

## Visible Fists, Clandestine Kicks, and Invisible Elbows: Three Forms of Regulating Neoliberal Poverty

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*Abstract:* In a preliminary attempt to understand the daily production of poor people's subordination in contemporary Argentina, this paper explores the workings of overt and covert forms of state violence against the urban destitute and of more subtle modes of domination. Attention to the simultaneous operation of what this paper calls visible fists, clandestine kicks, and invisible elbows in the daily life of the dispossessed serves to a) better integrate violence into the study of popular politics, and b) cast light on the productive (and not merely repressive) nature of state power. *Keywords:* state violence, urban poverty, Argentina.

Three decades of neoliberal economic policy in Argentina have generated massive dislocations and collective suffering. From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, impoverishment of the middle and low income sectors was driven by the disappearance of formal work and the explosion of unemployment levels. After the economic recovery that began in 2003, the poor's material and symbolic conditions continued to be deeply affected by the sustained decline of income levels in the lower ranks of the job market and the growth of informal employment. The most dramatic physical manifestation of this generalized degradation in the lives of the dispossessed is the rapidly growing population living in precarious settlements in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires. According to a study conducted by geographers at the Universidad de General Sarmiento (*La Nación* 10 July 2006), the population of slums, shantytowns, and squatter settlements went from 638,657 residents living in 385 precarious settlements in 2001, to an estimated 1,144,500 living in 1000 precarious settlements in 2006. According to Cravino's estimates (2006), 10 per cent of the population of Buenos Aires' metropolitan area now lives in informal settlements (for diverse descriptions of living conditions in shantytowns see Alarcón 2003; Auyero 2000; Auyero and Swistun 2009).

The proliferation of shantytowns is a concrete geographical expression of the fragmentation of Buenos Aires' metropolitan space which in turn reflects and reinforces growing levels of social inequality (Catenazzi and Lombardo 2003). During the last three decades, the income disparity between Argentines has mounted steadily. As Aronskind (2001, 18) summarizes: '21.5 per cent of the population was poor in 1991, 27 per cent at the end of 2000. Indigents were 3 per cent of the population in 1991 and 7 per cent in 2000. At the beginning of the 1990s there were 1.6 million unemployed, at the end of 2000 there are 4 million unemployed'. Taking recent figures available from the National Institute of Statistics (INDEC), the rising poverty rates become quite evident. In 1986, 9.1 per cent of households and 12.7 per cent of people lived below the poverty line in Greater Buenos Aires. In 2002, these figures were 37.7 per cent and 49.7 per cent, respectively. In other words, whereas a little more than one in ten *bonaerenses* was poor twenty years ago, at the dawn of the new century, one in two is living below the poverty line. With respect

to overall income inequality, the Gini coefficient went from 0.36 in 1974 to 0.51 in 2000 (Altimir et al. 2002, 54).

Although poverty rates have been slowly declining since 2003, and considerable polemics revolve around existing figures given the lack of reliable official data (*La Nación*, 3 February 2009; *Página12*, 21 March 2009; Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires 2009), these economic and social disparities have become inscribed in urban space. Gated suburban communities (*barrios privados*, which Pirez refers to as ‘corridors of modernity and wealth’ [2001, 3]) have been mounting alongside enclaves of deprivation (Svampa 2001). These *barrios privados* and the *villas* (shanties) now encapsulate the growing extremes of poverty and wealth that characterize contemporary Argentina.

This *great transformation* has triggered diverse forms of unruly behaviour among the destitute, including street protests, land squatting, and diverse forms of delinquency. Poor people’s unrest, in turn, has been met with a fierce response from the state apparatus. The visible iron fist of the Argentine state has been quite busy during the last two decades. It has openly repressed protests organized by the unemployed, persistently criminalized contentious collective action, dramatically increased the prison population, engaged in high levels of police violence against poor youth, deployed military-style forces such as the National Guard to occupy and rein in certain destitute (and highly stigmatized) urban areas under the guise of ‘safety’, and sharply increased the number of evictions carried out by state agents on private and public property (CELS 2003, 2009; Brinks 2008a, 2008b).

But the *visible fist* has not acted alone. *Clandestine kicks* and *invisible elbows* have also been active in the state’s management of poverty and regulation of poor people’s actions. In a preliminary endeavour to make sense of the routine political production of subordination, the first part of this paper fleshes out the workings of fists and kicks as incarnations of state-generated collective violence. What Charles Tilly (2003) calls ‘violent specialists’ – that is, actors who specialize in ‘inflicting physical damage such as police, soldiers, guards, thugs, and gangs’ – play a key, though sometimes not quite discernible, role in the origins and the course of the collective violence with which the state generates the poor’s always partial compliance. To ply, we should be reminded, comes from the Latin *plicare*, ‘to bend’. The second part of this paper extends and adapts a lesser known notion of Tilly’s (1991) – that of ‘invisible elbows’ – to describe another way in which the state achieves poor people’s submission. Mostly devoid of physical violence, these elbows operate in usually under-funded welfare agencies where minor ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky 1980) interact with the poor on a daily basis.

In what follows I describe the workings of visible fists, clandestine kicks, and invisible elbows as forms of regulating poverty. I argue, by way of demonstration, that to better understand of the relationship between domination of the poor and the politics of collective violence, we should pay attention to the *simultaneous functioning of these three forces in the daily life of the destitute*. This analytic integration should, in turn, allow us to a) better incorporate violence into the study of popular politics, something that, as Tilly argues, most political analysis still neglects (Tilly 2003; see also Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004; Auyero 2007); and b) cast light on the productive, as opposed to merely repressive, nature of state power (Foucault 1979; Wacquant 2009).

This paper draws upon primary and secondary sources, including past and present ethnographic fieldwork, investigative reporters' accounts, and human rights reports, to depict poor people's various encounters with the state.<sup>2</sup> Particular accounts of housing projects' dwellers besieged by the National Guard, of squatters being evicted by policemen and paramilitary forces, and of clients endlessly waiting at the state welfare office collectively convey a unified picture. This picture is of a modal encounter between the dispossessed and the state, characterized by the routine truncation or utter denial of the most elementary form of citizenship.

In order to foreshadow the main substantive points of this paper, I begin with the story of one individual, which is a composite of several stories I heard in the field. This story succinctly conveys some of the forms of power that poor people experience in their daily encounters with the state. The story also serves as a road-map for the exposition that follows. It moves from a description of overt forms of state coercion to a dissection of a less forceful, but equally relevant, form of domination. In sum, this paper's main argument is that state power, from overt and covert violence to more 'gentle' forms, not only punishes the poor but also disciplines them, producing what I call 'patients of the state'.

This article provides accounts of three types of relationships between the urban poor and the state. These are certainly not the only modes of encounter. My own research in Argentina (Auyero 2000, 2003; 2007) and that of others in other parts of the world (Lazar 2008, Shefner 2008, Holzner 2007, Kerkvliet 2005, Goldstein 2003, Gay 1994) has examined a diversity of ways in which the destitute engage with the state, from patronage to civic participation to contentious collective action.<sup>3</sup> Although state repression has been the subject of many scholarly investigations, for both political and scholarly reasons neither clandestine coercion nor situations in which the poor are forced to patiently and silently wait for the state to deliver on its promises have received the same empirical and theoretical attention.

Jessica is 19 years old, born and raised in Argentina. We met her at the welfare office in the city of Buenos Aires. She came to renew her housing subsidy. She has been waiting for four hours and, like most of the people we talked to in the office during the first six months of fieldwork, she does not know if and when she will receive the benefit. 'You come here and you don't know at what time you'll leave'. As we are speaking with her, a state agent tells her, from the counter and in a very teacher-like manner, 'stay seated'. She turns to us and says: 'If they are in a good mood, they treat you well'.

Like many other recipients of the housing subsidy, Jessica first heard about the state benefit from a social worker who was present when state officials and policemen were evicting her and 15 other families with children ('we were all women, with children in tow') from her room of 'wood and metal shingles' in a squatter settlement. She still remembers the day of the eviction as a highly traumatic experience – 'there were these guys, throwing all our stuff into garbage trucks'.

Jessica thinks the welfare benefit is an 'aid because with the scavenging, I can't pay for a room. These days, it costs at least \$450 a month (roughly US\$ 110) and with the scavenging I collect for the day to day, I can't pay the rent with it'.

If she is lucky, the subsidy will cover six months of rent in a run-down hotel in the city. After those six months, she will be homeless; the subsidy cannot be renewed.

Echoing what we heard countless times, Jessica says that obtaining the benefit takes ‘a long time [...] you never know when they will pay you’. And like many others, she conceives of the waiting time as an indicator of the clients’ perseverance and thus of their ‘real need’. If you ‘really need’, she and others believe, ‘you will wait for a long time’, you will ‘keep coming’, and you will show state agents you are worthy of aid. This is how she puts it: ‘you have to wait, wait, and wait [...] They will not give it to you until you come here three, four, five, ten times, to check, to talk, to ask, with this official and then with the other official [...]’

Like many people we talked to, Jessica compares this long and uncertain wait to that of the public hospital. In a statement that captures one prominent way in which poor people relate to the state, she adds: ‘*Here and in the hospital, they tell you the same thing, “sit down and wait” [...] and (what do you do?), you sit down and wait. And if you have some money, you buy a soda and a sandwich*’ [my emphasis].

Jessica’s story encapsulates the narrative sequence of this paper. I first examine the visible fists (the forceful eviction), then depict clandestine kicks (the actions of ‘the guys’, who, as we will see, are thugs working for the state), and finish with a sketch of the workings of invisible elbows (‘sit down and wait’, ‘keep coming’ to show your worth). The story also illustrates the disparate power of fists, kicks, and elbows: needless to say, obtaining poor people’s compliance with extended periods of waiting at the welfare office is not the same thing as throwing them out of their homes using legal and/or illicit means. For narrative purposes, this paper separates these forces. We should not forget, however, that fists, kicks, and elbows are deeply intertwined in the daily encounters between the urban poor and the state. And so a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between the state and its urban denizens should bring these three forms of regulation into a single analytical framework.

The unprecedented expansion of the prison system in the United States and in Europe, and the concentration of its massive growth among specific racial and ethnic groups, has been the subject of much social scientific research (Garland 2001, Western 2006, Wacquant 2009). Only recently, however, has scholarship begun to pay sustained and systematic attention to the ways in which mass incarceration is affecting everyday life in poor communities (Goffman 2009, Comfort 2008). This paper seeks to add to this new literature in two ways: 1) it presents findings from a little known case, that of contemporary Argentina, on the manifold ways in which the neoliberal state coaxes the urban poor into compliance; and 2) it extends the forms of regulation of mass misery from imprisonment and repression to less overt and more subtle types of power.

## Visible Fists

Before I describe the visible fist's main components, I make two disclaimers. First, the hardening of state power against poor people in the form of violence, imprisonment, evictions and territorial control *does not follow a deliberate plan* designed by authorities, but rather an 'objective convergence of a welter of disparate public policies' (Wacquant 2009, 29). In this sense, the image of a fist can be misleading. There is neither a deliberate plan nor a single, monolithic agent driving the fist against the poor; rather, it is a series of processes that coalesce around the management of their conduct. Second, when dealing with the subaltern, state agents do not always carry out their business in broad daylight. As we will see in the case of evictions undertaken in the city of Buenos Aires, the public dimension of the democratic state sometimes vanishes when interacting with marginal populations. In effect, it resembles the covert workings of a dictatorial state that has terrifying resonances in Argentine history; or in other words, when at the margins of the social order, the state operates in a way that resembles authoritarian regimes (O'Donnell 1993; Brinks 2008a, 2008b). The image of clandestine kicks seeks to capture this other form of state action.

*Protest, repression and criminalization:* Since the return of democracy in 1983, state repression of poor people's social movements has ebbed and flowed. During the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s, state violence reached an extreme, brutal form, with the repression of the protests organized by the unemployed (known as *piqueteros*) and of the street demonstrations of December 2001 (Giaracca 2001, Svampa and Pereyra 2003, Gomez 2006, Giraudy 2007). Security forces routinely made informal use of lethal force in the context of massive protest, thus implicating the Argentine state in serious human rights violations. Between December of 1999 and June 2002, twenty-two persons were killed by state forces in public protests and hundreds were seriously injured (CELS 2003). Although state violence against *piqueteros* has decreased since 2003, the judicial criminalization of protest persists (CELS 2009). In the last decade, thousands of protesters have been prosecuted by the state. The 'tremendous coercive power deployed against those accused in a penal process' has thus been used 'by the administration of justice as an authentic tool to subjugate activists' (CELS 2003, 24; see also CELS 2009).

*Police violence:* Political scientist Daniel Brinks (2008a, 12) writes that twenty-five years of democracy have had 'a noticeably democratizing impact on the written laws and constitutions of Latin America'. He continues:

If the laws described the practice, Latin America would be approaching an egalitarian democratic utopia, and yet the *de facto* world of discrimination and rights violations continues to outdistance the *de jure* world of equal rights for all. *Police violence* is one of the places where the reality does not live up to the promise of democracy. Many countries, even or especially those with a legacy of authoritarian repression, have become political democracies but continue to violate individual rights. These countries no longer target political opponents,

but their police continue to torture and kill on a large scale *in the interest of social order* (Brinks 2008a, 12 [my emphasis]).

Among those countries, Argentina (along with Brazil) stands out. The country's security forces rely habitually on deadly violence as a means to control crime (Daroqui et al. 2009). The human rights report published annually by the Center for Legal and Social Studies puts it this way: 'The high levels of violence [...] the abusive use of force, the extrajudicial executions of those suspected of a crime, the arbitrary detentions, the torture and the physical abuse, the fabrication of criminal cases and the false imputations, are still extended phenomena in Argentina' (CELS 2009, 11). Between 1995 and 2000, Buenos Aires 'averaged a per capita rate of police homicides (almost 2 per hundred thousand) [...] just as high as the [noticeably violent] São Paulo'. Unabated and usually unpunished (Brinks 2008a, CELS 2009, Daroqui et al. 2009) police violence is, needless to say, not democratic. It finds its privileged targets in the urban poor and, among them, the youth living in shantytowns, housing projects, and squatter settlements (CELS 2009).

*Prison growth:* Another face of the state's visible fist directed against the dispossessed is the runaway growth of the prison population. Argentina shares this trend with advanced societies, namely that of a 'spectacular swelling of the population behind bars' (Wacquant 2009, xiii). Although there is a remarkable difference in the rates of incarceration between Argentina and the United States (183.5 convicts per 100,000 residents in 2007, a figure that pales in comparison with the current 760 per 100,000 in the United States), both countries have witnessed this explosive prison growth in the last two decades. In the United States, the imprisonment rate went from 138 convicts per 100,000 residents in 1980, to 478 per 100,000 in 2000 (Wacquant 2009, 117). Since the return of democracy, Argentina has seen an almost fourfold increase (398 per cent) in the population behind bars in federal prisons. In 1997, there were 14,292 persons in state jails and prisons in the province of Buenos Aires. A decade later, the incarcerated population had almost doubled to 27,614 (CELS 2009).

The Centre for Legal and Social Studies has been at the forefront of publicly denouncing the appalling living conditions inside the overcrowded Argentine prisons and the systematic violation of inmates' rights. A comparison between imprisonment in the advanced north and the underdeveloped south is beyond the scope of this article. A functional convergence should be highlighted, however. In both cases, 'incarceration rates serve to physically neutralize and warehouse the super-numerary fractions of the working class [or the "marginal mass" (Nun 2001)] and in particular the dispossessed members of the stigmatized groups [...]' (Wacquant 2009, xvi). Or, as the CELS report states, the prison is used as a 'generalized state response to social conflicts and claims' (2009, 279).

*Military occupation:* Another particularly illustrative manner in which the state has been forcefully controlling the behaviour of the urban poor has been the occupation of entire neighbourhoods by the National Guard (Gendarmería Nacional) in what amounts to territorial sieges. The National Guard is a security force with military origins that is dependent on the Ministry of Justice, Security and Human Rights of

the Argentine Nation. The gendarmes now enforce law and order in the (in)famous neighbourhoods of La Cava and Carlos Gardel in Buenos Aires (*Revista Mu*, 2008). But it is in the barrio Ejército de los Andes that the gendarmes have achieved national notoriety. Approximately 35,000 people live in the 3,777 apartments located in the barrio Ejército de los Andes, commonly known as *Fuerte Apache*. The neighbourhood is located in Ciudadela a few blocks from *General Paz*, a highway that divides the capital city of Buenos Aires from the suburbs of Greater Buenos Aires, a metropolitan area that comprises 30 municipal districts. *Los tortugas ninja* (ninja turtles), as the national guardsmen are locally known, have been an occupying force in this neighbourhood since 14 November 2003, and operate with a stated mission of ‘improving security’.

What follows are excerpts from a chronicle written by journalist Cristian Alarcón on the occasion of the assassination of a gendarme in the neighbourhood. The full story uncovers retaliation as a factor in the murder and, at the same time, exposes the relational and honorific character of a violence that the media and authorities portray as meaningless. The selected passages illustrate vividly key aspects of poor people’s experiences with the daily violence exerted by state agents:

I was going to study, almost two weeks ago. We had been eating homemade bread – says P., 20 years old, unemployed since they fired him from his job as a food distributor. Five or six guardsmen came then, there are never fewer than five or six, with batons to hit [us with]. They have helmets, and armour that looks like Ninja Turtles. They tell you: ‘Don’t look at me. Look down. Drop to the floor. Don’t look at me idiot’, and then they take out everything you have in your pockets. If there is money, somewhere, depending on the guardsman, he keeps it. If not, they take the drugs and give you everything else back.

Alarcón points out that P’s story is quite typical: guards routinely order poor youngsters ‘not to look’ at them, ‘kick their heels with cruelty and verbally denigrate them’. His report continues:

In each [entrance to the neighbourhood] there is a security post; in each post, between three and five uniformed men. Those who guard do not look like those that walk in the neighbourhood; they wear military clothes and carry heavy weapons. After ten o’clock at night [...] the Special Forces come out, or the ‘helmeted’ (*casquados*), as they are known.

[...]

The tension with the guardsmen can be felt in darkness on Friday night. Between the dirty walls of one of the buildings, the light of a flashlight moves as if looking for something. It looks like one of those huge lights they turn on in jails when someone escapes. One can distinguish the silhouettes of the Ninja Turtles forming a troop of six [...] The guardsmen advance with their mouths closed and long rifles in hand. Like that, with signals, without saying a word, they order the young men they encounter to get against the wall. They make them put their hands up, open their legs and proceed to pat them down.

From Cristian Alarcón, ‘El Barrio Fuerte’, *Revista C*, November 2008 [my translation].

*Evictions:* During the 1990s:

Buenos Aires has undergone a profound transformation of the built environment. Local effects of globalization seem to generate [the] expulsion of low-income sectors from areas of the city that are currently required by corporate agents for development and investment. These trends enhance urban segregation [...] (Procupez and Rodriguez 2001, 216).

Market forces have not acted alone in the reshaping of the mega-city's social geography. State-mandated evictions from illegally occupied residences and public spaces have skyrocketed since the beginning of the decade, especially in the city of Buenos Aires. This is due to the rapid increase in real estate prices since 2001, increasing gentrification in selected areas of the city, and changes in the judiciary system which shorten the civil judicial process. When the current mayor of Buenos Aires took office, there were squatters and/or homeless individuals living in approximately 160 public spaces, mostly in parks and plazas. In less than a year, the government 'cleaned' (a word used by officials) almost one hundred of them (*Perfil*, 16 November 2008). Evictions from private and state-owned buildings also increased at a fast rate. In 2006, 34 persons per day were evicted. A year later, this figure more than doubled: 76 persons a day were removed from the places where they were living (*Clarín*, June 2004, 2007). By the end of 2007, 6700 families had been evicted in the city of Buenos Aires (*Clarín*, 7 September 2007) According to the city government there has been a 300 per cent increase in evictions during 2007 (CELS 2009, 322). During 2008, evictions proceeded at an even faster pace of one judiciary-ordered eviction per day. Denying their speed but acknowledging their occurrence, the city government chief of staff put it this way: '*Slowly, and silently, evictions are being carried out*' (*Página12*, 4 May 2009, my emphasis).

Not surprisingly, the number of people living in the streets doubled in less than a year, from roughly 1000 to 2000 persons sleeping in the streets on any given night (*Página12*, 4 May 2009). As the city government rolls out its punitive arm with rapidly increasing evictions, it simultaneously draws back its welfare hand: the budget of the Instituto de Vivienda de la Ciudad (the agency in charge of state-funded housing) decreased four-fold, from 500 million pesos to 120 million pesos.

### **Clandestine Kicks**

Come on, wake up, let's go! – Those were the screams that woke up Maria at dawn. Three men, dressed in black, hooded sweatshirts, were tearing down her shack located below the highway.

Come on! What's going on with you? Up! Or do you want me to bring the gang? – María crawled on the dirt floor, her eight-month pregnant belly hanging, facing down. The only thing she could see were the military-style pants and the sneakers that were kicking everything she had. A few meters away, a camouflaged garbage truck was waiting, engine on. The men threw her mattresses, her blankets, and three bags full of plastic bottles and cardboard into the truck.



Suddenly, there are noises of an ongoing fight. María's son is grabbing a cart, his hands hard like iron claws.

Let it go, little piece of shit (*pendejo de mierda*)! – the hooded man shouted at him, and grabbed the cart, brusquely pushing the kid aside. In desperation, María ran toward her son. She arrived at the scene just in time to get a blow with a stick that sent her to the hospital with haemorrhages.

The gang (*patota*) got into the unidentified car (no plates) [...] From the floor, María was able to read the words in one of the men's caps: UCEP.

From Lucía Alvarez, 'Desalojados', [my translation]. <http://aguilashumanas.blogspot.com/2009/09/desalojados-lucia-alvarez.html>

Evictions are mandated by the state and usually carried out with police assistance. But during the last two administrations, the city government has also deployed a special force to intimidate and then to violently remove 'intrusos' (intruders, unlawful tenants) from parks, plazas, streets, lots below highways, and city buildings. In 2009 a group of twenty to thirty 'corpulent and unfriendly-looking men' (*Perfil*, 16 November 2008) were officially named the *Unidad de Control del Espacio Público* (UCEP). All of the UCEP members are state employees. Before the current administration, under 'progressive' and self-identified centre-left governments, the group was known informally as 'the sharks'. The press has documented dozens of cases in which these enforcers were involved in violent evictions, mostly at night, using methods that sadly resemble those used by military authorities during the last dictatorship to 'clean up' the city of shantytown dwellers (Oszlak 1991; *Perfil*, 16 November 2008; *Página12*, 4 May 2009; *Página12*, April 12, 2009; *Notife*, 3 August 2009). A welfare office official from the current city administration critically acknowledged this in an interview with us: 'Yes, we know about the UCEP. It's a task force (*un grupo de tareas*) with characteristics that are similar to those deployed during the last military dictatorship'. When asked about their 'cleaning' procedures, UCEP members assured journalists 'that they are peaceful but that, on occasion, they have to show their teeth: "One day an intruder didn't want to leave and we had to put a garbage truck in front of him and told him that we would throw all his stuff in there. He understood"' (*Perfil*, 16 November 2008).

Government officials and 'sharks' themselves say that all they do is 'make people [intruders] comply [with the law];' they seek to 'clean up the public spaces from intruders, in the name of the law' (*Perfil*, 16 November 2008). What none of them admit is that they do so with unlawful methods by employing outright violence, causing physical harm to destitute city residents and destroying their few belongings. A joint report based on witnesses' accounts and carried out by the city ombudsman office, the *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*, and the *Defensoría Oficial de la Justicia Porteña*, reconstructs a series of evictions, and unambiguously describes the UCEP 'as a para-police force that seeks to threaten, stigmatize, repress, and expel from the city the most vulnerable persons' (*Página12*, 10 August 2009).

The UCEP enforcers are true 'violent specialists' (Tilly 2003), and illustrate the last and more recent incarnation of illicit kicks produced by the state. They also illustrate the continuing operation of what, in previous work (author 2007; author

2009), I called the ‘gray zone’ of state power – informal, clandestine, links between established power-holders and perpetrators of collective violence.

### **Invisible Elbows**

To paraphrase Loïc Wacquant from his depiction of the punitive approach pervading advanced societies, the gendarmes, the police, the courts, the UCEP ‘sharks’, and the prisons are ‘the sombre and stern face’ that the Argentine state turns toward ‘the dispossessed and dishonoured categories trapped in the hollows of the inferior regions of social and urban space’ (2009, xviii). For shantytown dwellers; for residents of squatter settlements and ill-reputed housing projects; for those living at the margins of the social and spatial structure, surviving in the cracks and crevices of a rapidly gentrifying city; and for those who dare to rebel against oppressive living conditions, the Argentine state deploys open repression, imprisonment, illegal violence, and ‘slow and silent’ expulsion.

Along with the more visible iron fist and the clandestine kicks described above, the state also uses ‘invisible elbows’ (Tilly 1997) to keep the urban pariahs under control. Tilly’s image of the ‘invisible elbow’ encapsulates his model of social life. ‘Coming home from the grocery store’, he writes:

[ ] arms overflowing with food-filled bags, you wedge yourself against the doorjamb, somehow free a hand to open the kitchen door, enter the house, then nudge the door closed with your elbow. Because elbows are not prehensile and, in this situation, not visible either, you sometimes slam the door smartly, sometimes swing the door halfway closed, sometimes missed completely on the first pass, and sometimes – responding to one of these earlier calamities – spill groceries all over the kitchen floor (1997, 39).

The systematic properties of actors and things involved in this familiar vignette (door, elbow, groceries and, not least, shoppers) constrain the outcomes of the ‘attempted nudge’. Tilly adds, ‘[o]ver many trips to the grocery store, which of these outcomes occurs forms a frequency distribution with stable probabilities modified by learning. With practice, you may get your door-closing average up to .900’ (1997, 39). And therein lies Tilly’s key insight: erroneous interactions and unanticipated consequences pervade social interactions, but so do ‘error correction and responses, sometimes almost instantaneous, to unexpected outcomes’ (39). Collectively, mistakes and rectifications, learning and practice, produce ‘systematic, durable social structure’ (38), even in the absence of a unified, conscious intention.

For illustrative purposes, let’s return to a typical eviction scene. Alongside police personnel, judicial officials, and/or the UCEP enforcers which constitute the repressive right hand of the state, there are other agents that make up the state’s left hand (Bourdieu 1999), i.e. officials from the *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social* (Welfare Agency). Drawing upon informal interviews with state officials, fieldwork at the welfare agency in the city of Buenos Aires, and on newspaper coverage, I uncovered a basic logic in the welfare cases I reviewed. In essence, welfare agents, who are usually less noticeable than repressive forces, make themselves present during most evictions in order to encourage the recently expelled to apply for a ‘housing subsidy’ available from the state welfare agency. The cash amount of this

subsidy varies according to the number of members in the household, but it usually covers no more than six months of rent in one of the rundown hotels in the city. On occasion, the subsidy is utilized as a bribe to entice intruders to leave the illegally occupied property; and when the bribe, for whatever reason, is not effective, UCEP enforcers begin their work. There is an irony here: Like a racketeer, the state produces a danger through eviction and then, at a price, offers a precarious and limited shield against it (Tilly 1985). The price to be paid is the silent submission of the poor to the mandates of the state.

In the immediate aftermath of an eviction, a new ordeal begins for the now homeless population. This experience is shared by many others who, for a variety of reasons, end up in the welfare office, and by those at the lower rungs of the social and cultural space who have to regularly interact with state agencies. In a manner that closely resembles the trials and tribulations experienced by Josef K in Kafka's *The Trial*, every time the dispossessed seeks a solution from a state agency (a welfare office, a court, etc.) to pressing problems such as housing, food, and environmental hazards (Auyero and Swistun, 2009), he or she is likely to become progressively entangled in the state's web of power. This web is composed of uncomfortable waiting rooms and corridors, ever-changing paperwork, and long and unpredictable delays. During this ordeal, the physical violence of the visible fist takes a back seat, and a less evident form of domination begins to operate. Elbows poor people don't quite see (impossible requests, gruelling runabouts, sudden and unexplained cancellations, etc.) produce outcomes nobody explicitly intends. A subtle production of poor people's compliance occurs not through the deployment of force or the control of bodies and spaces but through the manipulation of their time. In the opening vignette of this paper, Jessica captures well the manufacturing of patients of the state. She and others like her just 'sit and wait' and 'keep coming, and wait, wait, wait', experiencing the endless postponements of bureaucratic mistakes, inattentions, random rectifications, and the perennial underfunding of the presumably benign arm of the state.

Waiting, writes Pierre Bourdieu in *Pascalian Meditations*, is one of the privileged ways of experiencing the effects of power. According to Bourdieu (2000, 228), 'Making people wait [...] delaying without destroying hope [...] adjourning without totally disappointing' are integral parts of the workings of subordination. In the limited space of this paper, I cannot provide a full description of the many interactions between the urban poor and the state we witnessed during the course of a year of team fieldwork (interactions that include injunctions – 'sit down and wait', 'stay seated;' friendly and not-so-friendly advice – 'come back in a month and we'll see;' but also human mistakes, delays caused by computer crashes, errors in understanding state language, etc.). Let me simply present the story of one exemplary waiter, a sort of Odysseus's Penelope of the welfare office that typifies the many facets of the shared experiences of waiting.

#### Milagros' trial:

In the back of the welfare office waiting room, 27-year-old Milagros plays with two little children; one of them is her two-year-old son Joaquín. Milagros is Peruvian and she has been 'in this thing' (the way in which she refers to the paperwork at the welfare office) for a year and a half. She is a beneficiary of two

programmes, a cash transfer programme known as *Nuestras Familias* and the housing subsidy. The housing subsidy is ‘late’, she tells us, ‘because there’s no payday scheduled for foreigners’.

She oftentimes walks to the welfare office – it’s a mile and a half walk but it saves her much needed cash. Since giving birth she can’t carry much weight on her, so the days Joaquín’s grandmother can’t babysit, Milagros has to take the bus with him. The expensive bus fare is not the only reason why she avoids coming with him. Waiting, she says, is ‘boring and tiring’ for her and her son. Waiting, she adds, is ‘costly’ – referring to the expenses she incurs every time her son demands ‘something to drink or to eat’ from the little stand located in the back of the welfare area. In her nickel-and-dimed life, a 30 cents bus ride and a one dollar treat is a luxury that she cannot afford. In this way, and in many others, Milagros’ story is not anecdotal. During one of our first observations, a mother scolded her little daughter saying: ‘You are making me spend a fortune. That’s it. I’ll buy you a chocolate milk in the afternoon’ – and dozens of interviewees told us stories along similar lines.

Milagros learned about the welfare benefits from a social worker at the hospital where she gave birth. When she first attempted to apply, she came to the welfare office at dawn. ‘At 4 a.m., they were giving 30 slots, and I was number 32. I thought they were going to attend [to] me, but they didn’t’. The next day, she came ‘earlier...at 11 p.m. (the night before). I waited outside all night long but there was some sort of problem and they didn’t open the office that day. That was a long wait’. She then waited 3 more months. One day, she came back at noon and was told to come earlier in the morning. She did the paperwork and received the housing subsidy for one month. Since the owner of the apartment from whom she was renting ‘did not have everything in order’, her subsidy was terminated abruptly. She had to start the paperwork all over again in order to receive two more instalments – after which she ceased to be eligible.

Milagros makes US\$ 9 per day taking care of an elderly couple and she can’t afford to miss a day at work. When she comes to the welfare office, she meets with friends, and they talk about how agents give them the ‘run-around’. ‘You feel despondent here (*te desanimas*)’, she tells us, ‘because they [welfare agents] tell you to come on day X. You ask for permission at work and then you find out that they have not deposited the money. I lose one day at work [...] I think the aid is a good thing but [...]well, I don’t think it’s fair that they make you wait so long and that sometimes they make you come here for nothing (*te hacen venir al pedo*) [...] They tell you to come on Monday, and then Wednesday, and then Friday [...] and those are working days’.

Milagros does not know whether or not she will receive the subsidy today. The last time she came to this office she ‘left with nothing’. She felt ‘impotent’ and cried a lot at home, she tells us, but ‘*here I didn’t say anything*’ [my emphasis]. She desperately needs the aid the city government offers to pay the rent and to feed her son.

Milagros' story teaches us that waiting is a process, not a one-shot event. The overwhelming majority of those we interviewed in the welfare agency's waiting room had gone through some version of what, to invoke Joseph K again, one could call 'the trial' of welfare. As Milagros' story of endless hassles illustrates, this process is pervaded by *uncertainty*, *arbitrariness*, and resulting *frustration*, much like Kafka's. The uncertainty and arbitrariness engender one particular subjective effect among those who need the state to survive: they silently comply with the authorities' often capricious commands. Milagros' one-line statement regarding what she did (or, rather, did not do) when forced to wait ('here I didn't say anything'), and her feelings at the time ('despondent', 'impotent'), summarize the relationship between waiting and submission that we unearth during our fieldwork. Or as Jessica, cited at the beginning of this paper, puts it: 'They tell you to sit down and wait [...] and you sit down and wait'. Thus, far from being simply a negative practice that tells poor people it is not yet their time, making people wait has some 'possible positive effects, even if these seem marginal at first sight' (Foucault 1979, 23). Chief among these positive effects is the everyday manufacturing of subjects who know, and act accordingly, that when dealing with state bureaucracies they have to patiently comply with the seemingly arbitrary, ambiguous, and ever-changing state requirements.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Latin root of the word patience, 'the quality of being patient in suffering', is *pati*: 'to suffer, to endure'. In the recursive interactions with the state, poor people learn that they have to remain temporarily neglected, unattended to, or postponed. It is true that patients comply because they do not have an alternative; but they comply silently, if begrudgingly, because they have also learned that there is no use in protesting publicly. If they are to obtain the much needed 'aid' (*ayuda*), they *know* they have to show they are worthy of aid, they *know* they have to avoid making trouble, and they *know* they have to 'keep coming and wait, wait, wait'. Over the many months of fieldwork we never heard this discussed in terms of 'rights'. This implicit knowledge demonstrates that acts of cognition are, simultaneously, acts of recognition of the established political order.

Over time, trips to the store and nudge attempts make us all better at closing the door with our elbows, Tilly says. Trips to state offices and interactions with state officials teach poor people that they will have to comply by waiting if they want to get hold of some resource crucial to their survival. On a daily basis, this form of domination recreates the existent dissymmetry between urban denizens and state agents, subordinating the former by routinely 'inducing anxieties, uncertainties, expectations, frustrations, wounds and humiliations' (Bourdieu 2001, 110).

Writing about the nineteenth century English proletariat, Friedrich Engels describes a class that 'knows no security in life', a class which is a 'play-ball to a thousand chances' (1973, 139). Those waiting in the welfare office fit this description well. Their lives are constantly on the edge of disaster or in the midst of it. They have recently been evicted or they are about to be, they have just lost their jobs, they are seriously sick, their spouses recently left them with two or more small children to be cared for with no source of household income, and/or some combination of the above. Once they come into the welfare waiting room, the insecurity does not abate. Many of the individuals with whom we met during the

course of fieldwork describe their waiting in ways that echo Engels' depiction of lives far away in time and place: 'They kick us around like balls (*nos pelotean*)'. This simple statement encapsulates the pervasive uncertainty and arbitrariness of the lived experience of waiting. The overwhelming majority know when to come to the office ('the earlier the better'); most of them, however, do not know when they will leave ('I told my husband, 'I'm going to the welfare office [...] don't know when I'm coming back'''). One is thus reminded of Barry Schwartz's statement in his classic study of queuing: 'Punitive sanctioning through the imposition of waiting is met in its most extreme forms when a person is not only kept waiting but is also kept ignorant as to how long he must wait' (1975, 38). Indeed, uncertainty pervades both the amount of time they will spend there, as well as the outcome of the visit. More than half (59 per cent) of our 69 interviewees do not know if and/or when they will receive the benefit they came to ask for. In other words, in the indeterminate waiting that defines the interactions between poor people and the welfare bureaucracy, we witness the daily reproduction of a mode of domination founded 'on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity' (Bourdieu 1999, 85). This insecurity forces the destitute into compliance with the mandates of the state.

We first met Mónica at the waiting room of the welfare office with her two-year-old in tow. She was waiting for a resolution on her housing subsidy. This was her third time in the office. A national from Peru, Mónica is a legal resident of Argentina. She had been evicted the previous month from a squatter house and had been receiving the subsidy for a month, but 'one day they didn't give me any more. They told me that I had incomplete documents. They wanted a certified letter of eviction on part of the owner'. Her story portrays the kind of precarious, itinerant life lived by many of the people we met at the office. It also captures, in elementary and absurd detail, the workings of the state's invisible elbows.

M: I lived in a squatter house (*casa tomada*). I rented a room, because they didn't want to rent to me with him (referring to her two-year-old son who is running around us) anywhere, they don't like to rent with babies... When they evicted us I had a friend who told me that I could move to her place, share the room with her until I found something else.

I: That's how you arrived here?

M: Yes, because a man in the eviction told me to come here, that here they would help me rent something.

I: And? That's how you entered the housing programme (*Plan Habitacional*)?

M: But they only gave it to me for the first month. Every time I came back they told me to come on another date, that the payment still wasn't resolved.

I: What explanations did they give you?

M: At the beginning they told me that the day of payment for foreigners still wasn't scheduled. But later they told me that they didn't give it to me because I lacked documentation.

I: What documentation?

M: A letter. A certificate of eviction signed by the owner of the place where they evicted me from, which I never could obtain [emphasis that Mónica signalled with her hand].

I: Because?

M: Because I never met the owner.

I: In other words: first they evicted you, they recommended that you come here, they gave you a month of subsidy, and then they didn't just stop paying you but they told you to bring a certificate of eviction after having evicted you?

M: Uh huh.

The regular character of the interactions between the poor and the state described in this article is not the result of a master plan, or of actors behaving efficiently in typical means-ends terms. In other words, the regulation of poverty and its deleterious social effects uncovered here is not the outcome of a group of agents who act in concert to coax the destitute into compliance. For example, street-level bureaucrats at the welfare office are doing their best to allocate subsidies with a limited budget, attend to emergency situations such as a massive eviction, and comply with their superiors' demands. In the many interviews we conducted with BAP<sup>4</sup> coordinators and social workers, they told us as much. They are operating within severe economic and political constraints. Not surprisingly, state agents describe a world in which budget considerations trump all other policy decisions in the distribution of aid:

When there is more money, the periods are shorter. Sometimes there is money, and they cover the subsidy the next day. It varies a lot because of the budget.

They change the totals according to the budget, and the quantity of quotes changes also.

What is remarkable, however, is that the discretion also originates in the world of 'politics', which is understood by state agents as a world beyond their reach, a world of obscure deals and peculiar stakes.

In order to remove the homeless [from a place where there's going to be an official event] money is given without them being part of any programme so that they vacate immediately.

Suddenly there is money for a programme, suddenly there isn't. If there is a massive eviction that was decided for political reasons, money appears. And the subsidy is given to the evicted at the moment of the eviction, with no requirements in mind.

Before the elections, they give subsidies immediately, without taking the requirements into account.

Although the outcomes of this form of welfare provision are long and unpredictable delays, street-level bureaucrats are not consciously attempting to make the destitute wait. In other words, they are not intentionally manufacturing patients. Neither fists nor elbows obey a sure-handed implementation of a foresighted plan.

Instead, they constitute a ‘strategy (of domination) without a strategist’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

### **Forms of Domination**

The complex relationship between subordinated groups and the state has been the subject of much scrutiny in historical and ethnographic research (see, for example, Roy 1994, Bayat 1997, Wedeen 1999, Chatterjee 2006, Goldberg 2007). For the most part, it has drawn the attention of empirical investigation when it has broken down; that is, when it has erupted in episodes of mass contention or explosive insurgency (for a classic statement on the subject, see Joseph and Nugent 1994) and/or when it has called for the deployment of the state’s visible iron fist.

However, there is much to be understood and explained about other forms of state engagement with subaltern groups, in this case the urban poor. This engagement may be hidden, embodied in the pernicious operation of clandestine kicks, or routine and ordinary, illustrated in the workings of invisible elbows that force welfare clients to endure long and uncertain waits.

During the last decade, investigative reporters and social scientists have documented the ways in which power-holders in Argentina have relied on illicit links with party members and/or other types of grassroots activists to conduct the ‘dirty work’ of politics. This work ranges from the intimidation or public shaming of election opponents to the incitement of large scale violence. The food riots of December 2001 are an example of the latter. The actions and inactions of political brokers linked to the Peronist party and of the police explain much of the opportunistic destruction that took place (Auyero 2007). In this paper I extended this empirical work by examining the ways in which state actors rely clandestinely on violent specialists to deal with subordinate groups: the use of shock troops to evict squatters. Most political analysts are focused on the ‘respectable’, ‘civilized’ (i.e. devoid of violence, according to Elias), and easily visible side of politics which takes place in government houses, parliaments, and is broadcast through mass media outlets. Thus, they tend to disregard what I call the gray zone of politics; that is, the area of invisible ties and invisible, clandestine acts. Although this gray zone may lack the prestige of a legitimate object of political analysis, it constitutes a crucial dimension of politics that must be dissected empirically and theorized critically in order to better understand *routine* political activity. In other words, as political analysts, we should do a better job at integrating ‘gray zone’ actions and relations into the study of ‘normal’ politics. Inattention to these clandestine is analogous to the inattentiveness to ‘informal institutions’, noted by political scientists Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky. In both cases, political analysis ‘risks missing much of what drives political behaviour and can hinder efforts to explain important political phenomena’ (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 725). Rather than dismissing such acts as aberrant phenomena or denouncing them on moralistic grounds, the challenge for a proper social scientific analysis is to incorporate such acts into our standard models of political action.

It should hardly surprise students of Latin American and Southeast Asian politics that actors with well-oiled connections to the polity might be ‘behind’ – rather than against – episodes of collective violence. Research on the origins and forms of



communal violence in Southeast Asia, for example, highlights the usually hidden links between partisan politics and violence (Das 1990; Shaheed 1990). Paul Brass' notion of 'institutionalized riot systems' captures well these usually obscure connections. He states that in these riot systems, 'known actors specialize in the conversion of incidents between members of different communities into ethnic riots. The activities of these specialists [operating under the loose control of party leaders] are usually required for a riot to spread from the initial incident of provocation' (1996, 12).<sup>5</sup>

In the contemporary Americas, we have several ethnographic accounts of the working of clandestine connections in politics. Gunst's (1995) extensive exploration of Jamaican gangs illustrates the links that *posses* had with political parties during the 1980s, as well as the usually violent outcomes of these 'mafia-style links' (83). The origins of Jamaican drug gangs in New York can be found, Gunst argues, in the *posses* which were, in fact, political groupings armed by party leaders linked to Seaga or Manley. Goldstein's (2003) and Arias' (2006) recent ethnographies of Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* (shantytowns) provide further evidence of the collusion between state actors, political party members, and violent entrepreneurs, in their case gang members associated with drug trafficking. Luis Astorga's (2005) detailed historical reconstruction of the mutual imbrications of the field of illicit drug production and trafficking and the political field throughout twentieth century Mexico provides another excellent example of concealed and illegal connections between actors inside and outside the political system. These relations should be seriously considered if we are to comprehend seemingly random upsurges of violence, both past and present.

The experience of poor people waiting at the welfare office illustrates another way in which the state relates to the urban destitute. To be an actual or potential welfare recipient is to be subordinated to the operation of invisible elbows. This subordination is created and recreated through innumerable acts of waiting. In those recurrent encounters with state agents, poor people learn through endless delays and arbitrary changes that they have to comply with the requirements of unpredictable agents. In short, they learn to be patients of the state.

The state agencies and agents we observed in the city of Buenos Aires do not place much emphasis on the 'customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking' (Foucault 1991, 209) of those in need. During the course of fieldwork, I did not notice any attention to or attempts to control the minute aspects of poor people's behaviours. I saw very little of the governing of bodies and souls or moulding of 'habits, behaviour, or dispositions', on which the 'rehabilitative function' of welfare in the United States historically placed much emphasis (Goldberg 2007, 3; also see Gilliom 2001; Hays 2003). Rather, the interactions with the state described briefly under the invisible elbow rubric introduce economy and order (i.e. government, in Foucault's sense) through the manipulation of poor people's time. It is through this practice, through this 'governing technique' (Foucault 1979, 198), that the state creates docility among the poor. Interpreted in this light, the 'mundane statements [made] by minor administrators' (Rabinow 1984, 15) acquire a quite relevant and consequential socio-political significance. Although much less spectacular than troops, thugs, and jails, the seemingly unimportant assertions and commands uttered by low rank bureaucrats and those subjected to their commands should also

be understood as indicators of the workings of power. The words, justifications and injunctions of state officials, and the stories of resignation and frustration of the subordinated, are far from trivial. Rather, they exemplify the everyday reconstruction of political domination.

In poor people's lives, visible fists, clandestine kicks, and invisible elbows frequently meet and mesh. Rather than isolating these forms of power under different rubrics (state repression, welfare provision) and then treating them separately, the analytical framework proposed here begins with one particular encounter between the destitute and the state, and then by zooming in on poor people's daily lives seeks to explore the connection that a particular form of poverty regulation establishes with others. Ethnography, as a mode of inquiry based on the 'close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do (Wacquant 2003b, 5)', is a particularly apt methodology for a research endeavour that seeks to simultaneously scrutinize the operation of fists, kicks, and elbows.

The material and symbolic import of these forms of power is indeed diverse, as are the urban spaces towards which they gravitate and the categories and relational settings they affect. An analytical framework is, in my mind, a set of interrogating arrows pointing to the social world. Accordingly, let me conclude with a set of questions that should guide future inquiry: Are fists and kicks more active in some urban spaces (for example, in shantytowns and squatter settlements) than in others (working class neighbourhoods)? Do invisible elbows gravitate towards certain categories of people (for example, women and the elderly) more than others (men and young)? If so, what is the role of elbows in reproducing age and gender hierarchies? Do certain relationships (for example, patronage networks) protect the poor against fists and kicks and channel them into the elbows' power?

### **Concluding Remarks**

In his insightful synthesis of materialist and symbolic approaches to penal systems, Loïc Wacquant (2008, 13) writes:

The police, courts, and prison are not mere technical implements whereby authorities respond to crime – as in the commonsensical view fostered by law and criminology – but a core political capacity through which the state both produce[s] and manages inequality, identity, and marginality.

The visible fist of the Argentine state indeed has this dual role, as do its clandestine kicks and invisible elbows. All three act to 'enforce hierarchy and control contentious categories' (Wacquant 2008, 13) by removing the homeless from public plazas, evicting the poor from squatted property, jailing and/or physically harassing poor youngsters living in shantytown and other destitute neighbourhoods, and/or besieging public projects with the National Guard. They also 'communicate norms and shape collective representations and subjectivities' (Wacquant 2008, 13; 2009) by fuelling perceptions of 'young predators' who can only be controlled with 'mano dura', classifying certain poor as undeserving of a place to live and deserving of

violent clean-up operations, and moulding welfare recipients as patients of the state as opposed to rightful citizens.

As I write this, hundreds of residents of the city and state of Buenos Aires are protesting in front of the federal Welfare Ministry, claiming their participation in a work programme recently created by the government. Drawing upon a collective action tactic that has become quite common in the last two decades in Argentina (Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Auyero 2007), they are camping in front of the main office of the Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, blockading traffic in the Avenida 9 de Julio, the main artery of Buenos Aires (*Clarín* 3 November 2009; *Página12*, 4 November 2009). In no way does this paper suggest that the three forms of regulating poverty presented here achieve complete domination of the dispossessed. The attempted manufacturing of acquiescence is always partial, always negotiated. Three decades of neoliberal economic policies continuously generate enough misery in the lower regions of the social and physical space that it is hard to imagine an end to structural-adjustment-generated disorders. As social insecurity multiplies, so will unrest; and so will the operation of the state's fists, kicks, and elbows.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

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2. During 2008 (August-December) and 2009 (September-December), and together with three research assistants (Shila Vilker, Nadia Finck, and Agustín Burbano de Lara), we conducted fieldwork in the waiting room of the city of a Buenos Aires' welfare office and in the waiting lines formed outside the RENAPER (Registro Nacional de las Personas, where people apply for national identification cards). We interviewed a total of 69 persons waiting in the Welfare Office. During the nine months of fieldwork, we observed interactions between agents and beneficiaries, three hours a day, three days a week. We also interviewed eight officials and case workers working for the city welfare office. Regarding newspaper accounts, this paper relies mainly on 'hard news items' (i.e., the who, what, when, and where of the episodes) which, as other researchers have pointed out, are generally more precise than 'soft news' (i.e., journalists' impressions and inferences) (see Earl et al. 2004, 72). In order to control for biases, I mainly draw from three national newspapers with different political leanings – from left to right *Página12*, *Clarín*, and *La Nación*.
3. On the relationship between clientelism and contentious action, see Auyero, Lapegna and Page (2009).
4. BAP (Buenos Aires Presente) is an agency within the Ministry of Social Welfare that serves the homeless population of the city of Buenos Aires.

5. See also Kakar (1996), Kirschke (2000), and Wilkinson (2004); on the link between partisan activity and the makings of collective violence in Colombia, see Roldan's masterful study of 'la violencia' in Antioquia (2002).

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