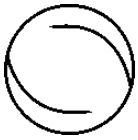

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Mundane and Everyday Politics for and from the Neighborhood

Pablo D. Fernández
IAE Business School, Argentina

Ignasi Martí
EMLYON Business School, France and ESADE, Ramon Llull University, Spain

Tomás Farchi
IAE Business School, Argentina and IEEM Business School, Uruguay

Abstract

Social movement scholars and activists have recognized the difficulties of mobilizing people for the long haul, moving from the exuberance of the protest to the dull and ordinary work necessary to produce sustainable change. Drawing on ethnographic work in La Juanita, in Greater Buenos Aires, we look at local actions for and from the neighborhood in order to resist political domination, taken by people who have been unemployed for long periods of time. We identified concrete and local practices and interventions—which we call *mundane and everyday politics* – that are embedded in a territory and go beyond the typical practices of social movements and the expected infrapolitical activity in allowing the disfranchised to engage in the political process.

Keywords

autonomism, collective mobilization, infrapolitics, social movements, territory

Introduction

In recent years, scholars from different disciplines have noted a new and alarming tendency in contemporary society. People who are excluded or at risk of expulsion from life projects and livelihoods, labor and housing markets (Sassen, 2014; Standing, 2011) are often condemned (or at least thus portrayed) to accept their lot, or turn to individual (but not collective) efforts to change their situation. A warning sign appears to be the growing political disengagement and profound distrust of politicians and democratic institutions, by younger generations in particular. In apparent

Corresponding author:
Pablo D. Fernández, IAE Business School, Mariano Acosta s/n y Ruta 8, Derqui – Pilar 1629, Argentina.
Email: pfernandez@iae.edu.ar

contrast to this pessimistic picture, it is also observable how people worldwide have mobilized to voice their frustrations and grievances (Castells, 2012; Juris, 2008) in the face of such "structural violence" (Galtung, 1969), which includes decaying economies, soaring unemployment, and policies threatening and in many cases already dismantling welfare state institutions. Among these efforts, the Occupy movements and the Spanish *Indignados* have certainly captured the attention of both the public and social movement scholars, who have regarded them as examples of a renewed wave of rebellion.

However, despite their initial success in mobilizing people, these movements seem to have lost momentum, going "from indignation to resignation."[1] This apparent failure in sustaining a political project of change represents the challenges faced by both scholars and activists: How can people move from the exuberance of the protest to the dull and ordinary everyday work necessary to produce sustainable change? The former, according to Zolberg (1972), constitutes the "moments of madness" when "politics bursts its bounds to invade all of life" (1972, p. 183); while Tarrow (1993) calls it a time when "all is possible." It is in these moments when people choose parts from the available social repertoire to forge new realities. As Rao, Morrill, and Zald argue, social movements operate in two different directions: they "de-institutionalize existing beliefs, norms, and values embodied in extant forms, and establish new forms that instantiate new beliefs, norms and values" (Rao et al., 2000, p. 238). But, as "participants tire, supporters melt away, and the forces of order regroup and repress their challenges" (Tarrow, 1993, p. 282), these new realities tend to fade away when not adopted, institutionalized or combined with old ones.

These days, the networked society (Castells, 2012; Juris, 2008) seems ready to use new (online) social spaces such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook that are deemed efficient for communicating, spreading ideas, mobilizing emotions, and gathering people. But while such "techno-optimistic narratives" (Juris, 2012) suggest that the intensive, face-to-face, ritualistic interactions of the past are gone (Han, 2014; Skocpol, 2003), other more skeptical accounts tend to highlight the limits of new media technologies in maintaining a long-term political project unassisted. Face-to-face interaction, locally embedded projects, closeness and proximity, and in some cases intimacy are thought to be necessary ingredients for sustainable change. As Juris (2012) acknowledges, even for movements that relied extensively on online platforms—such as #Occupy or the Egyptian revolts at Tahir Square—offline sites were still important: "Places, face-to-face networks, social histories and the messiness of offline politics continue to matter, as exemplified by the resonance of the physical occupations themselves" (Juris, 2012, p. 260).

This paper looks at how in such places—notably the neighborhood—members of an organization interact with one another by creating specific relational conditions that sustain and foster activism. More specifically, we aim to address the question of how movements can sustain political change in the long term, going from the exuberance of the protest to the humdrum of everyday work, by analyzing a story of resistance (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). The story is of Cooperativa La Juanita, a cooperative created by people who had been unemployed for a long period of time in a poor district in Greater Buenos Aires. Argentina is fertile ground for studying precariousness, its consequences, and how some actors try to cope with them. The country suffered the consequences of neoliberal policies two decades ago, long before the 2008 financial crisis. Since then, a cooperative created out of a *piquetero* movement[2] has been an expression of the struggle of its members to "re-assert their basic integrity, dignity and worth" (Goffman, 1961) and a means to transform their local neighborhood. Their story of resistance began locally, where neighbors joined together to seek solutions to a very concrete problem: they could not afford their gas and electricity bills. After this first instance of mobilization, they joined forces with other people suffering the consequences of unemployment. Their actions, protests, and reach became first national and then global. Finally, the movement devolved to the neighborhood to engage in what we term "mundane and everyday politics."

Mundane and everyday politics belong neither to the realm of infrapolitics (Marche, 2012; Scott, 1985) nor to institutionalized (and traditional) politics of unions and political parties, nor to multitudinous social movements attempting social change (Tarrow, 2001). Mundane and everyday politics are concrete and local practices and interventions that are embedded in a territory. In the case of La Juanita, this territory is the neighborhood.

With the notion of mundane politics, we aim to respond to and join recent efforts of organizational scholars interested in expanding our understanding of resistance (Fleming, 2016; Mumby, 2005; Thomas & Davies, 2005). According to Courpasson (2016), "Resistance seems to have taken a fundamental political dimension beyond the workplace boundaries" (see also Spicer & Böhm, 2007). This expansion of the existing literature aims to analyze different processes where issues of "social justice and social injustice" are discussed (Martí & Fernández, 2013; Martin de Holan, 2016). Specifically, we are interested in collective attempts by those deemed powerless.

We argue that it is after encountering specific local problems and experiencing and creating new forms of neighborhood togetherness and solidarity that mundane politics of La Juanita are crafted, aiming to enhance capabilities, creating a united collective identity, and normalizing the space. These everyday political activities expand our understanding of how those living under precarious conditions can engage in meaningful resistance, moving beyond the typical institutionalized politics of unions and political parties to offer new insights into the political activity of those deemed powerless.

The politics of the weak

As expressed by Saskia Sassen, what one can observe after the 2008 crisis goes beyond more poverty and more inequality, rendering people in developed and underdeveloped countries in extreme conditions of poverty and exclusion. She uses the term *expulsion* to refer to a "gradual generalizing of extreme conditions that begin at the edges of systems" (Sassen, 2014, p. 28). In a similar vein, Standing (2011) refers to the *precariat*, an emerging class that experiences uncertain and short-term employment, unstable occupational identities and careers, and lack of social protection. And Harvey (2010) notes capitalists' methods of accumulation by dispossession, arguing that through processes of privatization and the financialization of the economy, capitalist elites have managed to appropriate progressively more from labor. In this light, it is interesting to look at what mechanisms people may employ to advance political, economic, and social alternatives to situations of unemployment, underemployment, dispossession, or deprivation. In other words, (how) can the disfranchised bring about real change in their lives? James C. Scott (2012), quoted at length here, has expressed the issue lucidly:

> Episodes of structural change … tend to occur only when massive, non-institutionalized disruption in the form of riots, attacks on property, unruly demonstrations, theft, arson, and open defiance threatens established institutions. Such disruption is virtually never encouraged, let alone initiated by left-wing organizations that are structurally inclined to favor orderly demands, demonstrations and strikes that can usually be contained within the existing institutional framework. Opposition institutions with names, office bearers, constitutions, banners, and their own internal governmental routines favor, naturally enough, institutionalized conflict, at which they are specialists. (Scott, 2012, pp. xvii–xviii)

Thus, without the weapons of the powerful, are the powerless left with no means of resistance? In his long and fruitful career, Scott (1985, 1990, 2009, 2012) has contributed detailed accounts of the refusal by the powerless to accept subordination. The politics of the weak – *infrapolitics*, as he called them – are "diagonal, careful, and evasive politics" that avoid overt conflicts carrying dangerous risks. Infrapolitics consists of thousands of small acts including "character assassination,

petty theft, social boycotting of elite feasts, gossip and rumor, vague threats, and small acts of sabotage" (Scott, 2012). Interestingly, these actions are not explicitly coordinated, but generally followed and tacitly accepted as the norm – as "the small coin of conflict and class struggle" (Scott, 2012). Moreover, they are sometimes performed with the silent acceptance of those in power, who prefer to ignore than repress them and risk acknowledging the threat and turning it into overt conflict. Thus, this "subterranean world of political conflict leaves scarcely a trace in the public record" (Scott, 1990). Yet, as Scott (2012) suggests, infrapolitics is the prevailing genre of day-to-day politics for most of the world's disfranchised.

The "problem" of infrapolitics seems to be its "inconsequential" nature, particularly regarding the material conditions of the oppressed. In effect, rare are the cases in which infrapolitics transcend self-affirmation, the (hidden) expression of the oppressed dignity and worth, or the neglect of their subordinated condition. Scott himself acknowledges this. In these rare cases when (material) consequences followed, it was more for the aggregation of behaviors, a kind of unintended side effect. For example, Scott (2012) suggests that the American Civil War was defined by the massive desertion of Confederate soldiers. These desertions were never coordinated but simply done *en masse* by people who had no interest in fighting the war.

Building on Scott's work, other scholars such as Marche (2012) and Baudry (2012) have expanded our understanding of infrapolitics. The importance of these works lays in their challenge to the prevailing belief in the inconsequential nature of infrapolitics. For instance, Marche (2012) studies graffiti artists who publicize their criticism of the War on Terror in the United States. According to Marche (2012), graffiti constitutes "oppositional speech acts"; as such, they belong to the public discourse, as an alternative to the status quo. Similarly, Baudry (2012) analyzes activists who contest their exclusion from the public space through the apparently harmless activity of gardening. In original, colorful and humorous ways, they throw "seed bombs," drill holes in sidewalks, and take over tree beds and other minimal spaces overlooked by greening designers. By promoting an alternative use of land to what the public or corporate urbanizer imposes, these activists reclaim their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968). Both Marche and Baudry treat infrapolitics as overt contestation: graffiti and gardens are visible expressions of struggle.

Through the work of Scott and other scholars, we have learned that two conditions must be met for infrapolitics to occur: anonymity and ambiguity. Anonymity, because it occurs in the shadows, far from the sight of the powerful, permitting contesting behaviors to take place. Ambiguity, which may take the form of humor, irony, or religious speech, is designed to conceal the real intention of the speech or actions and thus permit subversion. Thus, it is not surprising that the powerless turn to infrapolitics—characterized by such ambiguity and anonymity—when those in power may use sheer violence and force to repress any attempt to subvert the order. But quiescence is puzzling when the oppressed are not facing totalitarian regimes, but (apparently) open democracies. This puzzle has led Scott to suggest that by living under the state and influenced by other forms of hierarchical organizations, people seem to have lost their capacity to cooperate and organize to create social order by themselves. In fact, Scott (1990) asserts that what infrapolitics and the hidden transcripts manifest is not the Gramscian idea of hegemony and the lack of class consciousness that prevents people from attempting something different, but a kind of inability to act together.

This apparent apathy appears to be confirmed by social movement scholars who observe the difficulty that movements face in sustaining change for the long haul (Juris, 2012). Indeed, following the "moments of madness" (Zolberg, 1972) and high emotions characteristic of the onset of protest, social movements tend to decline. While scholars favor examining mobilization and how social movements emerge, few studies explain why most of them eventually decline (Kamenitsa, 1998). Among the available explanations, Gamson (1990) focuses on the exhaustion of resources; Piven and Cloward (1979) attribute the weakening of activism to the creation of organizations;

McAdam (1982) stresses the loss of grassroots support; and finally, Van der Veen and Klandermans (1989) attribute social movements' decline to the decrease in members' participation. Such inability to maintain participation is also highlighted by studies that suggest how, despite massive "expulsions" (Sassen, 2014), a large number of individuals today seem to simply accept their lot or attempt to change it through individual efforts only, not collective action.

On particularity and space. If—as suggested by scholars as disparate as Sennett (2012), Haidt (2006), and Hauser (2006) among many others—the capacity for cooperation is embedded in human nature, a fundamental question is: To what extent do current situations of extreme flexibility and insecurity jeopardize any sense of and capacity for cooperation and willingness to endeavor in collective processes of social transformation? As pointed out above, the burgeoning literature on new media technologies and social movements suggests how first listservs, websites and cell phones, and more recently social networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook, offer unparalleled opportunities for mobilizing people in largely decentralized networks of resistance. Such optimistic accounts are relativized by those who argue for the still vital importance of face-to-face interactions to understand dynamics of protest. As expressed by Juris (2012), often such "debates between techno-optimists and skeptics are rather beside the point," since it is obvious that new media influence how movements organize, while places, bodies, and social stories continue to matter (Juris, 2012, p. 260; see also Courpasson, Dany, & Delbridge, 2016). Instead, for the purposes of this paper, we are interested in the craft of lasting cooperation with the purpose of making "our complex society prosper" (Sennett, 2012) in a context where infrapolitics seems to be the only remaining mechanism enabling resistance.

In his recent book *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, Scott (2012) explores a possible lead to start addressing the question of how to uphold everyday work necessary to produce sustainable change under unstable conditions of provisionality and adversity. According to him, people can commit to solidarity and mobilize when facing "particularity." In his words:

> People don't easily identify with or open their hearts or wallets for large abstractions: The Unemployed, the Hungry, the Persecuted, the Jews. But portray in gripping detail, with photographs, a woman who has lost her job and is living in her car, or a refugee family on the run through the forest living on roots and tubers, and you are likely to engage the sympathy for strangers. All victims cannot easily represent one victim, but one victim can often stand for a whole class of victims. (Scott, 2012, p. 132)

People engaged in humanitarian help, mobilized for change, do not do so following an abstract principle but in a face-to-face context with particular, real victims of injustice. Scott's argument, therefore, calls for closer attention to particularity, closeness, and experienced forms of togetherness.

The importance of closeness and experienced forms of being together has also been observed by students of recent social movements such as *Indignados* (Castells, 2012), the Arab Spring in Egypt (Gladwell, 2011), and #Occupy (Juris, 2012). For example, Gladwell (2011) reminds us that many protestors in Tahir Square did not have Internet access and relied on face-to-face interactions to get mobilized. Juris (2012) notes that although online interactions were critical to the organization of #Occupy, physical locales were critical to the existence of the movement. He argues that physical presence served the movement in many ways. First, it allowed visibility. Second, (occupied) squares symbolized contestation and spaces of resistance created by appropriating and resignifying the urban space. Finally, places became "sites of human interaction that modeled alternative communities and generated intense feelings of solidarity" (Juris, 2012, p. 268).

Along the same lines, in their study of the Global Justice Network, Cumbers, Routledge, and Nativel (2008) observe that the individual movements that comprise networks remain "heavily

territorialized in their struggles" (Cumbers et al., 2008, p. 184) and that "place-based events or 'real space' remains critical in developing trust, understanding and deeper affinities, as well as organizational coherence for more sustained translocal interactions between activists" (2008, p. 191). According to Cumbers and his colleagues, the centrality of place remains inescapable: "For many grassroots activists, whether it is in peasant or indigenous people's movements, trade unionists or even consumer activists, it is their own locality, sense of community, or even a national or ethnic collective consciousness that remain the most important (but not necessarily only) source of collective and individual identities" (Cumbers et al., 2008, p. 193). Finally, Martin and Miller (2003), building on Lefebvre's idea that sociopolitical contradictions are realized spatially (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 365), highlight the relationship between place, cognition, and place-specific discourses. According to them, as cognition always occurs in a socio-spatial context in which symbolic frameworks, values, and ideologies guide recognition, interpretation, and understanding, it is through place-specific histories of social relations, struggles, and events that landscapes become imbued with meanings, which in turn shape discourses (Martin & Miller, 2003, p. 150). Indeed, it is in the sites of their day-to-day life that people can see inequality and injustice—for instance, in inadequate housing or basic services in their neighborhoods against the contrasting reality of privileged areas—and their place can become the object and site of political contestation. This brings us to the questions guiding our work. Specifically, how might particularity, closeness, and proximity promote long-term political engagement? How can territorialized struggle lead to sustained mobilization?

Fieldwork

Scott (2012) warns that political analysis of non-elites tends to be done behind the masses' back. In his words, "their politics is read off their statistical profile: from such facts as income, occupation, years of schooling, property holding, residence, race, ethnicity and religion" (Scott, 2012, p. xiii). To Scott, this is both "morally and scientifically inadmissible" (2012, p. xiii). He thus argues for listening systematically to people's explanations, hearing what they have to say, how they understand and explain what they do. With this in mind, we conducted this study inductively, using ethnographic tools and archival sources to inquire into the story and everyday life of the members of Cooperative La Juanita.

Ethnographic methods are particularly suitable for studying the seemingly banal and mundane everyday life of people and communities, providing access and insight to the making of their meanings and culture. The thick descriptions offered by ethnographies (Geertz, 1973) advance our understanding of how people make sense of themselves and their organizations, particularly by addressing "the condition of organization, how and why it occurs and how we might make sense of lives being continually organized" (Holt & den Hond, 2013, p. 1588). Additionally, and just as importantly, ethnography holds the potential to increase our sphere of empathy by rendering others familiar. Doing so has the potential to "(re)develop 'passionate scholarship', a discipline in which scholars of all ages and backgrounds share not only knowledge, but also certain values and emotions based on their passion to talk about and work on crucial issues for the future of real people at work, as well as for the future of the organizational society" (Courpasson, 2013, p. 1247).

We visited the site six times, during September 2012 to May 2014, spending a total of about 250 hours in the cooperative. While there, we talked to people including members of the cooperative, their family and friends, mothers of the children in their school, people attending the courses they organize, and occasional clients; shared *mates* (a local infusion); had lunch; collaborated sporadically on some minor tasks; and participated in their meetings. Additionally, we talked to "outsiders" such as Carlos March and Joaquin Sorondo, who were important figures in the origins of the cooperative. We tape-recorded and transcribed 17 interviews, but many other conversations were

spontaneous and not recorded. Interviews ranged from around half an hour to more than two hours. Each day, when leaving the site, we wrote down our impressions of the day.

Regarding archival sources, we were able to collect 23 press articles and 7 video documents about La Juanita. Within the videos are short reports, interviews of some La Juanita members, a documentary prepared for Avina by a journalist, a talk given at a university by Toty (a member of La Juanita) and Churba (a fashion designer who works with La Juanita), and two short videos promoting some of La Juanita's products. The videos, which run to almost six hours, were filmed between 2009 and 2013. Among the written material, two books edited by Toty Flores were useful in developing our understanding of the evolution of the cooperative. The first book, *De la Culpa a la Autogestión* (2005), compiles articles dating back to May 2001, narrating the origins of the *piquetero* movement and the workers' cooperative. The second one, *Cuando con Otros somos Nosotros* (2007), assesses the initial years of the cooperative and explains their vision in terms of knowledge they acquired and how they hoped to help similar organizations. Both books include testimonies by members of La Juanita and a disparate set of articles covering such topics as excerpts from a research project conducted by students of the School of Social Sciences at Buenos Aires University, and press interviews or a manifesto written after the 2001 Social Forum in Brazil. Finally, we followed the cooperative's Facebook page as well as some of its members (Silvia, Toty, Jorge, Graciela, Alejandra, Lita, and Marcelo).

Before moving to the presentation of the fieldwork, a further note is due. As will become apparent in the description of the origins and evolution of the cooperative, it is important to note that Toty Flores has played a major role. Toty is a charismatic leader and a reflective political thinker. For that reason, echoing Scott's call to allow the actors to express themselves, we did not limit his "appearances" throughout the paper, so that his voice could be heard.

Finally, in understanding why La Juanita succeeded in sustaining long-term participation where many movements had struggled on that point, the work of suggesting possible mechanisms needs to be done (Elster, 2007). In their simplest form, mechanisms can be understood analytically, as an effort to elaborate on grounded explanations of the processes that bring about the phenomenon of sustained participation and its consequences. Such processes may include the re-creation of broken social ties, emergence of new forms of labor coordination and solidarity, normalization of the territory, and the development of a new identity. This analytical step is consistent with our attempt to produce a theoretical contribution (see Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010).

La Juanita

Cooperativa La Juanita is a workers' cooperative situated in La Juanita, Gregorio Laferrere, La Matanza—a marginalized, semi-rural district in Greater Buenos Aires. The cooperative was officially founded in 2001; however, its origins date back to mid-1995 when a group of neighbors gathered in La Matanza's main square to complain about their gas expenses and electric bills. They simply could not afford them, so they went to the city hall to ask for help. Jorge—one of the founding members of the cooperative—recalls that while there, they realized that the true cause of their problem with the bills was their condition of being unemployed. Such unemployment was the consequence of a full set of neoliberal policies implemented by the Argentinian government in agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that combined monetary and fiscal austerity. Unemployment, a relatively new phenomenon in Argentina (Ferreres, 2005), spiked from 6% in 1991 to 18.5% in 1995 (Vinocur & Halperin, 2004). The situation in Greater Buenos Aires was even worse, with unemployment reaching 20.2% of the labor force (Dinerstein, 2001). Precariousness of labor in the form of underemployment climbed to 30% in 1996 and 40% in 2002 (Vinocur & Halperin, 2004).

The people gathered in La Matanza's square decided to organize what they called the Unemployed Workers Movement or *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (MTD). The MTD was one of the many organizations of the unemployed that emerged in the years prior to the collapse of 2001. These movements adopted the roadblock as primary mode of protest. From this practice, they took the name *piqueteros* (picketers). La Juanita thus finds its roots in a nationwide movement. Between 1997 and 2000 there were 775 roadblocks in Argentina; in 2002, when the crisis reached its most dramatic momentum,[3] that number jumped to 2336 (Massetti, 2009). Besides participating in roadblocks, marches, occupation of public buildings, meetings with other picketer organizations, and demanding food from supermarkets through blockages, picketers' organizations had strong territorial presence (Auyero, 2001). Politically, their desire was to compete with the typical political structure of *clientelism*, which was characterized by exchanging votes for help in the form of assistance to the poor population in Greater Buenos Aires. Instead, they would form a road blockade and use participative forms of decision-making to collectively decide their demands, then negotiate with representatives of government. Picketers were criminalized by the state, repressed by the police, and prosecuted. Simultaneously they were feared and stigmatized by the middle classes, who saw these movements as violent, radical, opportunistic, and lazy (Svampa & Pereyra, 2009).[4] Facing mounting protests, the national government attempted to mitigate the conflict with picketers by distributing subsidies through local governments and municipalities. The plans—called *Planes Trabajar*—had been designed, monitored, and financed by the World Bank and consisted of a monthly subsidy of $150 (which was equivalent to US$150 at that time) in exchange for some work. Unemployment was a requirement for this benefit, which was provided for a limited period of time. As the crisis worsened, the original number of plans escalated from 100,000 in 1999 to 2.3 million in 2003.

Miriam's case serves as an illustration of how clientelism works. Miriam, aged 31 at the time of the study, is the mother of three children: two boys aged 16 and 10 and a girl aged 6. Miriam had been unable to complete her schooling. She told us that some years ago she had been a beneficiary of a state subsidy called *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar*. When she received the subsidy, the person who allocated it to her asked for a contribution of $50, which amounted to a third of the benefit. She was also advised to be ready to participate in marches or support the local candidate in meetings and political parades. Miriam explains: "If you want to keep receiving the subsidy, you need to comply. I don't know much about politics, I am not interested, I don't care. But at that moment I needed the money." Similar stories abound.

In 2001, at the worst of the crisis, the MTD adopted a clear posture against accepting the plans, rupturing relations with other picketers' organizations. Toty—one of the founders of the movement—describes the reasons for rejecting the benefits:

> The state, taking advantage of a culture enrooted in our people saying that solutions come from the top, instrumented a plan of cultural and political domination with deep consequences for the popular sectors that wanted to organize themselves: *assistentialism* and *clientelism*. [By accepting the plans] they [picketers] were allowing a new channel to do politics where the worst of neoliberal culture, the corrupted police, political operators (*punteros*), and drug dealers of the poorest neighborhoods gathered together creating a new form of non-institutional power with characteristics of real mafias… It originated a new form of repression, of low intensity, at almost no political cost.

Marta, another member of MTD, explains simply but emphatically:

> Why should they [the government] have to give me anything when I have two hands, a head, and still a body to work? They should give jobs, not 150 pesos.

While other movements accepted these subsidies, and somehow competed for them, the MTD refused them. As the quotes above express, the group viewed these packages as a way to perpetuate their condition of unemployment and dependence on the state's assisstentialism and clientelism. The refusal of such benefits represented a conscious break with other picketers' organizations. It was accompanied by a move back to the neighborhood as the preferred place to engage in efforts of resistance against existing pressures to silence and dominate them.

The group consisted of around fifteen men and women between the ages of 30 and 50 years. During the following years they survived by seeking and sharing informal work on a daily basis. They gathered inside an abandoned school they had (illegally) occupied and set up a soup kitchen for themselves, their families and some other local residents. Next they established a very basic bakery, in a clay oven. Soon after, a textile workshop was added. Both projects remain active today and constitute the bulk of their productive activities.

The move back to the neighborhood was accompanied in the period between 2001 and 2004 with more reflexive but still active engagement in national politics, in the form of marches and demonstrations. In that regard, somehow they went back to the local—the neighborhood—and from there, they collaborated in the creation of the Universidad de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, participated in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and ran a radio program every Sunday where they hosted activists and intellectuals who discussed the political and social situation in Latin America. In 2004 they launched a school. In 2007 Toty Flores, one of the founders of the MTD and its most charismatic leader, was invited by a center-leftist party to run in the legislative elections as National Deputy. He accepted the offer after consulting with other members of the cooperative. He served as Deputy for one period and lost the following election. Since then, he resumed working in the textile workshop while participating in a Political Party called *Movimiento Humanista de Resistencia*.

Today, Cooperativa La Juanita is comprised of 52 members. Some members work in productive activities within the cooperative itself (the textile workshop, PC maintenance, and the bakery), some work in the school and some others have found outside employment but still remain members. Table 1 provides a chronological overview of the scope and type of practices enacted by La Juanita.

Initial conditions: The neighborhood. Cooperativa La Juanita is located in a neighborhood of around 10,000 inhabitants called La Juanita, in Gregorio Laferrere, La Matanza. The neighborhood architecture combines flat and self-built houses with workshops and warehouses, typical of the suburbs of Greater Buenos Aires. The neighborhood is poor, though not classified as a slum—an important distinction for its inhabitants. Only the main street is paved; all others in the area are dirt roads. The neighborhood has neither sewerage nor residential gas; public lighting is scarce and some areas are prone to flooding. The main street, Leonardo da Vinci, connects the neighborhood with Route n.3, the highway that runs from Buenos Aires to Tierra del Fuego. The main street boasts a few businesses including a pharmacy, two grocery stores, a butcher, and a bank. Shops are usually barred on both the inside and outside with shopkeepers interacting with customers from behind grills.

The following vignette depicts an outsider's image of the neighborhood. On September 27, 2012, President Cristina Kirchner gave a lecture at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. During the question period, an Argentinean student from that school said that he was lucky to ask a question to the President and complained that she was not open to criticism (there were no press conferences during her mandate and public appearances were organized with militants from her party). When President Kirchner interrupted the student to reply, some others present in the room began to boo timidly. The President's reaction to the booing was, "Guys, we are

Table 1. Cooperative La Juanita's geographical scope and practices since its creation.

Geographical scope	Practices				
	1995	1996–2001	2001–2004	2004–2007	2007–2015
International			• World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil • Radio program allows contact with activist from Brazil, Mexico, Colombia		• Receive international students in volunteer programs • Participate in workshops in Brazil, France, Israel, and Norway invited to share their story
National		• The MTD join other picketer movements and participate in roadblocks, marches and demonstrations • Organization of National Meeting of Picketer Movements (1998) • Radio program: discuss national politics	• Participate in marches, pickets and demonstrations • Participate in Universidad Popular de Madres de Plaza de Mayo		• Toty became member of the Parliament (2007–2011) and he is candidate for vice-president (2015) in a center-left coalition • Participation of members of La Juanita in leadership seminars • Participation of La Juanita in solidarity forums in different cities
Local	• Gathering on local square to complain about gas and electricity • Creation of the MTD		• Occupy abandoned school to have a place for the MTD • Start a soup kitchen • Start bakery and textile workshop • Local fair	• Bakery, textile and serigraph workshops • Local fair • Creation of the school • Craft and trade skills courses • Civil development center	• Bakery, textile and serigraph workshops • Local fair • School • Craft and trade skills courses • Space for youth • Literacy program

at Harvard, please. These things are for La Matanza. Leave these things for La Matanza."[5] Two days after that event, which was publicized by the press in Argentina, one of the researchers was in La Juanita and took the opportunity to ask about the president's comment. Miriam responded:

> It is a shame what she said. It hurts. And of course, before the elections, they come here to look for votes [many candidates close their campaigns in La Matanza, as it is the most populated district in Greater Buenos Aires second only to the city of Buenos Aires].

The same day, the researcher asked Toty about his opinion on the President's reaction. He replied that he was initiating a discrimination complaint against the President. He said that although he knew nothing would happen, "If you remain silent, you consent to it." And, on September 28, Jorge posted on Facebook:

> I live in La Matanza, in a poor neighborhood of Laferrere, and nowhere in the academia, from the primary and secondary schools to the National University of La Matanza, have I seen the vulgarity to which our President referred to at Harvard. Mrs. President, I remind you that the poverty afflicting our district is your responsibility; poverty is not synonymous with vulgarity. It offends our youngsters.

These situations reflect the ambivalence of the relationship between the people in the cooperative with their neighborhood. Such relationship alternates between a strong sense of belonging (it is the place where they arrived with effort, built their homes, and raised their children) and dissatisfaction with the poor living conditions—crime, social fragmentation, and inadequate infrastructure and services. Jorge, now in his late fifties, arrived in La Juanita 30 years ago. He was originally from Chaco, a northern province in Argentina. In search of a job, he moved with his mother and elder sister to Buenos Aires. His initial experience was not promising, as he landed in a slum in Castelar. After two years of short-term jobs, he found a permanent position in an automotive parts factory in La Matanza. Over seven years he managed to save enough money to buy a plot of land in La Juanita, closer to the factory. He spent weekends and holidays building his house, then moved in. He describes his accomplishment with pride: he was able to build a house, raise three children and send them to school. However, he also recalls with sorrow the years of despair, when the factory closed and he became unemployed. Jorge explains:

> When you do not have a job—I mean, a normal job, you end up doing what you can. You offer your help here and there, but sometimes it is hard and nothing happens. You get tired, you argue with your wife about how to pay for the food. So you start a pilgrimage, first to the church to get a box of food, then to the *Unidad Básica* [local of the Peronist party], where they give you milk or medicines, and to the municipality to see if you can get your subsidy.

Jorge's story is similar to the stories of many others in the neighborhood. Toty, reflecting on his period of unemployment, explains:

> In the neighborhood you were known by your occupation. They don't call you by your name. You were the factory worker, the baker, the bus driver… But when you lose your work, you lose your credentials. You end up being no one.

Among the issues creating ambivalence in their relationship with the neighborhood, residents cited a lack of public services, inadequate public schools, insufficient transportation, and failing infrastructure as recurrent problems of daily life. Yet, despite the evident limitations and material conditions of La Juanita, its residents express their belonging and commitment to the place. This is

concisely conveyed by Evelyn, who states, "I am from La Matanza; this is my neighborhood. I don't want to move. I want it to change."

Actions and interactions: Back to La Matanza. As mentioned earlier, between 1996 and 2001 the MTD was involved in national politics. The MTD participated in roadblocks, marches, and demonstrations together with other picketers. In 1998, for instance, they organized and hosted a national meeting of picketers. The meeting had as its motto "for Land, Work and Freedom." Toty explains:

> Land, because it was the most abundant among the means of production, not yet exploited, and it didn't make sense to leave millions of human beings to die when there were real possibilities of obtaining food and becoming self-sufficient. Work, because there was a need to restore a culture of work, a different kind of work, not exploitative, but cooperative and solidary. And Freedom, because to defeat the genocidal plan of social exclusion, we had to struggle against an enemy that would not have any problem with repressing, incarcerating, or even killing, as they had already done to Victor Choque and Teresa Rodriguez.

In 2000, the MTD collaborated in the creation of the Universidad Popular de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, whose seminars and programs occurred in different buildings in Buenos Aires (hence, relatively far from La Matanza). Toty recalls:

> It was the most rewarding and beautiful militant work I had performed in my life. Every morning I cleaned the floors, and in the afternoon I continued doing menial textile work that allowed me to survive. I hoped that each evening, when students and professors crowded the University building and the experiences of the struggle filled that space, participants could find themselves in a different place—fragrant, radiant, and dazzling. I wanted them to experience the beauty of militancy.

Despite the rewarding nature of the work in the university, it distanced them from the neighborhood. This caused them to feel they had become a part of the very problem they had set out to oppose: abandonment of the territory and neighbors. Thus, in a decision consistent with their refusal to accept the *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar*, they decided to discontinue their work in the university and return to La Matanza to devote their efforts. Toty explains their decision:

> It was hard to leave the University. There we had recognition and status, we were close to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo; and we had the opportunity to meet people from all over the country and from abroad who came to Buenos Aires to see the Madres. But we were betraying our own principle. We were mobilized to change our lives and the lives of people like us, and they were not in the university but in La Juanita.

It was then, in September 2001, that the group turned an abandoned building into its own school where group values and cooperation were central to the educational curriculum. This building became key in their efforts to recover the social fabric of the neighborhood. The group then created a cooperative intended to contribute to the self-sustainability of the school through three productive ventures: a bakery, a textile workshop, and a serigraph workshop. They had been working on all three activities for some time. The cooperative, Toty explains, was designed to be a space for the movement, not only a response to the economic needs of life, "but an organizational form to break dominant individualism, and to rebuild us as persons though solidary work." Soledad recalls a party they hosted a few months after returning to La Juanita to obtain some funds for the school:

> We organized a party in January 2002. Everyone said we were crazy, but 600 people attended. A lot of them came from the neighborhood. And they stayed late into the night. We realized that in fact people needed to get together, to talk, to be listened to, to share a good moment and to realize through experience that not everything was a defeat or a disaster.

Such need to be together, to (re-)create broken social ties and new forms of solidarity, explains why the first 20 members of the cooperative adopted its form. It was also part of their legacy as factory workers that figured prominently into their biographical stories. As Soledad explains, "It resonated with our experience in factories, where workers had solidary ties among them." Initially the bakery was very basic. They used a pail to knead the dough and broomsticks to amass it, then baked it in a clay oven. As for the textile workshop, they borrowed four machines from a lady in the neighborhood whot had gone bankrupt and had no place to keep them. The statutory goal of the cooperative was "the provision of assistance, education and community services." This wide-ranging goal allowed participants to pursue different projects without becoming attached to a specific activity. Despite its vagueness, the goal was clearly understood by members. For instance, while explaining the purpose of the cooperative, Toty says:

> At the beginning we said we wanted to help everyone excluded in the world, but that was too much. We had to get focused, first on ourselves, and on our neighbors… We are here to help those who do not have a job but want to transform the reality…in other words, help people who are excluded to recover their dignity.

Mundane politics. Since their settlement in La Juanita, the cooperative's presence in the neighborhood has manifested in different initiatives: the school, courses for neighbors, a library, a popular fair, etc. These initiatives, referred to here as practices of *mundane and everyday politics*, aim for three different goals: enhancing capabilities, creating solidarity, and "normalizing" the territory. The following section elaborates on these goals.

Enhancing capabilities. The school is the most salient of the cooperative's initiatives. It was launched in March 2004, with 55 children in kindergarten. Since then, they have added new classes every year and now accommodate children up to the third grade of primary schooling. More than 100 children attend the school today. We made three surprising observations at the school. First, parents were highly involved in their children's education, which we did not expect to see. The idea, in their own words, is "to create a true educational community where we can all participate in all of the decisions." Zulma, 32 years old, is Kevin's mother. Kevin is now in third grade. He has been attending the school for four years, since age 3. We met Zulma one afternoon while she was preparing tea and biscuits for the break (two parents attend to this preparation each day). She expressed great satisfaction with the school and with Kevin's progress. She also appreciates that she can be involved:

> It's very different from the public school that my first son attends. There, you must leave your kids at the door, you are not allowed to enter the building, and teachers don't talk to you. At best, they might just send you written messages.

In addition, parents are expected to participate in a meeting every Wednesday (it is usually just the mothers who attend). In this meeting, the teachers and staff discuss different school-related matters with the parents, from an upcoming excursion to health-related topics. In their own words: "Our starting point is to figure out our needs, the real needs of the people, and in so doing, we aim to remake community together."

Our second surprising observation was the explicit effort to connect the children's education with real-life work skills. The group emphasizes that they "want children to learn things that will really help them to defend themselves later in life," which for them is intimately linked with work. For instance, a room in the school hosts Jorge's serigraph printers. He explained that while they could have put the printers in the warehouse, they want the kids to see people working to give them a taste of adult life. In his words:

> It is a shame how in our country we lost the culture of work. Our children just don't see their fathers working, as they simply collect subsidies. That's why we want the kids to be around us, to listen to the noise of the presses, to smell the ink.

The third element that grabbed our attention was the high quality of the school building in comparison with others in the neighborhood. Silvia explains that they attempt to obtain the highest-grade materials even if it takes longer: "We don't want a school built for the poor that will only keep people poor."

Besides the main productive activities, the cooperative offers a varied set of courses to other neighbors not part of the cooperative. For instance, in July 2014, they were running a dozen courses including plastering, serigraphy, PC repair, baking, social networks, electricity, washing machine maintenance, sewing, guitar, and more. Neighbors are charged a monthly fee of 20 pesos (less than 2 dollars) to attend courses. Graciela, who is in charge of the administrative tasks in the cooperative, explains: "We don't want to offer them for free, because then people would not value them." At the end of each course, the cooperative issues certificates of attendance to the participants in a ceremony followed by a cocktail. Some neighbors join the cooperative after completing a course. One example is Marcelo, whom we met during our first visit to La Juanita:

> When I came here, I found myself comfortable. I could spend my day talking to people that became my friends. I could help with some small work and learn a new profession [PC maintenance]. I used to work as a taxi driver, a very solitary job that wasn't good for my mind or my health. It is a very stressful profession. So, after being here for some time, I began working in the PC workshop, and little by little taking responsibility. And I am not a member of the cooperative. I am now thinking of starting my own business —one with social goals similar to La Juanita.

Three months later, Marcelo reported that he was about to launch his project: "I am starting my new business with a friend. I am happy. It is happening! We have all the support from Fabian [in charge of PC Maintenance in La Juanita] and Silvia. I am a bit anxious but excited."

Another example is 19-year-old Martin, who was born in La Juanita. When he was 13, his parents divorced and he moved to his aunt's place. He quit school and spent most of his time on the streets. He consumed drugs occasionally. Four years later, he moved back with his mother and began seeking a job in a car mechanic garage, as he was passionate about cars. He landed some sporadic employment but, as he explains, his lack of formal education limited his options. Then he discovered a baking course in the cooperative and signed up. He now works the morning shift in La Juanita's bakery. He explains:

> I like what I am doing here. It helps a lot. It forces me to get up early, gives me a routine. I know this is not what I will be doing all my life because I really want to be a mechanic… and I need to finish the school, I know. I don't want to go back to the streets, to lose my life hanging around, doing nothing. When I come cross the guys on the street corner I just don't want that anymore.

Building solidarity. The warehouse that hosts the cooperative was an empty building acquired in 2011 to free up the previous space they were occupying in the school. While the warehouse is not large—it occupies only about 300 sq. m.—most of the productive activities take place there. The ambience in the warehouse is relaxed and friendly. They share *mates* and meals. People work, but while doing so they discuss family, friends, their children, and occasionally a new project or solution to a problem.

The space is not clearly divided, except for the bakery, which occupies a side of the building and is walled off from the other areas. The other activities have no clear boundaries: the sewing

machines are located opposite the bakery; the serigraphy printers in one corner; the PC maintenance in another. Everything there looks disorganized and chaotic, with piles of old PC parts, and fabric rolls and unfinished clothes strewn all over the floor. There is a central table used for meals, meetings, and doling out work materials. The front door is always open and it is normal to see people walking in. Some come to attend one of the courses; some to participate in a youth group called *Espacio de Jóvenes* (which provides various activities for adolescents such as recycling, painting or designing and placing signposts in the area); and still others—like Ariel who works at the bank nearby—simply to hang out. Graciela said of a young girl who was doing some crafts:

> *She has been coming to La Juanita for a while, a month or so. She has just lost a baby, and she is only sixteen. We don't ask for anything. We give her something to do and the chance to talk if she wants.*

The warehouse serves as a meeting point for people in the neighborhood, and it is normal to see kids going there to wait for parents to pick them up after work. But its role goes beyond that. According to Graciela:

> *We all arrive here from the outside, having been beaten up by the outside world. You arrive in bad shape because, well, it's difficult out there. Whereas, here, you may have a problem, but it results from work we're engaged in, rather than your lack of something. You are in a really different place, a different situation and community.*

Activities in La Juanita's warehouse start each day at 5 a.m. in the bakery, when Daniel and Vanessa arrive to begin their work day. The bread is sold at a modest price that only covers the costs, as the group believes it should be affordable for everyone. Carlos explains:

> *Before the cooperative was officially created, the bakery allowed us to survive. That's why, as we can now make money with the panettones for Christmas and with pastry, we can offer bread at cost. It is a way to help those in the neighborhood who cannot afford to pay the normal price.*

Mari is in her sixties; she has been in the cooperative since the beginning and remembers with pride her time as picketer. Every Wednesday, several minutes before 4 p.m., she walks from the warehouse to the school to meet the neighbors who will participate in a popular fair. She welcomes the neighbors with a kiss and a hug, then asks about their week or about how the family and kids are doing. The fair offers space for 40 neighbors to sell the goods they produce for the occasion. These mostly consist of food products (*empanadas*, tarts, pies, and sweets), clothing or small crafts which are sold to more than a hundred neighbors who walk in every Wednesday. The fair was originally created as one of the many bartering clubs organized during the financial crisis. Most of them disappeared with the economy's recovery, but the one in La Juanita was transformed into a popular fair that still remains and allows neighbors to exchange small products. Beyond the courses offered to all neighbors, the group also aims to create a larger context within which people's social relationships are not based purely on transactional exchanges. Thus, for instance, they send messages through different avenues (including Twitter and Facebook, but also by physically posting announcements in their premises) urging various actions. These may include signing a petition, attending face-to-face meetings, or helping people both inside and outside the neighborhoods who are facing hardship.

"Normalizing" the neighborhood. While the bank on Leonardo Da Vinci Street does not belong to the cooperative, its presence in the neighborhood can be attributed to La Juanita. In 2011, Toty

met the president of International Bank (a pseudonym) and convinced him to open a branch in the neighborhood. At that time, there were no banks in the area, and people had to travel more than two miles to find one. Moreover, as Toty had argued, the bank would provide the people from the neighborhood with a means to integrate into normal society. After some discussions, the bank settled in the neighborhood hiring two members of the cooperative: Ariel and Marta. The branch was a kind of experiment, as it was the first to be located in such a poor area. It offers basic banking services, two ATMs, and even a public toilet, which was suggested by the cooperative and is highly unusual in Argentina.

Initially, the performance of the branch was outstanding and the Bank considered replicating the experiment in other poor districts. The two bank officers participated in several workshops explaining their experience. However, in 2014 there were some problems with credit cards issued at the office. People in the area were not accustomed to using them, and delays in the payments became problematic. Ariel and Marta, the two employees working in the office, proposed trying to solve the problem by visiting the debtors, but due to concerns for the safety of employees the bank did not allow them to leave the office. Ariel tells us:

> I had to explain to my boss at the bank that we are part of the neighborhood, we know the people, and they know us. We cannot just send a letter, we need to talk to them. We have to find out what is going on, and explain the consequences of not paying. So they agreed to allow us to visit the houses provided we not ring the bells or clap hands [Some Argentinian houses do not have doorbells and the custom is to clap hands to get the residents' attention]…all for the security of employees. We insisted, and they gave us the authorization. Finally, we could start meeting the people and better understanding what was happening. The situation is better now.

Another example of such "normalization" of the neighborhood is the literacy program established in 2011. Learning that the children in the school had experienced difficulties with their homework, the school staff realized that some of the parents were illiterate. So they decided to do a census in the neighborhood to determine the instances of illiteracy among them. They found around 300 people. Their solution was to offer a three-month course at the school. They delivered classes to groups of around 15, running two courses every year. Toty explains: "Our goal is zero illiteracy in La Juanita. We don't care if it takes four, five years."

Discussion

This paper centers on resistance efforts by a group of people within a neighborhood who had been unemployed for long periods of time. Our analysis of the elements both (pre)configuring the struggle and shaping existing relational spaces in La Juanita allowed us to see—through the particularities of people's life within the neighborhood—the ground for what we called mundane and everyday politics and the crafting of (different forms of) cooperation. Subsequently, we elaborate on how our findings extend current work on collective mobilization in contexts where infrapolitics appear to be the only mechanism left for resisting. Table 2 summarizes in a comparative fashion the mechanisms found in the literature and in La Juanita.

An organizational problem common to endeavors such as La Juanita is that people are known to come and go, only to eventually disappear forever (highlighted in the first data row in Table 2). Adverse political conditions, internal conflict, and fluctuations in financial resources create a backdrop of daily frustration against which such projects rarely endure (Summers Effler, 2010). But people in La Juanita sustained their efforts over time. Their collective endeavor did not fall apart. Despite strong political pressures that frequently have the effect of perpetuating conditions of

Table 2. Political practices and outcomes.

	Initial conditions	(Inter)action mechanism	Transformational mechanism
	Specific social situations that affect individuals in a particular way	Specific combination of individual desires, beliefs, and action opportunities that generate a specific action	Mechanisms that show how the individual actions are transformed into some kind of collective outcome
***Indignation–to-resignation* movements**	Common consequences of "expulsion" and emergence of "precariat": • Loss of jobs and/ or job insecurity • Unstable occupational identities and careers • Lack of social protection • Dispossession of material conditions	Overt contestation and resistance, short term: • Self-affirmation • Disenchantment with traditional politics • Expression of the oppressed dignity and worth • Exuberance of the protest that tends to decline	• Rarely result in sustaining collective action for the long haul
Infrapolitics	Common consequences of "expulsion" and emergence of "precariat": • Loss of jobs and/ or job insecurity • Unstable occupational identities and careers • Lack of social protection • Dispossession of material conditions	Covert contestation and resistance, long term: • Self-affirmation • (Hidden) expression of the oppressed dignity and worth • Tacit agreements	• Mostly inconsequential • Ambiguity and anonymity
La Juanita mundane politics	Common consequences of "expulsion" and emergence of "precariat": • Loss of jobs and/ or job insecurity • Unstable occupational identities and careers • Lack of social protection • Dispossession of material conditions • "Loss of credential and identity" Toty	Initial overt contestation and collaboration: • Spatial interactions, locales • Shared project and endeavors (political and labor: bakery, textile work, University of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, etc.) • Come together	Local practices and interventions • Re-create broken social ties • New form of labor coordination and solidarity • New (collective) identity • Normalization of the territory

unemployment and dependence on the state welfare policies, members of the cooperative resisted clientelism and assistentialism (epitomized in the different offered *Planes*), which they understood as channels of political domination.[6] Hence, in their resistance, we observed how they constructed a neighborhood-centered alternative in which closeness and proximity are key to transformative politics in the long run. Importantly, their decision to return their focus to the neighborhood indicates an unwillingness to withdraw or, paraphrasing Putnam, to hibernate. Such return to local efforts stands in contrast to Gessen's (2011, p. 200) reflections of #Occupy Wall Street, in which

he observed that "People show up to help, work awhile, then disappear." Thus our study contributes to explaining how—under conditions of fragility, provisionality and adversity, the conditions of the *precariat*—different and more sustainable forms of togetherness are built. La Juanita is not just a place where people feel better because they know each other. It is a "working" (Martí, Courpasson, & Dubard-Barbosa, 2013) and "lived" space (Lefebvre, 1968) where one may challenge prevailing patterns of domination and cultural codes while simultaneously developing new social relationships that "enter into everyday life" (Melucci, 1989).

Despite most probably being among those Sassen (2014) terms the "expulsed," their efforts demonstrate the possibility of resistance to different forms of "structural violence" (Galtung, 1969). Scott's work has shown us that the powerless tend to use infrapolitics when facing repressive systems. We also know that there is little room for effective institutionalized politics. Drawing on our fieldwork in Greater Buenos Aires, we suggest that there are other mechanisms to advance change (as summarized in the third data row of Table 2). We argue that these mechanisms are not at hand or ready-made, but can be developed to engage in what we call mundane and everyday politics. Mundane and everyday politics do not belong to the realm of infrapolitics (Marche, 2012; Scott, 1985), nor do they belong to the institutionalized (and traditional) politics of unions and political parties or to multitudinous social movements attempting social change.

Our study speaks, hence, to recent scholarship (see for instance Böhm, Spicer, & Fleming, 2008; Huault, Perret, & Spicer, 2014; Mumby, 2005) that cautions about resistance studies' unproductive fluctuation between a self-defeated vision of resistance (Deetz, 2008; Thomas, 2009) that hardly admits that resistance can be more than "Decaf" (Contu, 2008) by putting the emphasis on control and domination; and, on the other hand, the celebration and praise of any sort of resistance even when, in many cases—and particularly those under the label of infrapolitics—it can be deemed ineffectual in altering the status quo. Perhaps the observed mundane politics can be seen as an amalgam of efforts that complements and perhaps links Juris's distinction between "logic of networking" and "logic of aggregation" (Juris, 2012). These can be understood as efforts that sit between infrapolitics and overt multitudinous social movements attempting social change, and remind us of the importance of deeply embedded politics of place. In La Juanita, resisting efforts contributed to the (re)building of new forms of interactions where people knew one another well and had formed long-term informal relationships; where re-appropriated abandoned buildings and a shuttered school were transformed into a lived or "representational" space (Lefebvre, 1968) for community building. In that respect, mundane and everyday politics are not limited to discourse and identities but rather focused on the creation of solidarity, the improvement of material conditions, and the enhancement of opportunities and human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011).

Mundane politics are more than temporary attempts to subvert the order, or instances of expressing dissent. They are meant to stay, to re-configure and transform the territory (even in a limited way). Contrary to the massive mobilizations of contentious politics (Tarrow, 2001), mundane politics do not address the big issues (e.g., crime, unemployment, poverty, income inequality, drug consumption and trafficking, or the lack of adequate health and education services) at a macro level; instead, they address feasible, practicable, and achievable objectives that are concrete and visible such as street signposts, a school, vocational courses, a fair to sell small crafts, etc. However, we do not deny the presence of infrapolitical practices in La Juanita or argue that their activities are limited to mundane politics (for a review of infrapolitical mechanisms see second data row of Table 2). Indeed, on several occasions we saw actions typical of infrapolitics (for instance, mocking upper classes by mimicking accents). There is also classical political activity (for example, Toty serving as a deputy and several others being involved in a new political party); and they sometimes participate in the typical activities of a social movement such as demonstrating, collecting signatures, etc. Interestingly, they continue participating in macro-level discussions, but with a

different role. Instead of picketers, they now function more as discussants, mobilizing the notion of dignity, which occurs regularly in the story of La Juanita. Besides, operating at the macro level allowed the group to increase its visibility and outreach and collaborate with a greater number of allies. And yet, efforts originate at the neighborhood. Our study thus responds to recent calls for moving organizational spatial studies "from analyses of places of privacy, identification, liminality, to how places can enhance political efforts," a domain largely underresearched (Courpasson et al., 2016). La Juanita can be seen as an initiative, squarely situated in a neighborhood, where it belongs. There, people experiment with and promote practices designed to build solidarity, enhance local capabilities, and integrate into the larger society ("normalize"). Where resistance is carried out matters for understanding politics.

The group's style of participation resembles many other autonomous movements, both in their initial attempts to break free from the assistentialism and clientelism of the prevailing political structure, and in their effort to collectively make decisions affecting their everyday lives (Hassard & Cox, 2013). Activists and scholars who have reflected on these movements have focused on the autonomy of social movements from behavior patterns imposed from outside, in the form of either authoritarian socialism or contemporary democracy. "Rather than pursue careers and create patriarchal families, participants in autonomous movements live in groups to negate the isolation of individuals imposed by consumerism. They seek to decolonize everyday life" (Katsiaficas, 2006, p. 16).

In particular, Antonio Negri's work has focused on analyzing the traces of the emergence of a revolutionary force, known as the "multitude" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004), that is a different form of proletariat and somehow encompasses the entire world population subjected to exploitation by capitalism (see Munro, 2002). A critical aspect explaining the degree of exploitation and the emergence of autonomous movement is the rise of immaterial labor, defined as that which creates immaterial products such as knowledge, information, communication, and emotional responses (Hardt & Negri, 2004:108). It becomes apparent that the role of immaterial labor, *a la* Hardt and Negri, plays a very limited part in the case of La Juanita. The work in the bakery and in the textile workshop could have been clear examples of the physicality of a Taylorist production. Yet, the autonomy (i.e., lack of subjugation to any organizational structure), lack of paid labor, and the social goal of their production have re-signified the relationships of these "factory floors." In turn, this common material collaboration has undoubtedly had affective impacts (see Hardt & Negri, 2004), such as feelings of membership, friendship, endurance, and ease among La Juanita members. Perhaps most importantly, the materiality of their struggles (in the form of both contestation and cooperation) has resulted in a shared feeling of "becoming common." Nevertheless, this becoming common has not hindered the emergence of a charismatic leadership role among them. Such a leadership role within social movements has been overlooked (Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014) and deserves further research.

Our findings on La Juanita help extend previous work on autonomism in relation to the kind of resource used by the members of social movements to articulate cooperation. In a departure from the classical Marxist interpretation of the "information society," autonomist scholars maintain that information and media technologies "are not merely instruments of domination, but also potential resources for working-class struggle" (Hassard & Cox, 2013, p. 1716). As such, these means allow the creation of virtual spaces of communication, encounter, and resistance. Yet, our findings in La Juanita show that the materiality of embraced places (paradoxically, freed during the economic crisis), face-to-face networks, and even the physical symbols help to explain the kind of sustained collaboration we found in La Juanita. Although not completely new, these findings re-illuminate the importance of the role of material resources as a condition for both bringing together the members of the movement and eliciting lasting communication and cooperation.

Conclusions

Where resistance is carried out matters for understanding politics. Mundane and everyday politics in La Juanita, characterized by particularity, closeness, and experienced forms of togetherness, are performed in the territory in response to real and concrete problems facing its residents. However, the shift in focus back to the neighborhood should not be seen as an unproblematic move. The people we studied have an ambiguous relationship with the territory, epitomized in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is the place where they live—with its specificities; location; positive and negative elements. It is where they experience and live sociality with others whom they perceive as sharing their destiny (Hjorth, 2013). The neighborhood is where the residents face on a daily basis both the presence and absence of the state. This presence is embodied in networks of clientelism in which political landlords "own" a territory and its residents by exchanging state money and aid for votes and political support. The absence of the state is experienced in the lack of infrastructure, unfinished hospitals, flooding, drugs, and crime. The neighborhood is also the place where they suffered the consequences of unemployment and social fragmentation. It is where they saw their identities and families hit by the crisis, and where their material conditions worsened. But, it is also in the neighborhood where they could experience the proximity with others, solidarity ties could emerge, and shared projects could be put in place. The neighborhood is thus the place for mundane politics.

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Notes

1. Steven Vallas in a personal conversation.
2. Different *piquetero* movements emerged in Argentina with the mobilization of unemployed people in the mid-1990s. They were called *piqueteros* (picketers) as their primary means of protest is blocking roads and streets. We explain these movements later in the article.
3. The economic crisis turned into a political collapse in December 2001, with a freeze on bank deposits in response to large withdrawals on November 30. The freeze was known in Spanish as the *corralito*, meaning little corral. Many people from the middle classes reacted against the freeze, taking to the streets in angry demonstrations called *cacerolazos.* "All politicians out!" was their rallying cry as they banged pots and pans to make a noise. During the last days of December 2001 the political crisis escalated, resulting in the resignation of, President De la Rua. Three subsequent presidents were appointed and resigned over the next two weeks.
4. One of the researchers, living in Argentina at the time, recalled that his father had given him a gun and explained where to store it and how to use it in the event of a home intruder.
5. http://www.casarosada.gov.ar/discursos/26111-conferencia-de-la-presidenta-ante-docentes-y-alumnos-de-la-universidad-de-harvard. Accessed July 19, 2014.
6. Evidence suggests, and different studies concur, that most *piquetero* groups and organizations ended up co-opted by *clientelist* and *assistentialist* networks, sometimes by appointing their leaders to positions in the government and thus limiting their original transformative goals (Epstein, 2009; Massetti, 2009; Svampa & Pereyra, 2009).

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Author biographies

Pablo Fernández is an assistant professor of business and society at IAE Business School and member of OCE Research Center at Emlyon Business School, where he obtained his PhD. His research centers on processes of social inclusion in which marginalized actors seek to organize and work together to regain their dignity. At a broader level, he is interested in understanding issues of power and resistance in and around organizations. Part of his research has been published in *Organization Studies* and *Journal of Management Inquiry.*

Ignasi Martí is a professor of organization theory and entrepreneurship at the Emlyon Business School and permanent visiting professor at ESADE-Ramon Llull University. He received his PhD from the IESE Business School at the University of Navarra. His research focuses on dignity, resistance, entrepreneurship, power and politics, and other institutional processes. He has published articles in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Business Venturing, Organization Studies, Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, and *Journal of Management Inquiry.*

Tomás Farchi is an associate professor of organizational behavior at the IAE Business School and at IEEM-Universidad de Montevideo. He received his PhD from Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. His research interests include the epistemology of expert knowledge, the translation of knowledge across boundaries, and the nature of practices and mechanisms in hybrid settings. He has published articles in journals such as *Journal of Product Innovation Management* and *International Journal of Innovation Management.*