house this month, and a few months later, everyone pitches in to help another family build their house. In this way, the *mingas* constitute a rotating form of collaborative work and mutual aid, creating long-lasting relationships and bonds of solidarity and community between participants. Not only have MDC members participated in the *mingas* to construct their new houses, after the arson in 2012, but also other friends and allies of the movement. More than just work sessions, the *mingas* also always include a collective meal or celebration, again helping to build strong relationships in the community.

In March 2013, I participated in one such *minga* to build the roof of the first of the new houses. A group of about ten of us met early on Sunday morning to carpool from Buenos Aires, meeting up with approximately two dozen others on the property in the periphery, including the family planning on living in the new house, the other families planning on building houses on the land and various other friends and members of the MDC. The group of people who had come to help build the roof was about equally divided between women and men, ranging from teenagers to seventy year olds. A number of people had brought their young children and adults rotated childcare duties during the day. When we arrived from Buenos Aires, members of the MDC had already set up the materials to begin the day's work. Those from the MDC with the most construction experience directed the rest of us, dividing us into groups and giving us tasks: some mixing clay and manure for the green roof, others cutting and placing the roof boards. While there is clearly direction from those who will be living in the house and those who have more experience/knowledge in the process, everyone participates as equals, nobody is forced to do anything, everyone is free to rotate tasks as they wish, to take breaks when they need to. We
make jokes, share stories, get to know each other, we also all learn about construction techniques and the environment principles behind the green roof. In early afternoon, we take a break for lunch, sharing a stew that other members of the group had prepared. Over a long lunch, the discussion moves to political analysis, not only of the situation that forced the MDC to a new neighborhood, but also the broader political situation in the country as a whole.

The houses are built according to environmental principles that allow them to be more energy-efficient, such as the green or living roofs covered in vegetation in order to better insulate the building. Much of this construction expertise comes from visits and workshops with environmental activists and indigenous communities. Many of the younger members of the group have traveled extensively in Bolivia and the interior of Argentina, meeting with indigenous groups and, in some cases, participating in workshops. Additionally, as an organization of unemployed/precarious/informal workers, the MDC members have varied experiences in the construction industry, as well as odd jobs involving carpentry or electrical wiring. A couple of the older men have prior experience in metallurgic factories. A Cuban agronomist has befriended the group and shares his expertise as well. This mixture of different skills and experiences, one of the outcomes of the heterogeneity of the composition of “the unemployed,” here proves a crucial asset in building a new community.

Over the following months, regular *mingas* not only finish the construction of the first house but also begin work on two additional houses for other families in the MDC, as well as a community garden on the property. While the overall construction continues at a relatively slow pace, due in large part to the difficulty of obtaining the materials (some materials are being provided by the Ministry of Social Development, in response to the complaints Jara and Spagnolo made after the initial arson, while others are being donated by various friends and
NGOs, leaving them to fundraise for the remainder of the construction supplies). Meanwhile, the MDC members who have benefited from the wide support of friends and comrades from different organizations, continue to come to the aid of those other organizations as well. A pattern starts to develop where we alternate weekend *mingas* between the MDC’s housing project and fixing up the bar and kitchen at a social center where many of those living in Buenos Aires participate. In this way, the informal network that came together in response to the arson in Pico de Oro, organically starts to institutionalize itself through regular weekend work days in different locations, on different projects. This collective work also produces the feeling that these are all collective projects, that everyone is invested in and materially produces new social relations and ties of solidarity between participants. The *minga* form, traditional in indigenous and campesino communities, is thus translated to the urban setting in a more networked form, bringing together people from different communities, neighborhoods and organizations. Perhaps the *minga* also points to a different way of organizing labor in general, in a non-alienated and dignified way. In other words, it is not only the houses themselves, or even the physical community of the collective houses, that constitute the common in this case. It is also in how the houses are built, the social relations and subjectivities created in the process, and those that persist in the newly created space.

**Education and Knowledge Production**

In all areas of their political and social work, the MTDs prioritize educational activities and emphasize cultural and intellectual production. Collective, autonomous education is a key part of any MTD and most hold regular study groups and workshops, building on Freirean notions of popular education (Chatterton 2005). This focus on education runs through all the MTDs’ activities: for example, through sharing knowledge and building new skills in the worker-
managed workplaces, learning from and spreading indigenous knowledges regarding food production and housing, learning and sharing alternative visions of health. The MTDs also explicitly focus on education through educational activities for their members and local residents, including some form of childcare and youth programs, such as daycare and tutoring sessions, for members' children and other children in the neighborhood, popular high school degree programs, and other educational workshops and study groups.

Education has been a key element of the MTD La Matanza's project. Soon after occupying the abandoned school building where the textile workshop is also located, they officially inaugurated the building as the Center for Education and Formation of Communitarian Culture (Centro de Educación y Formacion de Cultura Comunitaria, CEFOCC). The MTD sought to use the space to provide educational activities to children and adults in the neighborhood, as well as for more formal political “formation” exercises as part of the political project of constructing the movement. Here education was not considered a neutral, objective good, an object to be handed down from those who know to those who not, but rather as a political tool for the creation of new values and subjectivities. Therefore, they emphasize the construction of “communitarian culture” in all of their educational practices. Early childhood education was one of the first priorities for the MTD La Matanza, setting it apart from many other movements that focus on adult education. This emphasis came after the realization caused by the difficulties of self-management and in sustaining an autonomous movement in general that capitalist values were much more deeply engrained than they had previously imagined. In 2004, they were able to open the preschool CIEL (Crecer Imaginando en Libertad – Grow up Imagining Freedom) in the CEFFOC building. The preschool is made up of two classrooms, divided by age, and employees two trained preschool teachers. It also relies on a large number of
outside volunteers, often education students from the nearby University of La Matanza or international volunteers, and is supported financially by the MTD's other productive enterprises and donations from NGOs and other charitable organizations (primarily the Fundación Raoul Wallemberg, the Centro Nueva Tierra, and the Confederación General Económica). The preschool's stated goal is to start fomenting values of mutual aid, care and solidarity from an early age. While approximately 55 students are enrolled in CIEL each year, the preschool cannot keep up with local demand in a neighborhood where public preschool is vastly underfunded.

The most prominent example of autonomous education in recent years are the *bachilleratos populares*: popular high school degree programs administered by social movements or recuperated factories, but with official accreditation from the state. The schools usually operate in movements' social centers or in recuperated factories themselves; students are movement participants/factory workers and their family members, as well as neighborhoods residents. The *bachilleratos populares* fought for years to receive funding and recognition from the state, and now there are over 200 in Greater Buenos Aires alone with others all over the country that are officially accredited and enrolling thousands of students (Zibechi 2009).

Paradoxically, their success is partly due to the requirements of the new welfare programs that require young people to attend, yet their practices and energies overflow the boundaries of a state-centered struggle. Krausch emphasizes how another popular high school run by an MTD, prefigures social change by creating new ways of being in the present, through horizontality and solidarity, rather than privileging a future time (2014). These popular schools are not fully outside of the state as their degrees are officially recognizes and, in many cases, teachers are paid by the state. Yet, by consciously working to produce new political subjects, through teaching about political struggles and enacting non-hegemonic social relations, the effects of the popular
schools reach beyond the logic of the state.

When the MTD La Matanza split into two organizations in 2008, the organizers and teachers of the literacy project Yo Sí Puedo decided to continue and expand the project into a high-school degree awarding program. Occupying two adjacent lots in the same neighborhood as CEFFOC, they (re)opened Yo Sí Puedo in 2009. With many of the original members of the MTD La Matanza, unhappy with the movement's political direction, working on the project, Yo Sí Puedo continued the literacy program, teaching adults to read and write using a combination of videos, worksheets and in-class instruction. Graduates from the program could then go on to become facilitators for future classes and many became involved in YSP's other political activities. The school quickly expanded to offer a complete primary school education for adults and, in 2010, a high school for adults. Many of the students are migrants from rural areas, both Argentinean and from Bolivia and Paraguay, mostly women, who had received little to no formal education. Additionally, adolescents who have fallen significantly behind in public school or been expelled from school for behavioral reasons can attend YSP. Besides teaching the government-mandated courses, YSP teaches classes about health and nutrition, and political formation, reading influential Latin American Marxists and learning about the revolutionary history of Argentina. These readings and discussions serve to politicize youth and other students, encouraging them to take action to improve their own quality of life. Additionally, students from the school participate in a community radio program with students from the University of La Matanza. The school receives support from the Ministry of Labor and the Fundación Padre Mario, as well as occasional additional support from various local Kirchnerista organizations. The principle teachers are paid by the government for their work, while other “volunteers” count the time they spend in the school as their weekly work requirement to receive their
unemployment benefits.

Since opening in 2009, the YSP school expanded to another nearby building and now offers primary and secondary school education for over 100 students. The students range in age from teenagers who had dropped out of school or fallen so far behind that they were no longer able to attend public school, to women in their 80s (mostly migrants) who had little access to formal education during their childhood. Students attend class daily, in either the morning session or the evening session, taking the standard required courses: mathematics, language/literature, English, science, and history/geography. Additional courses are offered in sociology, communications, and social psychology. There is also a special course schedule, with classes meeting less frequently, for workers and beneficiaries of the Plan Argentina Trabaja. Academic courses are taught by trained and certified teachers, paid by the municipal government, while volunteers involved in the school's political work teach art and music classes and offer tutoring for all subjects. Many of the state teachers and all of the movement teachers are trained in popular education methods, which allow them to incorporate the movement's horizontal principles in the classroom. YSP also hosts workshops and short courses on a variety of topics, ranging from a political formation workshop co-organized with the Centro de Estudios Laborales to vocational trainings and trainings specifically designed for workers in cooperatives.

Students arrive to YSP in a variety of ways: some because their family's benefit packages from the government require them to be working toward either a primary or secondary school degree, some because they did not have many educational opportunities earlier in life and have now decided to study either because they think it will help them obtain work (mostly the case for young men), or for a desire to learn more for the sake of learning (usually the case for older women). Often friendship or kinship ties draw students to the school. Almost all of the students
and organizers live within easy walking distance of one of the two school buildings, while some of the teachers sent by the government live farther away. Living in close proximity to the school is an important element of the territorial organizing discussed in the previous chapter. In effect, the two school buildings have turned into sort of community centers, students often come early or stay late just to hang out, meaning that learning and relationship-building occur outside of official class time as well.

Along with these officially recognized educational projects, the MTDs also organize a number of other cultural and educational activities. For example, the Movement of Collectives offers martial arts classes, theater and popular music lessons to young people in the neighborhoods where it based. On one hand, these activities serve as an alternative for youth who might otherwise be conscripted into drug gangs or other violent forms of social organization. Yet, more than this, they also serve as a form of sharing skills and knowledges and building community. Yo Sí Puedo organizes music and art classes, public exhibitions of students' art work, mural painting in the neighborhood where they work, and alternative celebrations of popular holidays. These cultural activities are not confined to the MTDs, and certainly are not new, but they do present an important aspect of the piqueteros' struggle demonstrating that this struggle is not only about than securing people's basic needs, but also about constructing whole new ways of life and subjectivities.

Research and publishing play an important role in the unemployed workers' movements' struggles as well. Many actively engage in research as part of their organizing method, especially a sort of “workers' inquiry” about the conditions of unemployment in specific neighborhoods, while some movements even operate their own publishing houses or publish their work with other movement publishers. For example, the Frente Popular Dario Santillan's publishing house
El Colectivo has published over fifty books, from political analyses and histories to poetry and short stories (Rabasa 2014). Instead of the usual copyright, these books carry a Creative Commons Copyleft insignia, allowing for free non-commercial reproduction and distribution. Many of the books are available to download for free on the Collective's website, engaging in the creation of a virtual commons that acknowledges the importance of knowledge and information in today's world. The MTD La Matanza also operates a small publishing house, publishing four books to date. The MTD Solano co-published a book with Colectivo Situaciones in 2002 and has since contributed book chapters to various anthologies on Argentinean social movements (c.f., Barrientos and Isaía 2011; Giarracca and Massuh 2008). These different publishing projects come, on the one hand, from a recognition of the importance of knowledge production for social change, and, on the other hand, a commitment to sharing and circulating that knowledge beyond an individual organization.

One of the MTD La Matanza's first activities when the movement formed in 1996 was a reading group to study and better understand the economic and political transformations underway in Argentina. The group started by studying Marxist critiques of neoliberalism that allowed them to understand the structural causes behind the increase in unemployment. Understanding unemployment as a structural issue was a key moment in helping them to politicize their own conditions of unemployment rather than remaining trapped in the neoliberal ideology that only recognizes individual responsibility for unemployment. Later the movement worked with a group of social psychology students based at the University of La Matanza to investigate more of these subjective effects of unemployment and the ways in which that neoliberal ideology becomes internalized. This investigation was what led the MTD to focus on guilt as a key element of that neoliberal ideology and a necessary factor to overcome to
effectively organize the unemployed. As Toty Flores explains:

Guilt was and is one of the most important weapons for the capitalist system to target the unemployed workers that proposed fighting and once installed in one's consciousness is very difficult to combat. It was guilt that prevented organizing with others in order to, together, find solutions to problems. It was guilt that made it difficult to identify unemployment as a social problem. It was guilt that constantly convinced us that “we are useless,” that “we are worthless,” that we “suffer misery because we chose to,” with which the condition of exclusion settled in our subjectivity and conditioned all our action, in our personal lives and also in participation in any social group, since the breakdown of self-esteem conspired against integration, in equal conditions with the other members of the group […] Identifying guilt as an instrument that the system used for domination, has perhaps been the first important appropriation that we made of scientific knowledge, and discovering it made me feel very happy, along with the other compañeros: we had a new tool with which to defend ourselves. (2005, 15).

Following this research on the role of guilt, the MTD continued doing workshops with social psychology students on how to counteract this guilt and build new relationships based on solidarity. These workshops and experience of collective investigation around guilt was an essential process of building the relationships that would allow the movement to grow and allow workers to work cooperatively in the self-managed enterprises.

The MTD Solano's collaborations with Colectivo Situaciones are emblematic of this role that investigation can play for these movements. In the midst of high unemployment and the emergence of unemployed workers' movements around the country, the investigations of the MTDs and Colectivo Situaciones analyzed these emerging new forms of organization and subjectivities, exploring the collective desires behind them (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002). Investigations uncovered a generalized crisis of representation marked by a widespread loss of faith in representative bodies, as well as all forms of representative decision-making. They announced the emergence of new subjects desiring autonomy, with enhanced capacities for collective decision-making and control over common affairs. Inquiries sought to understand the contradictions and limitations of these processes, as a moment of self-reflection
for participants, while creating more opportunities for collective experimentation and building relationships between different experiences.

What the experiences of these unemployed workers’ organizations point to is the productive and political capacities of inquiry: the research process itself plays a fundamental role in the production of new subjectivities and social bonds. Investigation into the causes and effects of unemployment challenge any notion of unemployment as an individual problem, helping people overcome feelings of guilt and personal responsibility for not having a job. Active participation in these processes of investigation also plays an important role in building unemployed peoples’ confidence in their own capacities and knowledges; it teaches them new skills and helps form group cohesion, creating a shared experience among the participants. Moreover, this disposition toward inquiry implies a different way of doing politics, one which does not assume a pre-defined subject or path of action, but instead emphasizes the production of new social relations and experimentation in forms of living and organization.
Conclusions: Caring for a Life in Common

This dissertation followed the experiences of two unemployed workers’ movements in the periphery of Buenos Aires showing how their struggles shed light on contemporary forms of labor and exploitation and offer important lessons for political action in the current moment. The unemployed workers’ movements formed part of a wave of new social movements that emerged in Argentina in the late 1990s in response to the devastating effects of neoliberal “structural adjustment” and austerity measures: a rapid increase in unemployment accompanied by a decrease in state assistance for the poor and unemployed, which left many people across the country unable to meet their basic needs. In 2001, as the country fell even deeper into economic crisis, social unrest grew throughout the population, ultimately terminating in an uprising on December 19th and 20th that forced the president out of office with the rallying cry que se vayan todos (they all must go), calling for the end of the neoliberal system and the entire class of politicians supporting it.

The unemployed workers' movements were some of the largest and most influential social movements of this period. Organizations of unemployed workers first formed in small towns in Argentina’s countryside in response to massive lay-offs following the privatization of the state oil company, experimenting with a new form of protest: the piquete or roadblock. Through these roadblocks, the unemployed won important victories, such as unemployment benefits from the state or the rehiring of laid-off employees, and the tactic spread as other
unemployed workers' organizations started throughout the country. These organizations formed independently from the official labor unions and political parties, who initially considered the unemployed to be a reactionary force with little chance of wielding real political power. Instead, the unemployed came together autonomously in their towns or neighborhoods to form Movements of Unemployed Workers (MTDs) and began organizing around problems in their daily lives. In the periphery of major cities, notably Buenos Aires, La Plata, and Rosario, these MTDs became especially massive and powerful. By interrupting traffic into and out of the cities, the unemployed possessed enormous political power to disrupt the daily workings of capitalism through interrupting the flows of goods and people. By staging protests that were basically encampments, living in the streets, they put issues of unemployment and reproduction in the public eye, politicizing these questions that the architects of neoliberalism sought to maintain as private and individual. The MTDs did not only disrupt the daily workings of capitalism, they also sought to institute new ways of living through building an autonomous counter-power from below and alternative economic and social practices, such as cooperative enterprises, community health clinics, movement-controlled schools, and collective housing projects. These alternatives provided the framework that allowed the poor and unemployed to survive during the worst years of Argentina's economic crisis, while also offering an alternative vision of the organization of society, a glimpse of what a non-capitalist world could look like.

Nearly twenty years after their original emergence, the unemployed workers' movements continue to play an important political role in Argentina. They were among the movements that led the 2001 insurrection that overthrow the country's neoliberal government and later provided an important force for the institution of a new governmentality inaugurated by Néstor Kirchner's election in 2003. The continued mobilizations of the unemployed, along with other social
movements, allowed the Kirchner governments to overcome a series of political crises and reinforced its legitimacy, allowing for the implementation of important social programs to help the poor and unemployed. On a micropolitical level, these movements also instituted new social relations and subjectivities, and deeply transformed the mode of governance in peripheral neighborhoods and fundamentally transformed the relationship between the state and social movements.

The unemployed workers' movements also provide important lessons for social movements globally. They show the political power of the unemployed and the informally and precariously employed and how they might collectively organize. The unemployed workers' movements, along with the other movements that emerged in Argentina in the late 1990s and early 2000s, also provide important insights for organizing in times of economic and political crisis. The movements in Argentina drew much of their force not because they opposed a certain government or even a certain economic system, but because they were able to simultaneously oppose neoliberalism while creating concrete alternatives. These alternatives ranged from the barter and alternative currency markets to the worker-controlled factories and cooperatives to community-controlled schools and clinics. These alternatives served two primary purposes: first, they allowed the poor and the unemployed to survive the brunt of neoliberal austerity measures and the effects of the crisis; second, they laid the groundwork for a non-capitalist society, creating alternative institutions and infrastructures, building knowledges and capacities for an anti-capitalist struggle.

The political practices of these movements decenter the state from a shared understanding of the political, spreading actions out in neighborhoods across the city and building alternative institutions and forms of decision-making. In one sense, this is a reflection of neoliberal
governmentality, in which power is not concentrated in the central institutions of the national state. In another sense, this is a rejection of centralized power, a call for really democratic institutions and forms of decision-making. This is what was behind the call *que se vayan todos* and even if it had receded from public view and is no longer *said*, the call still stands. It stands in the every day actions of hundreds of thousands of people across the country who, rather than waiting for the state to improve their living conditions, take direct action to improve their own lives in worker-controlled factories and cooperatives, community schools and health clinics, and other alternative spaces and practices of sociability. The call also resonates with recent mobilizations in Europe, especially the *no, no nos representan* (“no, they don't represent us”) and *real democracia ya* (“real democracy now”) chanted that arose from the plazas in Spain in May 2011. A full decade after Argentina's uprising, the European “movements of the squares” and the “Occupy movement” in the United States and elsewhere bear many similarities to the Argentine experience: from the disastrous and uneven effects of neoliberalism and austerity to the form of movements rising up in resistance. For the remainder of this conclusion, I will explore in more detail some of the political implications of the unemployed workers' movements that might prove useful to some of these struggles in other sites.

**Productivity of the Unemployed: Expanding our notions of labor and exploitation**

Drawing on the experiences and theoretical production of the unemployed workers' movements, this dissertation calls for an expanded conception of labor and exploitation. The movements themselves make the case for this broadened definition of labor: by choosing the denominate their organizations as those of “unemployed workers,” they refused common understandings, and indeed the dominant political narrative, that cast them as unproductive, as non-workers, and, therefore, non-exploited. Debates around the definition of labor under
capitalism have a long history and have taken up a new intensity in the last four decades due to the work of feminists to recognize the value of women's labor, post-colonial debates challenging a Eurocentric labor history that privileges industrial labor, and theories of immaterial – cognitive and affective – labor. Argentina's unemployed address all three of three of these interventions: recognizing the importance of reproductive labor, the large mass of people that have never formed part of the formal labor market nor have any expectations of waged labor, and the immaterial aspects of contemporary labor, not in terms of highly-skilled technical workers, but all the social and communicative work that happens daily and that literally produces the territory and the city. This is what various commentators have referred to as *life being put to work* or the biopolitical economy, in which capitalist production is not oriented exclusively around the production of goods but also social relations and *forms of life* (c.f., Hardt and Negri 2009).

Here it is recognized that exploitation not only occurs through the wage, but also through other forms of capture and extraction. Therefore, the unemployed, even though they are excluded from the formal waged system, are still included in the capitalist economy, are still exploited, still produce wealth, of which they are then dispossessed. Increasingly, this capture of wealth outside of the wage relation (and sometimes inside it, as well) occurs through debt. The penetration of finance into the urban periphery can be seen in the expansion of mechanisms of debt and credit that increasingly include sections of the population without access to a wage. At first this was seen through a growth in micro-credit programs supported by the federal government, international development institutions, and non-profit organizations. In more recent years, finance has primarily spread through the social benefits packages distributed to the poor and unemployed that require the use of banking services and the informal and illegal forms of credit that function in parallel to the state-sponsored ones (Gago 2014).
Emphasizing the productivity of the poor and the unemployed serves at least two purposes. First, it allows us to better understand the modes of exploitation and capture of wealth in the current moment. While the discourse of neo-developmentalism emphasizes how the expansion of social welfare programs has allowed for the *inclusion* of the poor and unemployed, who were only thought to be excluded during the neoliberal period of the 1990s, it fails to recognize the important economic contributions of the poor and the unemployed and how many of these social programs promote a system of differential inclusion which continues their exploitation. Additionally, the neo-developmentalistic discourse fails to recognize the continued importance of finance, relegating the primacy of finance to the neoliberal period of the 1990s and thus ignoring the role of finance both in setting international prices for raw materials and in expanding capitalist relations and neoliberal subjectivity (c.f., Gago and Mezzadra 2015).

There are also immediate political implications of this expanded concept of labor: recognizing their productivity is a refusal to cast the poor and unemployed as merely victims. Instead, it acknowledges their political and economic power. The labor and social cooperation of the poor and unemployed play an essential role in the contemporary economy, and their creativity and the breadth of economic alternatives they created allowed Argentina to recover from its economic crisis and continue to play a vital role in current economic growth. Recognizing this importance allows the poor and unemployed to begin organizing around their own desires and demands, instead of as mere props in a script written by others. Analyzing the ways in which value is captured from the social cooperation of the poor and the unemployed through the concept of extraction also broadens our understanding of extraction and the neo-extractive economy. The political implications of this are clear. Most accounts of extraction define it in terms of natural resource extraction, which take places almost exclusively in the
countryside, therefore leaving out the enormous population of the urban poor. These accounts posit the urban poor primarily as beneficiaries of the neo-extractive economy through the social benefits packages, thus serving to pacify these populations. An expanded concept of extraction allows us to seek connections between these rural and urban populations and to recognize the role that finance plays in extraction across different sectors, opening up space for new alliances and cooperation across sectors (Gago and Mezzadra 2015).

Expanded notions of labor and exploitation also enable the establishment of broader movements and the incorporation of different types of precarious workers. The unemployed workers' movements were able to successfully bring together recently unemployed industrial and service workers, informal and precarious workers, paid and unpaid domestic workers, and youth and migrants with no experience of formal labor. By understanding labor in a way that did not privilege one form of labor over another, that did not assume one to either be more dominant nor morally privileged, the unemployed workers, especially those belonging to autonomous movements, were able to create extremely heterogeneous organizations in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age, as well as experiences and expectations of work.

**Organizing around Reproduction**

Building on this expanded notion of labor and exploitation, this dissertation also emphasized the particular importance of what has traditionally been called “reproductive labor” or the work of social reproduction. Within capitalism, reproductive labor refers to that labor necessary to produce the commodity labor power, such as bearing children and childcare, feeding and clothing workers, providing for their emotional and health needs, and other forms of housework. In a more general sense, reproductive labor can be seen to include all the labor that goes into reproducing the capitalist relation as such, thus ensuring capitalism's continued
existence. While the distinction between productive and reproductive labor has always been contested (c.f., Dalla Costa and James 1972; Federici 2012), in contemporary biopolitical production that distinction has become increasingly blurred as all of capitalist production relies on affective and immaterial labor, the production of social relations and ways of life (Hardt and Negri 2009; Weeks 2011). Despite the crucial role that reproductive labor plays, it has often been relegated to a secondary place within labor organizing along with a simultaneous relegation of women’s participation and leadership in labor struggles.

This dissertation showed how the unemployed workers’ movements privilege questions of reproduction in their organizing. The movements can best be explained as arising in response to a crisis of reproduction, not only as a response to high unemployment levels. Neoliberal structural adjustment and austerity measures manifested themselves most clearly in people’s daily lives as this crisis of reproduction: for example, the unaffordability of basic services and food stuffs, or the inaccessibility of quality education and health care. Today, the neo-extractive economy functions by directly capturing value from reproductive activities through different mechanisms of debt. Many of the MTDs in the urban periphery began as groups of neighbors who came together in order to discuss how to collectively address this reproductive crisis. The first activities they organized were the ollas populares, collective meals in public spaces that served to meet the immediate need of hunger while also politicizing the crisis of reproduction. It was from this initial concern over reproduction that the MTDs formed out of these groups of neighbors and began addressing the question of unemployment.

This focus on reproduction has allowed the movements to be more inclusive of difference within demanding the same sort of unity as required by traditional labor unions or political parties. On the other hand, a focus on reproduction allows for a recognition of what we all have
in common without sacrificing difference and multiplicity. As discussed above, it allows for the inclusion of the vast numbers of the wageless, who despite not working for a wage, are still very much engaged in work. Yet this work takes on a myriad of different forms in different times and places. Reproduction, however, is common to all. In other words, the MTDs organize around the *spaces of reproduction*, or the spaces of everyday life, where the unemployed not only spend their time but also reproduce and produce social relations, subjectivities, and forms of life.

The focus on reproduction also allows for a rethinking not only of what counts as labor but what labor is valuable and necessary work. Reproduction opens an interesting question because it is reproduction of capital but also of ourselves. If it is these activities of reproduction that we reproduce the capitalist relation than it also where we can start to build something new, new types of social relations and worlds. Silvia Federici addresses the political potential of organizing around reproduction:

> For nothing so effectively stifles our lives as the transformation into work of the activities and relations that satisfy our desires. By the same token, it is through the day-to-day activities by means of which we produce our existence, that we can develop our capacity to cooperate and not only resist our dehumanization but learn to reconstruct the world as a space of nurturing, creativity, and care. (2012, 12).

Reproduction is thus the central point of conflict: where capitalist relations can be reproduced or not.

The centrality of reproduction not only refers to the forms of labor around which the movements organize, but also to the types of alternatives they seek to implement. While the worker-controlled (recuperated) factories and other types of cooperative businesses have received the most media attention and government support, many of the unemployed workers’ movements, especially the autonomous-leaning ones, focused perhaps even more energy on alternative forms of reproduction. These alternative forms of reproduction include alternative
forms of education, health, housing, and food production. The initial *ollas populares* became more formalized with the formation of the MTDs and developed into popular cafeterias (*comedores populares*) providing regular meals to neighborhood residents, community health clinics making quality health care accessible in even the most marginalized neighborhoods, and autonomous schools not only providing education but a different type of education, teaching non-capitalist and communitarian values. These alternative practices of reproduction were what allowed the poor and the unemployed to survive during the worst of Argentina's economic crisis from 2001-2003 and provided the material basis that allowed the movements to sustain themselves and to increase their force.

**Territory beyond the State**

The unemployed workers' movements' expanded concept of labor and emphasis on reproduction also necessarily imply a spatial reconfiguration of political action and organizing. This means moving labor struggles from the factory or other workplace into the spaces of everyday life: the home and the neighborhood. Without the shared space of the factory floor (and the shared time of a common working day) from which to build relationships, solidarity, and organization, the movements turned to the spaces that the unemployed and precariously-employed do share – the neighborhood – using the slogan “the neighborhood is the new factory.” Not marginal or outside of capitalist relations, this is precisely where the social cooperation that is exploited under contemporary capitalism takes place.

This move into the neighborhoods gave rise to the MTDs’ practice of territorial organizing. Territorial organizing prioritizes the spaces of everyday life as the spaces that must be fundamentally transformed as part of the political struggle, it also refers to drawing membership and focusing activities around a specific geographic area. In a basic sense, the
importance that the unemployed workers' movements place on territory can be seen in how they name their organizations: taking the name of the place where they are based (e.g., the Unemployed Workers' Movement of Solano or the Unemployed Workers Movement of La Matanza, the first a small neighborhood and the second a much larger county). More fundamentally, the attention to territory can be seen in the way the MTDs prioritize addressing neighborhood concerns and issues related to daily life: housing, health, education, and food, and to creating more accessible and safer spaces in the neighborhood.

Territorial organizing draws on the knowledges and experiences of the residents of the territory, that heterogeneous composition of the unemployed discussed earlier, which allows it to better respond to the needs and opportunities presented in that territory or situation. For example, women's participation in the MTDs played a key role in the creation of this territorial organizing, which was in large part based on women's already existing friendship, kinship, and support networks. Not only do these women possess an enormous amount of information and knowledge about what goes on in their neighborhoods, but their day-to-day activities are an essential part of producing the social relations that make the territory. Many of the unemployed workers' movements in the urban peripheries also draw on long experiences of migrant organizing in the territories, especially migrant land takeovers and settlements in the 1980s and subsequent struggles to ensure access to utilities and services.

One of the keys to this territorial organizing is that it conceives of power as residing in the territory itself. This contrasts with more traditional forms of organizing in Argentina that start by organizing in the territory but always with the goal of making “the leap out of the neighborhood,” usually through using neighborhood residents as support (in terms of bodies or votes) for political leaders and decisions made elsewhere or training neighborhood activists to
become political leaders on a larger scale. Either way, the neighborhood is only seen as the starting point, not an end in itself and political power is seen as fundamentally residing elsewhere. The unemployed workers' movements, on the other hand, see political work in the territory as an ends in and of itself, as both the ends and mean of their struggle: the construction of a new territory.

Despite this emphasis on the spaces of everyday life and specific neighborhoods, territorial organizing should not be equated with the local or small-scale. Nor should it be equated with defending a closed, autarkic space with rigid membership criteria. The territory is seen as the space where all politics and political power are rooted, thus being essential for affecting change at any scale. Additionally, the MTDs, while based in a specific territory, constantly expand and redefine that territory, and also connect with other MTDs and movements in different places. These movements are linked according to a non-hierarchical and non-centralizing logic, as a flexible rhizomatic network, in which organizations work together on specific objectives or events, without sacrificing their unique characteristics and rootedness in a specific place. Additionally, the MTDs draw on experiences and knowledges from outside of their specific territories: for example, the MTD Solano using indigenous building techniques from Western Argentina in constructing the houses for their housing cooperative or using agricultural techniques learned from a Cuban agronomist.

This form of territorial organizing implies an important rethinking of the concept of territory itself. Rather than a geographically delimited, closed space, for the MTDs' territory is rooted in a particular place and situated in everyday practices yet expansive, open to connections with other spaces and struggles. Territory in this sense is never fixed but constantly under construction. Building on a Lefebvrian notion of the social production of space, territory here is
understood not only as physical area, but also the social relations that make that place:

Territories are linked to the subjects that institute them, mark them, and signal them based on the social relations that they carry. That is to say, returning to Lefebvre, that the production of space is the production of differential space: whoever is capable of producing space embodies differentiated social relations that need to be rooted in territories that are necessarily different. This cannot be reduced to possession (or property) of land, but rather the organization by part of a social sector of a territory that will have different characteristics because of the social relations that that subject embodies. (Zibechi 2008, 30).

This notion of territoriality contrasts sharply with that commonly evoked by Anglo-American geographers and political theorists. For these scholars, territory is, by definition, always constructed by the state, defined as the physical area over which the state has exclusive jurisdiction and recognized as a distinctive feature of the modern state (Shah 2012). These authors' inability to recognize the role of actors beyond the state in the construction of territory, in other words, *the construction of territory from below*, points to a larger blind spot of only conceiving politics in terms of the state, which will be discussed more in the following point.

**Non-state-centric Politics**

As mentioned above, the unemployed workers' organizations' practice of territorial organizing involves a rethinking of the spatiality of power and the political. The unemployed workers' movements, along with other movements of the 2001 moment, challenged traditional conceptions of power as concentrated in the institutions of the state and the political as the struggle to occupy that site of power. Instead, these movements see power as immanent throughout the social field, as a relationship rather than something one holds. On one hand, power operates on a micro level through social relations. On the other hand, this power operates globally through international financial institutions and monetary policies, transnational corporations, and global logistics. Thus, power cannot be thought to reside within the institutions of the nation-state, making a struggle to take them increasingly pointless. This understanding of
power could clearly be seen in the 2001 uprising with the call *que se vayan todos* and the subsequent decision of protesters not to attempt to storm government buildings but to return to their neighborhoods and organize there.

This conception of power requires a rethinking of what constitutes the field of *the political*. Political action can no longer privileges the taking of state institutions, occupying the government either by reformist or revolutionary means. Instead, the political can be found in conflictual production of subjectivity, new social relations, and forms of life. These struggles decenter the institutions of the state in the affirmation of a non-state-centric form of politics that focuses on building counter-power from below. Counter-power refers to a power from below that does not seek to become an institutionalized, hegemonic or centralized form of power, but rather to expand the popular capacity for intervention (Colectivo Situaciones 2001, Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano 2002). Counter-power fundamentally involves the creation and affirmation of new values and forms of life. Parallel to this notion of counter-power is the concept of autonomy, which is understood not only as independence from the institutions of the state and capital through the creation of alternative economic practices and forms of social organization, but also as an ontological autonomy to determine one's own values and desires. Autonomy thus requires going beyond the binary logic of the state to develop an autonomous form of thought and create one's own categories (Colectivo Situaciones 2009).

A crucial feature of this understanding of the political and the construction of counter-power is practicing politics differently. Creating new social relations and subjectivities, new skills and capacities for intervention starts from within a movement. It is this conviction that is behind the unemployed workers' movements insistence on practicing internal democracy (albeit taking different forms within different organizations) and their refusal of representation and
representational democracy toward more direct forms of decision-making and collective control over the affairs that affect a community. It is also for this reason that the movements put so much emphasis on learning and education. However, this is not to say that internal democracy within a movement is enough for ensuring the coming of a more democratic world, but it is an important start.

Rosa Lugano, in a reflection on the work of Raquel Gutierrez Aguilar, describes this shift in the political:

We are attending the passage from a type of state-centric *res publica* – in which politics takes place in the encounter with the state’s institutional framework – to a *res communis*, in which politics is based on the capacity to interrupt processes of capital accumulation and the expropriation of common resources as well as to put pressure on liberal forms of the political, which, through delegation, destroy the possibility of collectively managing that which concerns us all because it affects us all. (2013)

Lugano continues,

The common is a way of naming that “non-state public,” which is produced collectively and whose control and decision are not delegated to political mediations other than those that produce it. The horizon of the common is, above all, a perspective of struggle launched to directly and collectively reappropriate and recover that which has been taken from the communities: control of their fate. The common is, therefore, a social relation not reduced to what is given; the repeated production of meaning and connections that gives the collective the capacity to intervene in general affairs. (ibid.)

Drawing on Gutierrez Aguilar’s work, Lugano understands politics not as the management of what already exists but as “the eruption of that collective imagination” and the creation of a “dissident common sense.” This collective imagination and a common sense going beyond the categories given by the state and capital is an essential element of a non-state-centric politics.

State-centric, liberal politics is an obstacle to this different understanding of the political: it constantly attempts to redraw the limits around what precisely is considered political, again and again fighting to have the political recentered around the state. The Kirchner administrations have gone about this in numerous ways: promoting and rewarding the social movements and
struggles that adhere to a state-centric version of politics, while repressing, denouncing, or otherwise delegitimizing those movements that challenge this limited notion of the political. The neo-developmentalist discourse of the “return of the state” does precisely this work by framing neoliberalism as the absence of the state (rather than a specific form of governmentality) and the 2001 moment as a chaotic, “pre-political” moment that was necessary to go through in order to overthrow neoliberalism but that has now been overcome by the return of a properly functioning state (Hupert 2011). The Kirchner apparatus has functioned by bringing social movements into its ranks, through offering them subsidies and political influence (e.g., positions within certain ministries) as an attempt to have those movements recenter their actions and desires around the state. Meanwhile, movements who refuse their advances and maintain a non-state-centric logic are not only denied many of the subsidies and opportunities available to other movements, but increasingly face direct violence and repression. Therefore, in the current political climate in Argentina, a non-state-centric politics becomes increasingly difficult as it is increasingly necessary in order for movements to overcome the state's binary logic that would seek to divide movements and pit them against each other. Or in the words of Mezzadra and Neilson: “Liberating political imagination from the burden of the citizen-worker and the state is particularly urgent to open up spaces within which the organization of new forms of political subjectivity becomes possible” (2013, xi).

**New Forms of Life**

What, then, does a form of politics that does not center the state look like? What form do struggles around labor, struggles of the working class, take in this moment of biopolitical production, of the multiplication of labor, when all of life is increasingly put to work? As noted above, one of the crucial features of the unemployed workers' movements was the early
recognition of the importance of reproduction and striving to create alternative forms of reproduction. Autonomous forms of reproduction not only refers to alternative modes of care, education, housing, all the activities traditionally associated with social reproduction, but, ultimately, the creation of new forms of life. New forms of life entail not only new ways of meeting basic needs, new forms of social reproduction, but also, even more importantly new values, new ways of being in the world, relating to one another, new forms of subjectivity and communality.

We can see the struggle for new forms of life reflected in the demands that the MTDs have made at different points. The unemployed workers’ organizations associated with labor unions or existing Leftist political parties tended to call for “genuine work,” invoking idealized images of a Peronist, Fordist society characterized by full employment. On the other hand, other movements of the unemployed orient their actions toward the demand for unemployment subsidies or other forms of state support for the unemployed. These movements, however, tend to reproduce a vision of the unemployed as unproductive and therefore in need of aid from the state. The autonomous MTDs, which were the subject of this dissertation, have a very different set of demands and discourses relating to work and their desired world. Rather than solely demanding genuine work or more unemployment benefits, these autonomous MTDs called for “work with dignity,” as the basis for the formulation of new forms of life. Work with dignity is more than a simple demand made to a centralized power: dignity cannot be given to a people. Rather, the call for dignity is more of a statement: a statement of what the movements are putting into practice and of a collective vision for a better future. The MTDs began to create their own work with dignity through cooperative workshops and other alternative economic practices, which aimed not only to provide workers with some income, but more importantly to produce
new subjectivities, capacities and social relations, in order to collectively control the workplace and build new relationships of solidarity extending beyond the workplace.

The focus on reproduction and territorial organizing implies expanding this focus on dignity, on creating the capacities for collective control, to other areas of life beyond what is narrowly viewed as the realm of production and the workplace. As stated above, the MTDs emphasized the creation of autonomous forms of social reproduction, such autonomous or movement-controlled schools, childcare, health care, food production and distribution, and housing. These projects provided important infrastructure that allow the poor and unemployed to meet many of their basic needs during a time of austerity measures when the state was unwilling to provide this support and continue playing an important role as inflation and financialization continue to make many of these basic needs unaffordable. Beyond providing services that the state does not, these autonomous forms of reproduction also allow the MTDs to reproduce themselves differently: schools that teach cooperative values and radical history, health care based on holistic health practices, and housing that emphasizes communal living over individual property ownership. These projects can be seen as part of an even broader process to create autonomous control over their territories, free from policing and other forms of state violence, as well as the daily violence of neo-extractive, financial capitalism. The MTDs do through occupying physical spaces where these other alternative practices take place, but also through cleaning up and caring for public spaces – parks, soccer fields, and plazas – and regularly hosting neighborhood events in order to build a sense of community and solidarity. It is through these alternative economic practices and autonomous forms of reproduction that the MTDs create new values, subjectivities, and social relations. These new values are expressed in concepts such as the “solidarity economy,” referring to economic interactions that are not based on maximizing
exchange value, but privilege use value and the construction of relationships of solidarity and mutual aid, or *buen vivir*, the indigenous concept of collective well-being.

Through their rootedness in specific territories, the MTDs were able to investigate and draw on the alternative forms of life and social organization already being practiced in those places. The movements’ heterogeneous composition and high levels of participation from women, youth, and migrants has been particularly important in this respect. Research and investigation have always been a key element of the MTDs' practice, from Marxist study groups to surveys on the living conditions and existing forms of life in their neighborhoods. This research was not only essential in giving movement leaders and participants better insight into the neighborhoods where they were organizing, a better understanding of the class composition of those neighborhoods and the self-activity of the working class there, but also played an important role in creating new subjectivities and collective identities. In this way, these practices of investigation can be understood as a form of “workers' inquiry,” or collective co-research into the forms of social productivity and subjectivities of the unemployed (Mason-Deese 2013).

These new forms of life are based, fundamentally, in *the common*. The common here does not only refer to natural resources – “common goods” – or even the “digital commons,” but all the elements that make social cooperation possible – language, affect, knowledge, and information. This common is increasingly at the heart of contemporary capitalist production, extracted from those who produce it, yet it is also the basis for an alternative to the capitalist mode of life. As Hardt and Negri, state:

The way out of the impasse is to bring the *political diagonal* back to the *biopolitical diagram*, that is, to ground it in an investigation of the capacities people already exercise in their daily lives and, specifically, in the processes of biopolitical production [...] In the biopolitical context, as we saw, the production of ideas, images, codes, languages, knowledges, affects, and the like, through horizontal networks of communication and cooperation, tends toward the autonomous production of the common, which is to say, the
production and reproduction of forms of life. And the production and reproduction of forms of life is a very precise definition of political action. This does not mean that the revolution has already begun and the problem of transition has been solved because, first, the autonomy of biopolitical production is only partial, since it is still directed and constrained under the command of capital; and second, these economic capacities are not immediately expressed as political capacities. It does mean, though, that in the common fabric of the biopolitical diagram rest latent, potential, chrysalis-like the capacities for the multitude to determine autonomously the political diagonal of the transition. Realizing this potential, by means of political action and organization, would mean carrying forward the parallel revolutionary struggles through the insurrectional event of intersection to an institutional process of managing the common. (2009, 364-5)

That is, building on the already-existing or latent forms of life in the territories based on the common, and creating the practices, institutions, and infrastructure necessary to maintain them.

The common cannot be seen as an idealized solution for all of the problems of the present. The production of the common has always been contested, while contemporary, neo-extractive, capitalism increasingly attempts to capture the wealth of this common. When the common and the forms of life based on it come under attack, they must defended and, most importantly, cared for. Care in this case refers, on one hand, to taking care of each other – collectively meeting material, emotional, and social needs –, ensuring our own reproduction, and, on the other hand, to caring for the common, for collective power and shared projects and ways of being in the world. This involves paying attention to how the common is captured but also the ways in which it always escapes. Care is not separate from the political, not something that must be done in order to be able to do politics, but it is a constitutive element of political action itself. As the Invisible Committee states:

It's not a question of choosing between the care we devote to what we are constructing and our political striking force. Our striking force is composed of the very intensity of what we are living, of the joy emanating from it, of the forms of expression invented there, of a collective ability to withstand stresses that is attested by our force. In the general inconsistency of social relations, revolutionaries should stand out by the density of thought, affection, finesse, and organization that they bring to bear (2015, 194).

This is precisely what the movements discussed in this dissertation are attempting to do: the
school Yo Sí Puedo through creating a school and territorial organization that create new ways of learning and sharing information, the Movement of Collectives by attending to people's health, food, and housing needs. At the same time, both movements also create spaces for new forms of sociability and being-in-common.
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