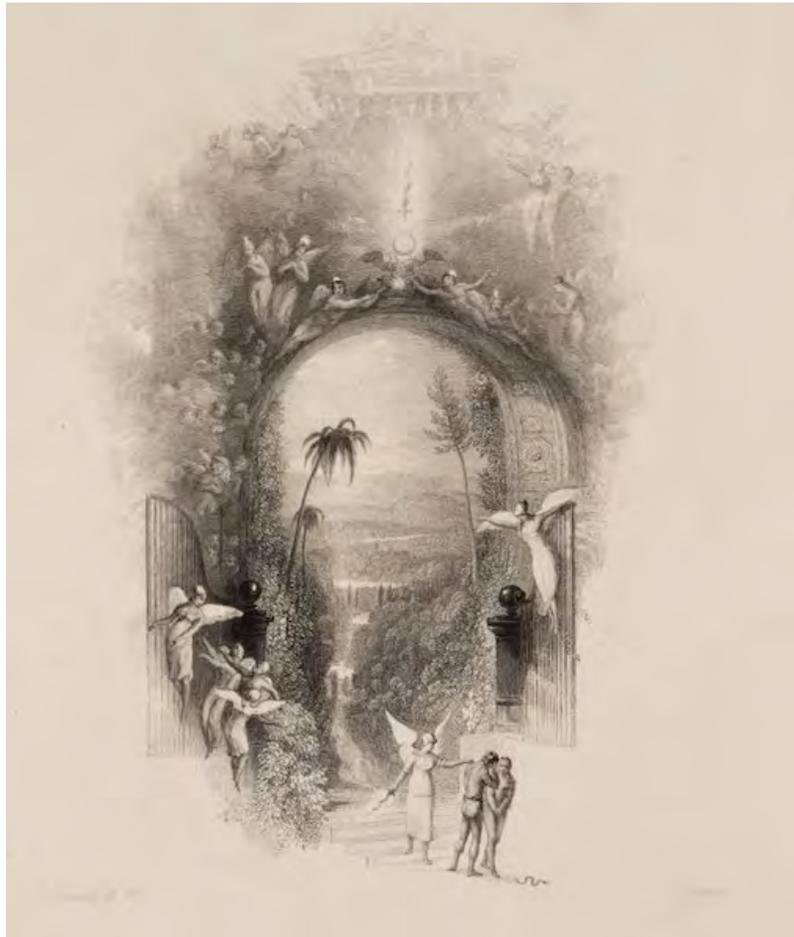


A LINE IN THE SAND
RACE, PURITY AND COMFORT IN ARGENTINE GATED COMMUNITIES



By Ricardo Greene

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology*

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on a gated community in contemporary Argentina, paying attention to the lifestyles, rhythms and practices of their actors. Since 1990 gated urban complexes have emerged on the outskirts of Argentine cities, radically modifying established forms of land occupation, and constituting one of the most significant territorial processes of the past decades. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Nordelta, Argentina's largest and most self-sufficient of these compounds, this research proposes that gated communities cannot be solely explained as the result of spatial fragmentation due to class difference, or as a consequence of neoliberal processes of privatization and deregulation. Rather, it suggests they are above all the latest iteration of particular class and racial relationships already deeply embedded in the fabric of Argentine society.

At the same time, in contrast to representations of these complexes as secluded, isolated and indifferent to their surroundings, the data generated through ethnographic research illustrate Nordelta's creative, productive and blurred borders, that are crossed on a daily basis by thousands of people, objects, languages and information. Their circulation is internally perceived as a threat to its purity and sovereignty, and to the project which gave rise to it. Consequently, a series of power mechanisms and technologies are deployed to reject, transform and/or normalise foreign bodies and all that is associated with them.

Lastly, the thesis proposes that gated communities are primarily motivated and guided by a particular discourse of truth, based on an ethics of comfort, which entails forms of conduct and self-discipline that seek to avoid stressful and potentially dangerous experiences, such as those arising from inter-class encounters. At the same time, a shared ethos promotes practices that are construed as positive steps towards well-being in relation to the individual, and to the private and domestic spheres (family, body, mind and soul).

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ACRONYMS

AFIP	<i>Administradora Federal de Ingresos Públicos</i> Federal Administrator of Public Funds
ARBA	<i>Agencia de Recaudación de la Provincia de Buenos Aires</i> Buenos Aires Province Collection Agency
AVN	<i>Asociación Vecinal Nordelta</i> Nordelta's Neighbours Association
CABA	<i>Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires</i> Buenos Aires Autonomous City
CECNOR	<i>Centro Comercial Nordelta</i> Nordelta's Shopping Centre. A business partnership composed by Grupo Desarrollista (80%) and Nordelta S.A. (20%), created to build and administrate Nordelta's commercial area.
CVN	<i>Consejo Vecinal Nordelta</i> Nordelta's Neighbour's Council
CEPAL	<i>Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe</i> ECLAC - UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
INDEC	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos</i> National Institute of Statistics and Censuses
GBA	<i>Gran Buenos Aires</i> Great Buenos Aires. Metropolitan area composed of 24 partidos of Buenos Aires Province plus Buenos Aires Capital City.
ND	Nordelta
PRN	<i>Proceso de Re-Organización Nacional</i> PNR - Process of National Re-Organisation

KEY SPANISH WORDS

<i>Bonaerense</i>	Gentilic for people from Buenos Aires Province.
<i>Barrio</i>	Generally equivalent to “neighbourhood”. When used in Nordelta, it refers to one of the 24 gated communities that compose the project.
Cabecita negra	[Little black head] Derogatory term used by elites and middle classes to talk about dark-skinned and lower class people.
Capital Federal	A.k.a. CABA or Buenos Aires. Argentina’s capital city, an autonomous district.
Cartoneros	[Cardboard people] People in a precarious situation who make their living by collecting and recycling materials from the streets.
Cheto / Concheto	A pejorative way of referring to rich people.
Ciudad-Pueblo	[City-Town] Nordelta’s nickname.
Consultatio S.A.	Argentine corporation owned by Eduardo Costantini, one of Nordelta’s two main partners.
Conurbano	24 of the 135 partidos composing Buenos Aires Province.
Countries	Native name for gated communities in Argentina.
Corralito	The freeze of Argentina’s banks by the government in 2001.
<i>Descamisados</i>	[The shirtless one] Nickname for General Perón’s supporters.
Dyopsia S.A.	Construction company owned by Astolfoni, one of Nordelta-s two main partners.
<i>El Interior</i>	For <i>Porteños</i> , the rest of the country.
<i>Gallaretas</i>	Nordelta’s most important local magazine. Takes its name from a popular local bird.
<i>Gaucha</i>	Nomadic or semi-nomadic population of mixed origin that relies on hunting wild cattle, and irregularly became employed as herders on the farming establishments. It is still used to describe certain qualities and a certain style of behaviour and dress; these qualities were honour, freedom, authenticity, and virility.

<i>Gran Buenos Aires</i>	Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, composed of CABA plus Conurbano provinces.
<i>Grasa</i>	While it literally translates as “fat”, the closest English term would be “tacky”, a derogatory term used by elites and middle classes to talk about people and practices they find distasteful.
<i>Groncho</i>	A derogative term for someone demonstrating “low class” behaviour.
<i>Localidad</i>	Urban settlement.
<i>Loteos Populares</i>	Public division of land for the poor.
<i>Malones</i>	Mapuche raids into Spanish, Chilean and Argentine territory.
<i>Mary-Go</i>	Private transportation company that serve Nordelta and other gated communities.
<i>Morochos</i>	Dark skinned. Derived from “moro” [moor].
<i>Nordelta S.A.</i>	Nordelta’s developer.
<i>Nordelteños</i>	Nordelta’s residents. A.k.a. <i>Propietarios</i> .
<i>Papeleta de conchabo</i>	Law preventing workers to leave their jobs before their contracts expired.
<i>Partido Justicialista</i>	Argentina’s major political party, founded by General Perón.
<i>Partido</i>	Two of its many meanings are pertinent to this research: i. A political party; ii. The local government in which a <i>Provincia</i> [Federal State] is divided.
<i>Piquetes</i>	A political protest in which people –called <i>piqueteros</i> – block main routes up for political demands.
<i>Piropo</i>	[Cat call] Unwanted verbal flirtatious harassment.
<i>Plata dulce</i>	[Sweet money] In 1976, the military junta tried to tackle hyper-inflation by over-valuing the <i>peso</i> , selling public industries, raising interest rates, fixing the exchange rate, and asking for international loans. Fresh resources were not used to develop the country or to strengthen national economy but to enrich middle and upper classes.
<i>Porteños</i>	People from Buenos Aires Autonomous City.

<i>Propietarios</i>	Nordelteños' native name for residents.
Provincia	Informal name for Buenos Aires Province, a Federal State.
<i>Rondín</i>	Armed private guard.
<i>Villa miseria</i>	Slum.
<i>Villero</i>	Derogatory term for people from slums.

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*Need is considered the cause why something came to be;
but in truth it is often merely an effect of what has come to be.*

– Nietzsche, 1974 [1882], p. 397

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I.

Three kilometres out of Nordelta's main access gate, bordering the city of General Pacheco, there is a modest bus stop. It is almost solely used by domestic workers heading to the different gated communities scattered in the area. No public bus line has ever been authorised to operate on the road –Nordelteños fiercely reject the idea–, therefore workers' predominant means of transportation to access the neighbourhoods are the private buses provided by Nordelta. On any given day, people have to wait on that stop for around thirty minutes, but sometimes it extends to an hour or even more. When one asks them, they say they would gladly move around by bicycle, on foot, or even on their own cars, but gated communities have put so many obstacles to do so, they rather not. Discriminatory practices also happen along the system, both at the bus stops and in buses. Residents riding on them from Buenos Aires frequently ask drivers not to make a stop, arguing the bus is already too packed, the workers are too loud, or their odour is too unpleasant. To create an even more harsh scenario, the buses' fares are ten times higher than in the public system, the infrastructure is deficient, and the constant surveillance of private guards make workers feel uncomfortable and uneasy about how things have been organised.

From time to time, domestic workers have felt so fed up with this situation they have tried to block road demanding better working conditions. Protests have never gotten very far, as the deployment of guards and police officers have managed to take things swiftly back to *status quo*. In November 2018, though, things turned out differently. After having yet another episode of a bus not stopping when and where it was supposed to, around 20 domestic workers organised a *piquete* [block traffic]. The episode reached a leftist newspaper, and their testimonies were quickly reproduced in a few websites around the country. I was living in Chile at the time, and because I had thoroughly researched the topic I decided to support the workers by posting a long chain of tweets in which I provided data collected during fieldwork. The purpose was to reflect on issues such as race, gender, space, elites and

boundaries through a series of interviews, videos, photos and maps. In a matter of hours, the thread escalated into the most commented topic of the day and week in Argentina. I was interviewed in different regional, national and even international media, contacted by journalists, called by politicians, and offered book deals, to my absolute bafflement.

The turmoil caused by the event, anchored in the domestic workers' courageous actions, managed what seemed impossible: in March 2019, just three months after it reached the news, the local government ordered Nordelta to open its gates and allow public transportation into its inner roads. The decision was strongly resisted by Nordelteños, who argued the State had no right to intervene and protested at the Intendencia, but the call was final. A few weeks later, they had to make peace with the first buses traversing their domains. Perhaps it was a small triumph for domestic workers, but nevertheless a radical shift in the ways the Argentine State had dealt with gated communities; until then, local and national authorities had remained mostly impassive over their discriminatory practices, their sovereignty claims, or their attempts to privatise public functions.

One can only hope that this brief episode, along with the heightened awareness of public opinion regarding gated communities' privileges and actions, open up a new course that may lead to more inclusive policies and novel forms of spatial arrangement. One cannot sufficiently stress how important this issue is. We live in times where ultra-right politics are making a return, and intolerance, xenophobia and hate are being used by different actors to position their exclusionary agendas. At the same time, in Argentina, a set of neoliberal policies have increased racial and gender vulnerability, while speculation with deregulated land has increased the fragmentation of communities, territories and public life. I feel privileged to have made a small contribution with this research, improving a few people's lives, but the task is far from being over. It is in this context that I submit this thesis, with the hope of further collaborating with the discussions about space, citizenship, elites, and the intersectionality of gender, class and race in contemporary Argentina.

II.

Argentines in general, and *Porteños*¹ in particular, are quite proud of their cultural diversity. They do not waste any chance to slip that, by 1920, half of the city's inhabitants were born in foreign lands, or to repeat that, while Mexicans descend from Aztecs and Peruvians from Incas, they 'descend from ships.' The term '*crisol de razas*' (racial melting pot) has become commonplace to describe the country, and their different European cultural backgrounds are frequently used to explain people's fondness for urban life, admiration for cosmopolitanism and devoutness to friendship. Many authors have argued that these claims are indeed sustained by a strong history of migration and urbanisation, an elevated rate of school attendance, an early incorporation of women into the labour market, and a strong urban legislation (Germani, 1955; Torrado, 1992), which in sum managed to achieve relatively high levels of socio-territorial equality (Silvestri and Gorelik, 2005). However, while it may be true that Argentina produced an environment where social differences were not as significant as in other neighbouring countries (Vidal-Koppman, 2002), these differences did exist. At least since its independence from Spain in 1816, nationhood has been defined in unequal terms, and symbolic boundaries have been used to produce a vast network of power that nurtures a racialised hierarchy of citizenry. Argentina may have been more equal than its neighbours, but that equality has only operated among those accepted as such; in particular, *white* Europeans and their alleged descendants.² The rest of the population has been systematically excluded from the national project, or at least left stranded in various liminal states.

During the first two centuries in the country's history, a large number of these 'proper citizens' gave meaning to their existence by living a public and political life. They could invest

¹ Buenos Aires' gentilic is *porteño*, while the gentilic for people from Buenos Aires Province –the conurbation of the capital city– is *bonaerense*.

² This distinction is grounded in a highly stable Spanish social structure that can be tracked down to the *Limpieza de sangre* [purity of blood], an ethnic hierarchical system established by the Inquisition to separate *pure* population from those with Jewish or Islamic blood. Once in America, the system was accommodated, dividing the population in: Pure race, called Spaniards or *peninsulares* (born in Spain), *criollos* (from Spaniard descendants but born in America), *indios* or *naturales* (American Indians) and *negros* or *moros* (Africans and African descendants, mainly slaves). Between the top two categories and the bottom two there were 16 'mixed races', which comprised different combinations and were granted different status and privileges according to their position. For more information, see: Dunbar-Ortiz, R., 1997; Martínez, M. E., 2008; and Navarro García, L., 1989.

some of their time on their private businesses, families or their artistic *oeuvre*, but the core of a 'good life' only could be achieved in the public sphere, working for the greatness of the country. This governing *ethos* conducted their lives up until the end of the 20th century, when practices associated with nature, individual transcendence, purity and well-being began to slowly overlay, appropriate, and shape their subjectivities. New discourses of truth were stated, and concepts like body, soul, society, family and countryside were re-qualified. Nobody noticed it at first. Yoga gyms opened, international NGOs concerned with well-being gained supporters, diets changed, and when the late nineties brought an acute sensation of insecurity, a large part of this population changed the city's neighbourhoods for gated communities in the suburbs. From 1992 to 2000, the population of such compounds doubled every two years (Carman, 2000), occupying over 30,000 Ha of former rural land. Nowadays, over 600 high-income and exclusive residential complexes occupy Buenos Aires' suburban areas, concentrating 91% of the country's gated communities (Girola, 2007, p. 369).

With their arrival to impoverished areas, the scale of segregation changed and households with considerable socio-economical differences got spatially close (Pérez, 2012; Sabatini, Cáceres and Cerda, 2001). Communities that were almost reciprocally invisible came to develop new knowledge about each other, and sooner than later new mechanisms of control and surveillance were produced and deployed to maintain social distinctions. At the same time, privileged newcomers began to replace what was left of their cosmopolitan lives in exchange for a suburban style, substituting the public for the private, diversity for similarity, urban for nature, and the collective for the individual (Torres, 2001; Janoschka, 2002b). It was not, I have to clarify, that they completely replaced one way of life –urban, cosmopolitan, pedestrian– with its opposite; by moving in, they chose to continue and radicalise a set of practices already present in their lives; practices which had slowly been moving from the periphery of their routines to the core of their system of thought.

Until the nineties, social differences and polarisation existed in Argentina but were systematically hidden. Gated communities made them visible and unavoidable. The discourse of insurmountable differences was institutionalised, and a country that at least symbolically praised diversity, started to be perceived as a tribal society; one that "couples

solidarity with others like yourself, to aggression against those who differ” (Sennett, 2012, p. 3). In a context of increasing labour precariousness, de-industrialisation, unemployment and social fragmentation, the image of a few selected people living in secluded ‘private gardens’ provoked a strong resentment, which crystallised in the comparison Carman made between gated communities and the epicurean utopia, for they both share an apparently unattached position towards the fate of the rest (2000; also Davis, 1990).³

Going no further, Svampa (2001) claimed these new compounds were the spatial materialisation of an already existing social polarisation. In a country divided in two, she argued, these private walls came to divide an *inside*, perceived by the people who live there as “a kingdom of comfort and security”, from an *outside*, “a chaotic and dangerous world” (2001, p. 25)⁴. Those living *inside* were the *winners* of an unfair socio-economical model established during the nineties, while those left *outside* were the *losers*. This idea falls not very far from that of the *dual city* (Castells, 1989), as they both assert that late-capitalist metropolises have been socially polarised by economic and political forces (see also Harvey, 1996). Such binary vision has dominated urban studies and public opinion for some time, up to the point that it would not raise an eyebrow to say –as many have– that due to gated communities, the suburbs today are shaped like a ‘sea of poverty scattered with islands of wealth’ (Janoschka, 2002b; Arizaga, 2005; Borsdorf and Hidalgo, 2009). In sum, a fragmented (Crot, 2006) or a micro-fragmented geography (Pírez, 2012) that has come to replace the organic and inclusive features that supposedly defined the Latin American traditional city (Prévôt-Schapira, 2001).

Based on ethnographic data produced in Nordelta, Argentina’s largest gated community, this thesis comes to offer three novel ways to understand how elites, racism and residential

³ Although the figure of the Stoics, summarised by Nietzsche as those who “desire as little pleasure as possible, in order to get as little displeasure as possible” (1974, p. 86), does not fully conform to that of gated communities’ residents.

⁴ These claims have probably been much more aggressive in Latin America than in the United States, as in the latter the hinterlands were barely occupied, while in Latin America they were inhabited by slums of low-income households. Even today, Buenos Aires’ Province shows worse social conditions than the central city: Over 50% of its population live below the poverty line (Thuiller, 2005a), while in the inner city that number rises only to 12,6% (DGE, 2006).

segregation are entangled. In the first place, it calls us not to be dazzled by what appears to be entirely new and keep our eyes on that which persists. Rather than explaining gated communities as a radical new way of organising society, fashioned by capitalism and neoliberal policy, I propose they should be understood as the latest iteration of a long chain of power mechanisms devised to reproduce social hierarchies, and to defend society against internal and external enemies. In other words, whilst they are indeed a new spatial arrangement created under a series of conditions set by neoliberal policies, such as the privatisation of large sectors of land of labour, and the growing levels of social inequality, they are genealogically founded in symbolic and social boundaries already embedded in the fabric of Argentine society. From concentration camps for the indigenous population to the planned attraction of Europeans to elevate local race; from digging a 350 km trench to separate civilisation from barbarism, to hiding housing projects behind walls, the country has never ceased to define its legitimate citizenry upon whiteness, leaving behind whomever does not fit such a parameter.

The second proposal comes to question the idea that gated communities are ‘islands of wealth in seas of poverty’; entities completely secluded from their precarious surroundings. On the contrary, I will provide data that reveal how creative, productive and blurred their borders are. Nordelta’s accesses are crossed every day by over 20,000 cars, 40 buses, 2,000 students, 2,000 guests and 7,000 workers, who carry different objects, languages, microbes, bodies and information in and out of the compound. Their circulation is internally perceived as a menace to the integrity of the project, and a series of mechanisms and technologies have been put in place whether to reject, transform or normalise foreign elements. Focusing on these circulations and procedures, this dissertation attempts to describe the ways in which the idea of a sanctuary is manufactured and reproduced. Guiding questions will be: what elements are granted access to the neighbourhood and how; which ones are forbidden; which should not leave the compound, and what are the normalisation processes things have to go through in order to be accepted. The analysis will also examine the tactics of resistance devised and deployed by residents, workers and visitors in order to deal, avoid, re-appropriate and/or resist such mechanisms.

The third assertion relates to the most general question this research raises, which is what kind of subjectivities are produced in and by gated communities. I argue that these scenarios can be understood as power apparatuses which aim is to foster a comfortable life, and that at their core there is a particular discourse of truth, which is an ethics of comfort, that previous elites did not possess. It is way of conducting themselves which seeks to avoid stressful and harmful experiences, like interclass interactions, while promoting positive practices related to well-being, such as living in a natural environment, with a healthy family, and in/with/through fit bodies and serene minds.

This chapter is the introduction to the thesis, and it is divided in four parts. The first one presents the case study, the second submits the methods report, and the third exposes the major theoretical standpoints and discussions. The fourth and final section provides this thesis outline.

1.1. CASE STUDY: NORDELTA

Nordelta is a gated community located in Buenos Aires Province,⁵ 30 km north from the capital city (fig. 1.1). It was designed and financed by Nordelta S.A., a business partnership created by the engineer Julián Astolfoni and the business tycoon Eduardo Costantini. Local authorities approved its master plan in 1994, and its construction began in 1998. In order to build it, over 1,600 hectares of swamps and marshes were radically transformed into an exclusive and paradisiacal suburban landscape⁶, (fig 1.2) where over 100,000 people could be accommodated. In December 2001, just a few days before a spiralling social crisis left the country in turmoil, its first houses were put on the market. At the present time, its residential areas hold a growing population of 50,000 upper middle and upper class residents, while its non-residential areas offer over 200 hectares of lakes and ponds, golf courses, soccer fields,

⁵ Buenos Aires Province, or just “Provincia”, is the most populated and largest of the 24 administrative territories in which the country is divided. With a surface of 307,571 km², it currently holds a population of 15,000,000 inhabitants. It is divided in 24 *partidos*, being Tigre the one where Nordelta is located. *Provincia* surrounds the Central City of Buenos Aires, but it does not include it.

⁶ Its construction required to move over 24 million m³ of land, elevating the terrain in an average of 1,7 metres. As a result, a central lake of 180 HA was built (Ríos, 2009, p. 106). To get an idea of its size, Nordelta is bigger than Vatican City, Gibraltar or the London Borough of Greenwich.

a Catholic church, a Jewish synagogue, an NGO, five private schools, a university, two dozen semi-private swimming pools, and running trails

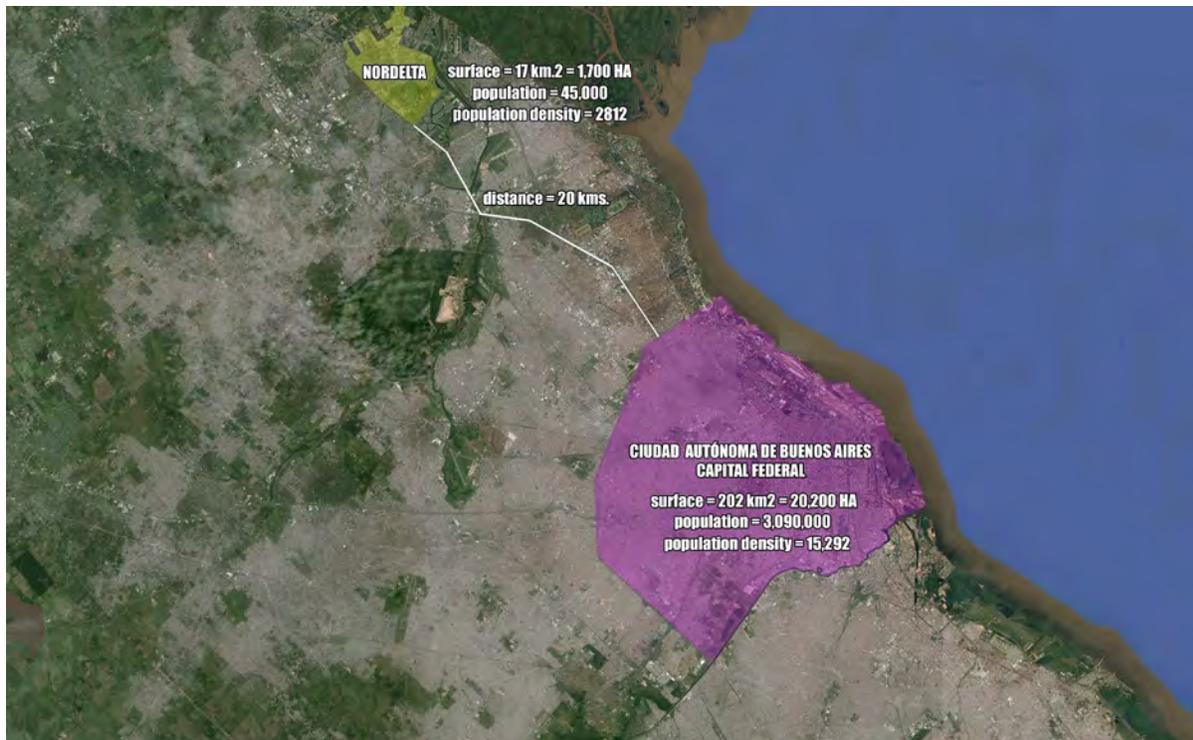


Fig. 1.1. Buenos Aires Capital City in light pink (right), and Nordelta in light yellow (upper left). Produced by the author over a Google Map image.

A hundred meters from the northern gate lies a semi-public commercial area, built and administrated by Nordelta S.A. Its axis is a large shopping mall around which a cinema, restaurants, a petrol station, a medical centre, a car wash, a top-end supermarket, an international hotel, a university, a medical centre, and a promenade with restaurants and bars are scattered (fig. 1.3). Further, the area is constantly being enhanced, with new parts being regularly added, which is discursively used in bulletins and advertising as a sign of Nordelta's growth and economic health. Overall, it is the area's prominent social hub; an exciting and safe place, attractive to investors, and appealing to those who live in the dozen gated communities spread around.



Fig. 1.2. Nordelta's urbanisation process. (1) 2003; (2) 2004; (3) 2008; (4) 2014.
Source: Google Earth.



Fig. 1.3. Map of Nordelta's Commercial Area.
Produced by the author over a Google Map image.

During the day, the commercial area is primarily visited by residents coming from different gated communities, who meet there to have coffee, catch a movie, shop, or just to walk around doing the ancient urban art of 'seeing and being seen'. At night most of the area closes and social activities concentrate in three spots: i. the restaurants at the bay (#1 in fig. 1.3); ii. the cinema (#7), primarily used by teenagers and young adults; and iii. McDonald's (#5) and its nearby area, which becomes a liminal area where pre-teens and teenagers gather to chat, flirt, and misbehave in ways they could not in the compound.

Of the over 600 gated communities that have been built in the suburbs, Nordelta is the only one that has a strong discourse of self-sufficiency and autonomy. The place has been widely advertised as *ciudad-pueblo* [city-town], a nickname that highlights the dual condition of having the amenities of a city⁷ while nourishing the quietness and security of a small community. Overall, a place that seeks to provide its dwellers with a sophisticated and pure environment where to be safe from the many threats of the outside.

Nordelta is not a traditional gated community but rather a mega-project composed of 24 gated communities called *barrios* (fig. 1.4). To urbanise the area, Nordelta S.A. followed the strategy of placing them in the market in a sequential and cumulative order, starting from the more expensive *barrio* to the cheapest one. In that way, richer households were attracted first with top-end plots until the market saturated. Their presence facilitated a second stage in which lower classes were attracted with smaller houses or apartments. Such strategy would not work the other way around.

Each one of these 24 *barrios* has slightly different features, varying in plots sizes, amenities, rooms per house and architectural style, which allow residents and real estate agents to sort them out according to lifestyles and value. This order has a symbolical counterpart, in which most *barrios* have been given a nickname according to their prestige. For example,

⁷ Almost every official brochure includes the same phrase: "Nordelta is the first city-village of Argentina. An ideal space where to enjoy the river, the green and pure air. With every city amenity, such as housing, education, health, business centre, shopping centre, Sports, recreation, and with the tranquillity and safety of a village" (sic).

Portezuelo, the cheapest one, is commonly known as 'The Bronx', while La Isla, the most exclusive one, is referred to as 'Beverly Hills'.

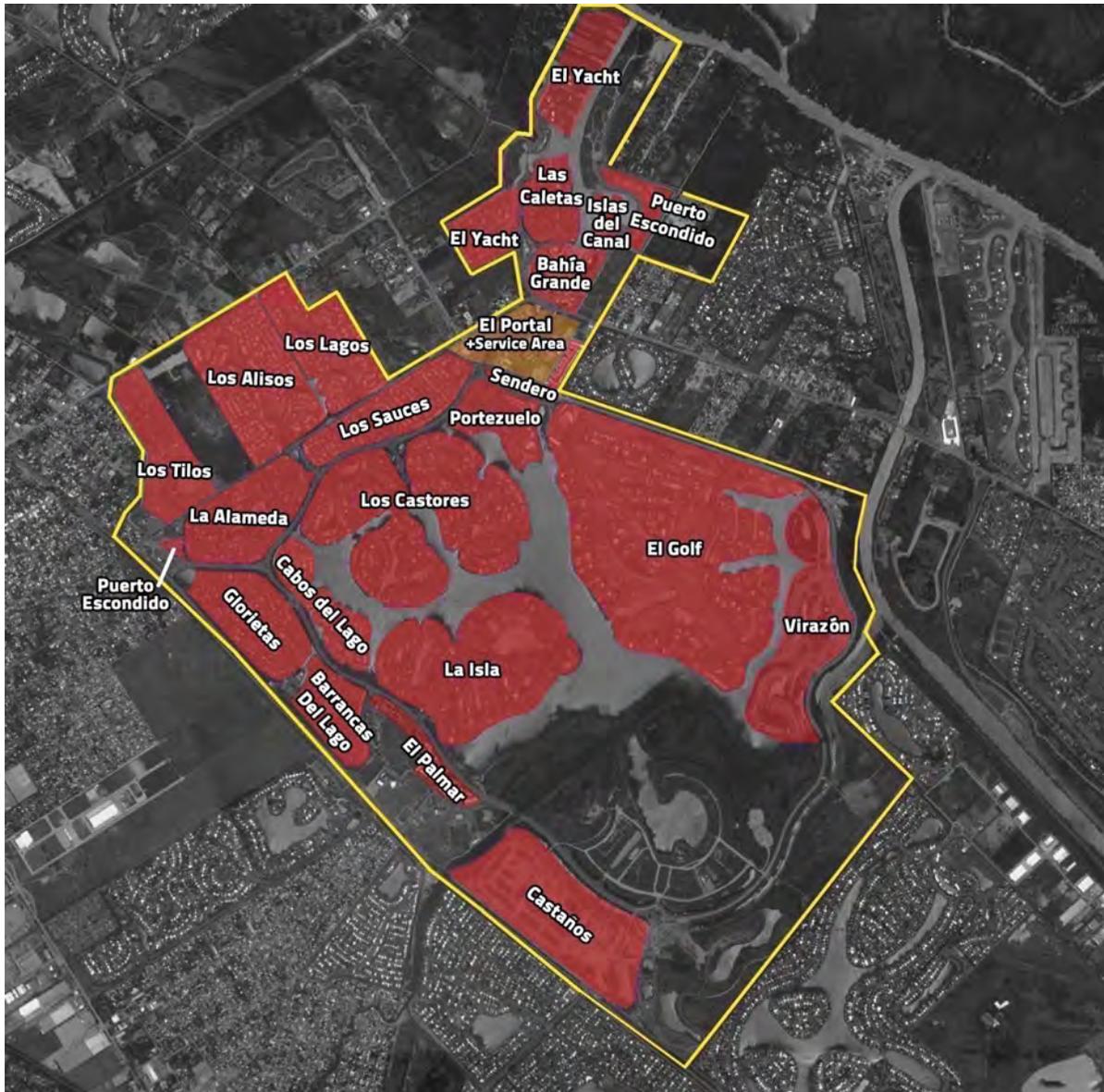


Fig. 1.4. Nordelta's subdivision in 24 *barrios*.
Produced by the author over a Google Map image.

Nordelta's *barrios* are legally organised as civil societies, every *propietario* owns one stock share. A General Shareholders Assembly is held once a year per *barrio*, and a Board composed of a neighbours' representative plus two Nordelta S.A. representatives is in charge of taking executive decisions. Being each *barrio* an independent society, there is some room

for different sets of rules⁸, but none can be moved very far from Nordelta's encompassing legislation. Pairing the juridical with the judicial system, each *barrio* has a Disciplinary Court, in charge of judging transgressions and applying sanctions to *propietarios*: These may go from a warning to a fine, and even to banishment⁹, and if residents do not agree with the ruling, they can appeal to AVN, who has the final word.

Nordelta is day-to-day managed by *Asociación Vecinal Nordelta*, AVN [Nordelta's Neighbours Association], a key actor of the urbanisation's social life.¹⁰ AVN is formally in charge of providing and administrating different services within the area, including security, building general maintenance, energy, water and waste management, infrastructure, sport facilities, pest control, outdoor green spaces, and handling community issues, among other things.

AVN is divided in five departments: safety, services, housing, administration, and environment. The institution is run by a board, whose members were initially named by Nordelta S.A. After years of complaints from residents, two seats were opened to representatives. Today, the board of directors is constituted by seven representatives: two from the residents, one from the non-resident areas (medical centre, shopping centre and schools), and four from Nordelta S.A. Thus, the majority of the votes are still under the developer's control¹¹. In 2005, Nordelta S.A. allowed residents to create the *Consejo Vecinal Nordelta CVN* [Nordelta's Neighbours' Council], which comprised a representative from every *barrio* (24) plus one from the schools, the shopping centre, and the medical centre. Its purpose is to advise AVN, even though their decisions are not mandatory.

⁸ For example, two of the *barrios* have decided not to ask visitors to open their car's trunks when arriving at the gate.

⁹ Sanctions have to be paid by residents, even if the transgressions are committed by a guest. When transgressions happen on the common area, sanctions are imposed by AVN.

¹⁰ They run a website at www.ndnet.com.ar, where they offer services and information. It is widely visited by residents, and a number of sections are reserved to them, using a password-protected system. In it, within the published documents, there is a contract in which AVN defines itself as the coexistence coordinator [*coordinador de convivencia*].

¹¹ The control of key positions is enhanced by a certain endogamy in the administration, with Costantini's relatives highly involved in it: a political relative is in charge of the law buffet that represents Nordelta S.A., his former wife owns a real-estate firm that sell plots and houses within Nordelta; the main Club-house and the official magazine are also managed by relatives.

Sorting gated communities according to the increasing level of access control, Luymes distinguished four kinds: i. Symbolic gates at the entrance; ii. Unguarded control gates; iii. 24 hrs guarded control gate and gatehouse; iv. Double gated neighbourhood within gated community (1997, p. 198). Following that taxonomy Nordelta would fall into the latter, as entering the main gates only gives access to a semi-private area, and to enter each *barrio* one has to pass a second invigilated access. This means that, even if you live in Nordelta, you cannot freely visit other *barrios* unless invited by a *propietario*.

Regarding surveillance, the venture's entire perimeter is enclosed by a high fence, and in some sections by a tall concrete wall. Technologies deployed include security guards, barriers, computerised databases, movement sensors, high powered lightning system and security cameras. Configuring what Luymes called a "double gate security system" (1997), each of the *barrios* within Nordelta has an independent gated entrance as well¹², secured with non-disruptive 'natural' fences, such as thickly planted shrubberies, sunken ditches and streams. There is not one security company in operation but several, as each *barrio* may hire its own. AVN also employs professional services to secure inner common areas, the perimeter, and the access gates. As some of these companies can be hired by more than one actor, there are currently just three in operation, a figure that changes frequently because guards are usually blamed when a crime occurs, and the entire company gets replaced.

Guards are hired to monitor residents and visitors, to prevent crimes, and to keep workers under control. Every day a *professional army* of 5,000 workers enters Nordelta:¹³ 'conditional others' whose job is to keep the suburban dream alive. Their presence is so ubiquitous that the neighbourhood's landscape is day to day overflowed and almost solely filled with the silhouettes of domestic workers, gardeners, schoolteachers, builders, tennis coaches, pool cleaners, delivery boys, taxi drivers and guards, whose very presence contributes to weaken

¹² Except for the two main entrances, protected by guards, barriers and CCR's, Nordelta's entire perimeter is enclosed by a fenced wall. However, once you manage to get permission to cross that first checkpoint, you can only access the common areas of the project; that is, main streets and areas of recreation and services, such as the ponds, tennis courts and schools. To access a particular house, you have to go through a second checkpoint, corresponding to each *barrio*.

¹³ Plus 3,500 live-in domestic workers.

the promise of seclusion.

When analysing the influence of gated communities in Pilar, a suburban municipality where these projects were massively built during the nineties, Thuillier found that: “the poorest residents of the periphery come from all the metropolitan areas to where gated communities concentrate, looking for jobs” (2005a). According to figures given by INDEC,¹⁴ Pilar’s population grew at a rate of 61% during that decade –89,000 new dwellers–, while these new compounds hosted only 15,000 of them (Thuillier, 2005a). The explanation is rather simple: each house creates 1,8 permanent jobs, adding another 60 jobs per house during construction time (Vidal-Koppman, 2000).

However, despite this fruitful exchange, the illusion, narrative and desire of isolation keeps on being of utmost importance for residents, who have followed a two-pronged strategy to deal with transgressions. Towards the outside,¹⁵ they have negotiated with the public institutions to achieve partial insulation and sovereignty; towards the inside, they have produced a number of mechanisms and technologies to regulate life within the compound, maintaining control not only over residents but also over visitors and employees, sanctioning transgressions and producing specific subjectivities. In that way, Nordelta is able to present itself as a suitable environment where to live a comfortable life.

1.2. METHODS REPORT

The ethnographic fieldwork of this thesis was conducted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I lived between January 2008 and November 2009. I returned three other times to the city for a period of two weeks each, in 2010, 2011 and 2012. Additional data was produced while living in Chile since the end of 2009. This section presents a methodological report divided in two parts: the first one provides an account of field sites, access, and methods, while the

¹⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos [National Institute of Statistics and Censuses].

¹⁵ It was not at all unusual to hear, from Nordelta’s inhabitants themselves, comparisons with “The Truman Show”. Furthermore, one of the kids I met, 12 years old, used to make with his mouth –just for fun- the sound of a bubble popping every time he had to leave the complex, as if “they were going out of this bubble”.

second presents general considerations, and ethical and safety issues.

1.2.1. Field sites and participants

After my arrival and for over a year, I tried to conduct ethnographic work inside Nordelta, along with its families and workers, but I was consistently rejected, unheard and even threatened. I was unable to perform almost every single one of the methodologies I had planned, but in the end, I found different ways to build stable relationships and establish rapport with *propietarios*. I was able to access Nordelta, conduct participant observation and in-depth interviews in over a dozen houses in different *barrios*. I also carried out research in the surrounding areas and in Buenos Aires Capital City, working alongside several relevant actors to the study. I did historical and archival consultation, while regularly following press and social media, understanding the latter as an integral part of their everyday life. Summing up, I undertook fieldwork in varied, spread areas, each with different actors and logics that demanded separated strategies of engagement. Therefore, next I present a non-conclusive list of those sites, alongside a description of how access was negotiated, and what methods and how were they applied.

(1) Nordelta's surrounding area

As in most gated communities, Nordelta's residents and administrators are highly concerned with safety and crime. One of the reasons they seek to maintain a strict access to the compound, and a tight surveillance over its immediate environ. The entire project is enclosed by fenced walls and protected by guards, barriers, CCTV cameras, dogs, movement sensors, and a dozen other mechanisms set to control people's movements and behaviours. Furthermore, the place has been designed with a double-fenced system, which means that passing through the first checkpoint, via any of its three gates, only grants access to a semi-public area and not to any of the inner 24 *barrios* that compose the project, which are guarded by secondary gates and guards.

This scenario made it very hard for me to access either Nordelta's semi-public area,

informally called *La Troncal*, or any of its *barrios* without being invited in by residents, locally known as *propietarios* ['owners']. To gain access, my first idea was to look for a place to rent, but they were quite beyond my student's budget. In that situation, during the first eight months I spent most of my time wandering through the surroundings, on the working-class' neighbourhoods of General Pacheco, south of Nordelta, and Benavídez, just outside the compound's northern gate. I met and engaged there with a range of actors, practices, and situations related to Nordelta, which offered me the first look into how the circulation of people, information and objects in and out of the compound were organised. Some of these actors are localised in fig. 1.5: Nordelta Foundation, where the gated community organises workshops and courses for the area's poorest population; CEPAN, a local health centre; Benavídez Parish, where a job centre for domestic workers operated; and ETILPLAST, a local recycling cooperative.



Fig. 1.5. Nordelta's surroundings: key spots.
Produced by the author over a Google Map image.

These two neighbourhoods –Pacheco and Benavídez– are part of a large continuum of urban settlements populated by the end of the 1920s, during an acute phase of rural-urban migration. Mostly inhabited by working class families, their cityscape looks like any of the

country's intermediate city, with residential one-storey buildings, quiet streets, and a mixed central axis that concentrates public services, shops and amenities. Within General Pacheco lies Las Tunas, a working class settlement composed of two areas: a formal, consolidated quarter of public housing projects, and an informal area of shantytowns. Las Tunas has been sponsored by Fundación Nordelta, one of the gated community's NGO, which conducts social programs with a focus in undernourishment, employment, breastfeeding, and literacy support.

I went to these places regularly twice or three times a week, and every visit lasted for about four hours. Through informal meetings and observations, I managed to engage with taxi drivers, school teachers, pool cleaners, gardeners, garbage collectors, private guards, police officers, shopkeepers, municipal officers, NGO agents, union representatives and domestic workers; actors connected, in one way or another, to the gated community. I had hundreds of informal conversations with them, and my field notes contain numerous entries of these range of actors, spaces, and situations, such as the different practices performed in space, and the atmospheric features of every sector, with indicators such as lighting, signage, materials, sounds, objects, and the like.

(2) Pacheco's bus stop

Three km south of Nordelta, on the outskirts of General Pacheco, there is a bus stop. Guarded by private guards posted at a sentry stall, the place is mostly used by workers to catch private buses towards the compound. As space is highly controlled inside Nordelta, and also because buses pass just every once in a while, it is the main place where domestic workers share information, create networks, and organise themselves to improve their labour conditions. I visited the place frequently and spent hours sitting on the bench, but it was not easy to build a steady relation with them.

First, because they were under constant surveillance by Nordelta's private guards and I did not want to jeopardise their jobs. Secondly, because in Argentina –as in many places– being approached by a stranger at a bus stop, particularly a male, is not well received. Nordelta is

a highly engendered place, by day almost solely inhabited by women, and dominated by the discourse of safety and the menacing status of strangers. Many times I felt placed in such positions, and trying to navigate through these issues I essayed two successful strategies: one, I decided to spend hours sitting at the stop, which made me a sort of natural informant of the area, being regularly asked about timetables and bus frequencies; two, at certain point I started visiting the field with different women, usually my pregnant wife or a close friend, and they were the ones initiating and leading the conversation with domestic workers. That factor completely changed my fieldwork experience and helped me to build steady and friendly relationships with them, moving from casual chats to be invited to their places and share our life stories.

There was another unexpected episode, that helped me gain workers' trust at that spot. In *Notes on the Balinese cockfight* (1973), Geertz narrates the story of when he and his wife had to run away from the police when an illegal cockfight pit was raided. He believed that sharing the event with the villagers caused them to accept him, and changed their attitude towards him. My own 'illegal cockfight episode' happened at Pacheco's bus stop six months after beginning fieldwork, when I felt a saturation point was reached and decided to stir things up a bit. It was a Monday morning, and I decided to take my camera out for the first time, using it as a mechanism to agitate reality and provoke reactions that were part of the set of relations that configured the place, but were usually made invisible. After placing the camera, the reaction was immediate: I was quickly approached and threatened by private guards, and a couple of minutes later by a policeman, sent by the former. To experience that situation in front of almost a hundred domestic workers and bus drivers completely changed the way they saw me. After that day, they knew who I was and became friendlier and more talkative. The event made me particularly close to Carlos, the owner of Mary-Go, the private bus company that served Nordelta and other nearby gated communities; and Gisella and Narda, two domestic workers I visited and interviewed in the following months.

(3) Nordelta's commercial area

For the entire period of my fieldwork I visited the commercial area, mainly during the days

but also on a few nights. I conducted participant observation and informal interviews with *propietarios*, workers, and a few visitors not coming from gated communities. I also engaged with the shopping centre personnel, as well as shop owners, real estate agents, and people from the medical centre, the supermarket, McDonald's, and a few restaurants. Additionally, I took photos of the area, recorded its soundscape, and used my video camera to produce a series of situations in which the distinction between the public and the private got questioned. At last, eight of the residents who more closely collaborated with my research agreed to give me a guided tour around the area, which I also taped.

(4) Inside Nordelta

Before moving to Argentina, I knew a few people in Nordelta that could act as gatekeepers, smoothing my entrance and positioning me among residents. The results upon coming there, however, were demolishing, as after months of phone calls, emails, and failed visits, all I had left were fragile relationships with a couple of residents, and a hundred pages with frustrated field notes. I was consistently rejected, unheard, and even threatened by *propietarios*, private guards and the police, which led me to think there was no chance of finishing this research. In words of Scott, I felt "filled with the mixture of elation, depression, missteps, and drudgery that any anthropologist will recognize" (1985, p. xviii). I have essayed some ideas on why it was so hard to engage with *propietarios* based upon different data produced in the field. It is not my intention to mention them out of any other reason than because they helped me comprehend how Nordelta works, what are these people's aspirations, and via which mechanisms they are trying to achieve them.

I want to begin mentioning resident's social position. Privileged families are usually disinclined to collaborate in researches (Mikecz, 2012), feeling uncomfortable with being asked personal questions by a third unknown party (Thuesen, 2001). Even more, when one manages to work with them, they execute a series of mechanisms in order to keep the situation under their control. Probably everyone does, one may say, regardless of their position, but "whereas in non-elite studies researchers have the position of 'experts', in elite studies those who are being studied are 'in the know'" (Mikecz, 2012, p. 483). They are what

Spradley (1979) called 'encultured informants', aware of their position, reflective about their own culture, and resourceful enough to negotiate different aspects of the research. As such, it was not rare for me to feel patronised and scrutinised by residents, and whenever a hard topic arose, the idea of having my access cut hovered over my head. Sabot eloquently summarises the pulse of my field notes when he writes the following about elite's reactions to researchers:

The right behaviour to adopt is: firstly, if possible, try to postpone the appointment, hoping that (s)he will lose patience. Secondly, if the stubborn researcher insists on having an interview, receive him/her very politely, with all regard due to his/her position, but avoid giving any written documents (without speaking of confidential documents) which could be used in a distorted way, as academics are renowned for doing. Thirdly, be careful about what one says by adopting a stereotypical formal language; avoiding all the sensitive current events; cultivating ambiguity in order to confuse the mind of the researcher, and never complaining about anything or anyone, because every word spoken can boomerang back and cause serious damage (Sabot, 1999).

Additionally, these were families who have chosen to live in a protected environment. For them, anything coming from the outside –including me– was first and foremost seen as a source of danger. As a complete stranger, I was treated as a threatening figure, or at least as one hard to classify. I will provide rich data about this condition throughout the upcoming chapters.

Another reason that explains their reluctance to participate is that, since the 2001 crisis, a general concern with safety and crime spread in Buenos Aires, particularly among privileged families. The country, at the time, suffered a few widely exposed kidnap cases that amplified that notion. Thus, they got scared and agitated, and urging their exile to the suburbs. This concern was informed to the guards and other workers as well, so although no kidnapping had actually happened at Nordelta, I was constantly approached by private guards asking what I was doing there –and that happened even at the shopping centre or at Pacheco's bus stop, outside Nordelta. Despite my careful explanations, it was not at all strange to be asked to leave, arguing I could be collecting data to kidnapping or hurting someone.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons, another probable cause of their suspicions is that

previous to my arrival two authors had published books about Nordelta, and residents felt betrayed for giving their trust and friendship to people who later wrote things they deemed 'exaggerated', 'partial' and 'unjustified'. *Propietarios* were not eager to receive me, and when they did, they got defensive and invested their time to justify their way of life. It may be relevant to add that even before these books were launched, *propietarios* felt unease by the level of hatred they were receiving from the rest of society, provoked –among other reasons– because the neighbourhood opened for business in December 2001, the very same month the country was passing through one of the most dramatic crises of the 20th century. Seeing this rich and exclusive paradise advertised in TV and newspapers, while thousands were living on the streets or suffering from hunger and unemployment, created an acute resentment among the Argentine towards gated communities in general, and Nordelta in particular. Nordelteños became the target of public loathe. Aware of this stigma, they took care of protecting themselves, as elites tend to do worldwide; in Fumanti's words:

“While elite status inevitably brings to its members prestige, recognition and privileges, at the same time it often attracts criticism and suspicion of the elites' modus operandi. For these reasons the elites tend to keep an aura of secrecy around their activities, thus limiting access to their social milieu by outsiders” (2004, p. 1).

Conducting research on elites and upper middle-class groups has never been easy for Social Sciences (Shore, 2004), but three elements of self-presentation helped me overcome this situation: first, my social class. I come from an upper middle-class family and, furthermore, my wife used to live in a wealthy Chilean gated community, which was a piece of information I commonly mentioned to get their sympathy and recognition. Secondly, I always cared to mention that I was conducting my research for a PhD based in London, which in Nordelta was received like a magical word. Being London a place associated with prestige, class, manners, and a proper way of doing things, just the sole mention of it opened a few doors. Thirdly, although it brought me a few hard times, summing up I believe that my being Chilean helped me out. Among the common Argentine, being Chilean is not highly valued, but among the elite it is, being acknowledged and even praised for our 'economic success', and for our right-wing dictatorship, a topic commonly mentioned by *propietarios*. Further, as Sabot mentions, people tend to mentally prepare themselves to welcome a foreigner, and to show

the best side of their personality: “They [are] more friendly, patient, and ready to give documents than they used to be with [a local researcher]” (1999, p. 4). Comparing notes with Florencia Girola, an Argentine researcher who also had Nordelta as a case study, we concluded that such thing clearly played in my favour. Social class, a London based PhD, and being Chilean were personal and professional credentials relevant to Nordelteños, that contributed to reduce my threatening condition. There was always a barrier between them and I, but despite this ‘chain-linked fence’ (Liebow, 1967), we were able to look at each other and spend time together.

Despite these difficulties, during fieldwork I managed to engage with residents through the following means:

(a) Three personal contacts served as gatekeepers. One was Ana, a relative who lived there for two years. She put a word for me with her friends, and their reception was surprisingly good. However, whenever I tried to make or to confirm an appointment, the scenario shifted, and I was fobbed off at every turn. After many attempts, I only managed to interview three of them, and conduct ethnographic work with one, who invited me over a few times. A second personal contact was a very distant relative who lived in Nordelta’s *barrio* of Portezuelo. I went to his place a number of times, and through him and his wife I met two other couples. At last, my third personal way of accessing Nordelta was through one of my sisters in law, who met in Europe two teenagers who lived in Castores. They received me at their place, and also put me in contact with other residents.

(b) While living in Buenos Aires I got involved in academic activities, and contacted Argentine scholars working in the field. Some of them I knew beforehand, and three of them were particularly helpful. They knew people in Nordelta, and through them I was able to contact residents of different ages in different *barrios*. Besides that, academic life opened another door for me. I was teaching an MA course at Universidad Torcuato di Tella and two of my students had contacts in Nordelta. Through them I was able to reach two of my key informants in Nordelta, and through them, I met and managed to work with several other residents.

(c) I was lucky enough to develop a rich social life in Buenos Aires. I made friends with social scientists, artists, filmmakers and scholars, and some of them had family or acquaintances at Nordelta.

Through these different avenues and snowball sampling, I managed to interview 39 residents and build a stable relationship with eight families. I was respectful and open with them, avoiding moral judgement and exoticisation. In open interviews I kept a list of topics and questions to discuss and, in general terms, I moved from descriptive interviews to more complex, intimate and critical ones. In terms of households, I tried to select a variety of family structures, employment conditions, and to keep gender quotas. I taped all interviews with an audio recorder, and some of them in video, always asking for their consent. In fact, while Mikecz (2002) states elites preferred to be interviewed without being recorded, my experience showed different: they asked me to be on record, so they would have a proof of what they said, and their opinions could not be misused.

I asked residents for guided tours around the area, and they all agreed. In every case they chose to show me around by car, in order to cover the entire extension of the neighbourhood. I recorded these guided tours both on audio and video, an issue I took into consideration once I analysed the data. Seven *propietarios* also agreed to do a second tour around their houses, which I also recorded and analysed.

Every time I visited a resident, I used my temporary clearance to walk as much as possible through the neighbourhood. Eventually, a couple of them told me to use their names at the entrance whenever I wanted to be authorised. I did, and my usual trip was to walk down the Troncal, following the pedestrian roads and passing by many of the *barrios'* entrances (fig. 1.6), I took photos and recorded videos whenever I could; I taped soundscapes, and managed to talk to a few people, mainly gardeners taking care of the area and domestic workers waiting for the bus, but also a few guards, teachers, visitors and *propietarios*.

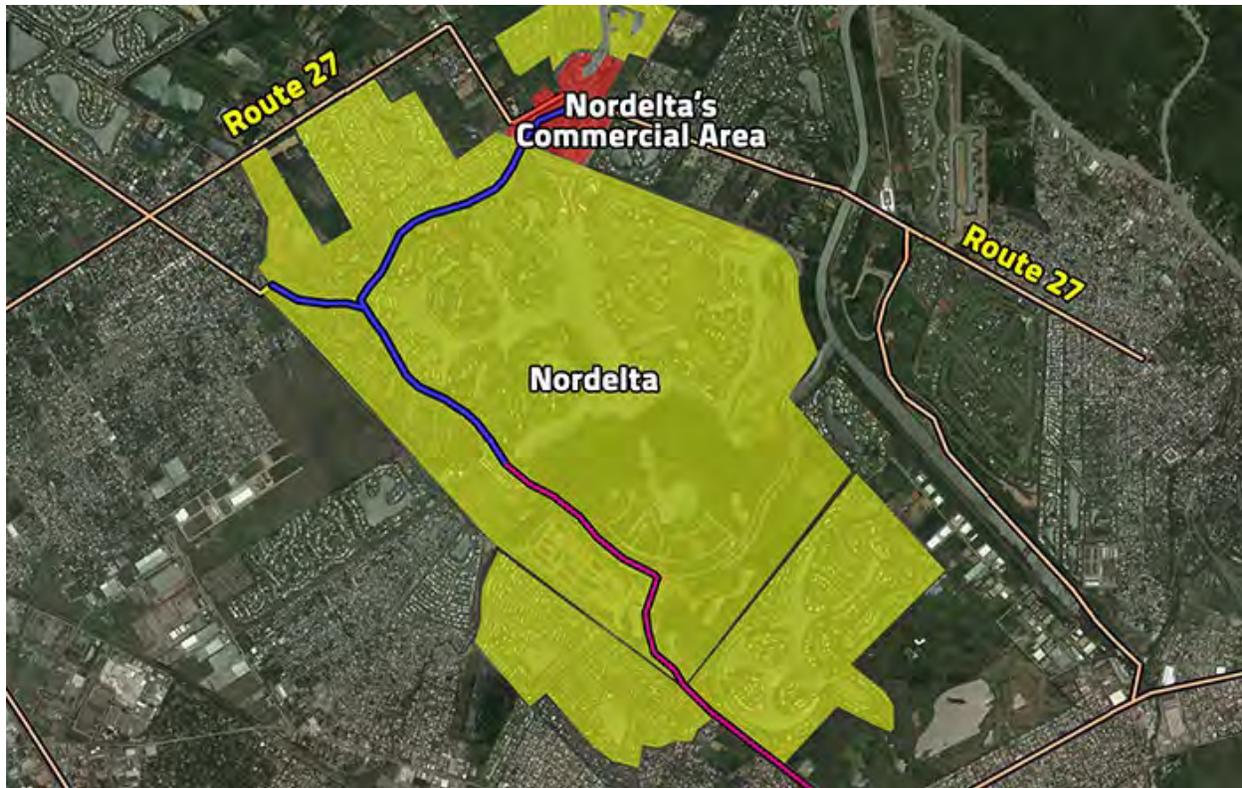


Fig. 1.6. In blue, the section of La Troncal that has a pedestrian lane. Produced by the author over a Google Map image.

(5) Other places

Additional areas in which I produced data were:

(a) The different means of public transportation I used to reach and leave Nordelta, such as the private buses, the Buenos Aires-Tigre train, and taxis. I conducted participant and non-participant observation in them, sometimes taking photos and filming.

(b) Media and social network: For all these years I have paid regular attention to local TV programs and newspapers, specialised magazines, and social network accounts related to Nordelta and other gated communities.

(c) During fieldwork I lived in a middle-class neighbourhood in central Buenos Aires. In my daily life I got involved in a thousand relationships –some fleeting, other stable– with

different people, and I regularly took field notes of the activities and conversations. I also visited institutions and interviewed representatives of AFIP [Federal Administration of Public Funds]; Tribunal de Servicio Doméstico [Justice Court of Domestic Work], Clarín [national newspaper], and UTEDYC [Association of Workers of gated communities], among others.

(d) I developed a close relationship with four domestic workers, two of which I visited regularly at their homes, scattered in different parts of the Conurbano.

Summing up, during fieldwork I conducted the following techniques:

- A total of 90 taped in-depth interviews: with residents (42), domestic workers (17), gardeners (4), municipal officers (3), professionals of the Nordelta Foundation (3), owners of the private bus company Mary-Go (3), unions representatives (2), real-estate agents (2), builders (2), former residents (2), garbage collectors (2), Nordelta's priest (1), Nordelta's guards (1), police officers (1), swimming pool cleaners (1), school teachers (1), bus drivers (1), taxi driver (1), and a professional of Nordelta's AVN (1). These interviews were the core of this research, and they provided valuable data that helped to understand the different actors' motivations, values and perceptions. Extracts were referenced and quoted throughout the text.

- Three group discussions: one with bus drivers, another with domestic workers, and a third one with *propietarios*. I initially planned to develop more of these events, in which I gather people with shared common experiences with the purpose of assessing their interaction, and having a deep understanding of their shared meanings. Nevertheless, Nordelta's workers were reluctant to participate, and only after a long preparation I could organise two. Conversely, the group discussion with *propietarios* was easier to assemble, and its results are thoroughly discussed in the dissertation.

- Participant observation. For two years, I walked through the area, taking over 250 pages of field notes, and engaging in informal conversations with different actors connected to

Nordelta. The main settings were Nordelta's semi-private road (*La Troncal*), Nordelta's inner *barrios*, and Nordelta's surroundings.

– Eight guided tours with *propietarios* through the project, and seven through their houses. While both aimed at producing data of shared journeys through their environments, the former intended specifically to see what particular places of the compound residents choose to show, and how they described them. The latter, on the other hand, concentrated on issues of material culture, nature and domestic work.

– 32 hours of video footage: Giving the area's hyper-surveillance, filming was primarily limited to the surroundings, where I recorded observational footage of different actors and practices, and informal conversations with guards, workers and passers-by.

– 1.900 photographs, taken both inside and outside the gated community. After sorting them out, I used them to find patterns and unseen elements.

– 22 hours of soundscapes, in which I recorded how the neighbourhood sounded. I considered it was important to explore Nordelta's sonic features, particularly in relation with the residents' perception of comfort.

– Review of primary sources, including the National Archive; museum catalogues; local, federal, and national laws and decrees; local and national press; social networks; and others.

1.2.2. General considerations and ethical issues

In order to protect the identities of the participants, all the names in personal interviews and observations have been changed, except from public actors providing official information, and public speeches and performances, as well as written publications, including those in social networks, in which cases the authors' real names were kept. The privacy of those who wanted to remain anonymous has been respected, and I made it clear that my research was an independent project, not sponsored by any commercial source.

My mother tongue is Chilean Spanish, and in Argentina people speak Rioplatense Spanish. These dialects are different in conjugation, pronunciation, and vocabulary, but in general terms that are quite similar, so the situation did not pose any problem during fieldwork. On the contrary, it gave me a special status which allowed me to ask things local researchers could not easily question; and after hearing the answers, I could request further details, descriptions and definitions under the assumption I did not fully understand. Unless stated, all of the original data and quotes from Spanish speaking authors was personally translated to English. I feel confident that the translations and interpretations capture the cultural and linguistic nuances present in the data.

I need to add that the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted, as well as the text written, has not focused on a single actor, but rather followed dozens of different people, in an attempt to understand reality from varied points of view. It complies with what Marcus defined as 'a modernist ethnography' (1992), which focuses in how subjectivity is produced across a wide range of different places and time. Having Nordelta a vast variety of actors, locations and practices, I chose to work with a plurality of voices, avoiding the usual figure of a central character that leads the reader throughout the narrative.

1.3. KEY CONCEPTS

Theoretical knowledge is constantly being assembled and corrected throughout the course of any research. At first, concepts have a status of prejudices or foreign models one seeks to avoid, contrast or confront. Later on, they constitute ideas that may feed and nurture ethnographic research; and finally, they become the novel outcome of a dedicated analysis on collected data. Being coherent with such an arrangement, in the writing of this dissertation I decided not to disentangle theoretical discussion from ethnographic description and analysis. Key concepts and discussions are presented in context, when a topic makes them pertinent and necessary.

Having that said, it may be appropriate to briefly present beforehand two of this

dissertation's theoretical standpoints. The first regarding gated communities, and the latter concerning Foucauldian theory of power. They will set the basic ground for upcoming discussions.

1.3.1. Gated communities

The past decades have seen a number of drastic transformations in major cities worldwide. Although each region presents significant differences, certain commonalities can be singled out, such as the weakening of urban centres, the dispersion of population and services (De Mattos, 2002), a modification of the traditional pattern of residential segregation (Sabatini, Cáceres and Cerda, 2001), the emergence of new centralities (Sassen, 1999), the privatisation of public services, and the fall of the rational-normative planning paradigm (Greene, 2005). If a modern city was defined by its attempt to organise space according to rational and functionalist values, this “new post-modern city”¹⁶ seems to be underpinned by opposite principles: chaos, mixture, and the impossibility of planning and even thinking about the city in its entire extension (Améndola, 2000).

The fate of public space has captured the attention of a wide range of academic fields such as radical geography, urban sociology, political sciences and cultural studies. Sennett (1977), Jacobs (1992), and Davis (1990) are among the many who have raised their voices alerting about its demise, arguing that once a fertile soil for encounters and diversity, cities have become a landscape of walls and fears; a *locus* dominated by cars over pedestrians, and shaped by market and simulated relations rather than critical debate and authenticity (see also: Davis, 1985; Venturi, Brown and Izenour, 1977; and Sorkin, 1992).

It would not be inaccurate to say these critiques have been based on an idealistic and romanticised representation of the *traditional city*, depicted as a model of virtue that has been slowly dismantled by modernity, and then harshly devastated by post-modernity. The idea of a traditional city has been based upon a series of assumptions, including “a uniform

¹⁶ This new urban spatial organization has also been called “Global city” (Sassen, 1999), “Post-fordist city” (Donzelot, 2004) and even “Polycentric city” (Hall and Pain, 2006).

land surface, universal access to a single-centred city, free competition for space, and the notion that development would take place outward from a central core” (Dear and Flusty, 1998, p. 51), that is epitomised in the Chicago School concentric ring model (fig. 1.7). The arrival of new “urban artefacts” (De Mattos, 2002), such as shopping malls, strip centres, supermarkets, touristic bubbles, and gated communities, have given shape to a fragmented postmodern geography, whose form relates less to a series of rings and more to a checkers board through which privileged classes navigate (Donzelot, 1999).

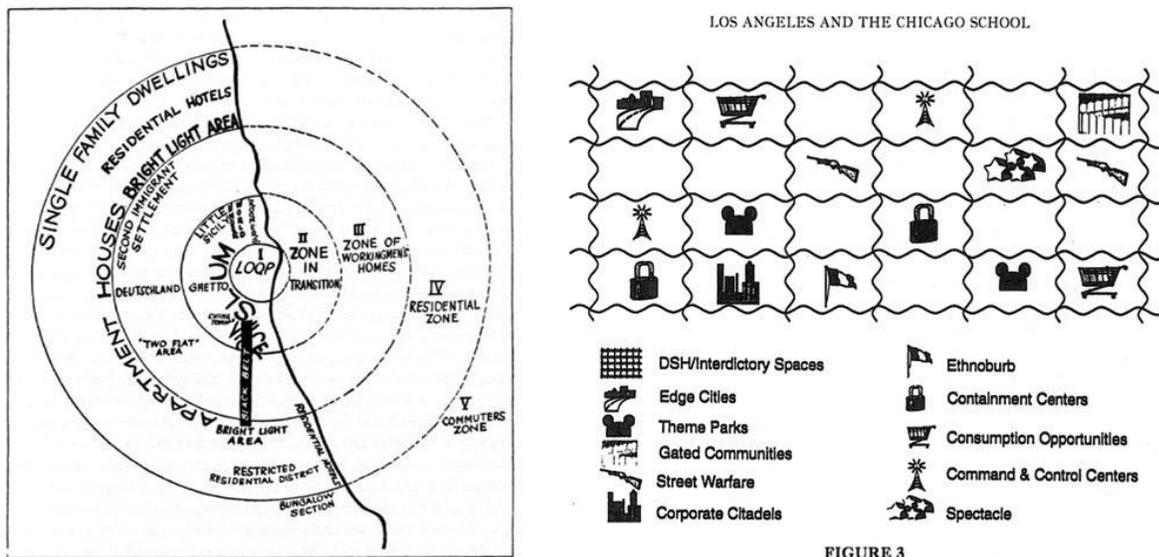


Fig. 1.7. Left: Burgess Concentric Zone Model (Chicago, 1925). Right: Dear and Flusty’s model of postmodern urban structure (Los Angeles, 1998).

From Roman *villas* to Victorian sprawl, suburbanisation is hardly a new phenomenon. However, during the past decades, cities around the world experienced an explosive awakening of suburban private settlements that came to crystallise a new way of dwelling (Fishman, 1987). Since then, gated communities have been widely accused of promoting residential segregation (Low, 2003), exacerbating social differences (Soja, 2000) and contributing to the privatisation of almost everything that once was public (Wolch, 1996; Stoner, 2002). Regarding the political sphere, a number of authors have stressed how gated communities introduce “new rules of the game that cannot always be reconciled with

traditional democratic institutions” (Boggs 2000, in Salcedo, 2004; Sennett, 1977)¹⁷. On the other hand, their apparent obsession with nature, security and defensive architecture is seen by many as the final stroke to an already moribund public space (Caldeira, 2000). Taking these critiques further, other authors have suggested that gated communities are contributing to the disintegration of the social body as a whole (Low, 2003; Svampa, 2001), framing them as Neo-liberalism’s most threatening spatial manifestation (Girola, 2008).

By far, the harshest critiques gated communities have received are about their apparent secludedness,¹⁸ their inhabitants being accused of lacking solidarity and interest in their surroundings (Davis, 1990; Carman, 2000). Gated communities have been seen as a spatial expression of social inequality. In Svampa’s words, their walls have come to divide an *inside*, perceived by the people who live there as “a kingdom of comfort and security”, from an *outside*, perceived by the same as “a chaotic and dangerous world” (2001)¹⁹. This narrative has gained many disciples under the influence of images such as the *Paraisópolis* (fig. 1.8), taken by Tuca Vieira in Sao Paulo and used in a dozen books; most notable, on the cover of Caldeira’s *City of Walls*, to exemplify the unbridgeable separations between rich and poor in Latin America; even though the photographer said the photo “does not show exactly how things are. In this building with the swimming pools are not the richest people, who, in turn, do not live glued to the poorest, who, in turn, are not the residents of Paraisópolis” (Vieira,

¹⁷ Disregarding these critiques, authors such as Fainstein (1994) argue that public space did not nurture more diversity or virtues in the past than it does today, echoing Foucault’s notion of power as a constitutive element of every social relation, and of space as the scenario where that power is shaped, displayed and exercised: “A whole history remains to be written of spaces –Foucault wrote-, which would at the same time be the history of powers” (1980, p. 149). In a similar note, Sennett takes the most mentioned example of virtuous democratic space, the Greek Polis and its *agora*, to stress how it was not the ideal inclusive system people seem to talk about in urban studies: “certainly throughout the classical era citizens comprised never more than 15 to 20 percent of the total population, or half the adult male population. And only a minority of those citizens possessed enough wealth to live leisurely, spending hour after hour, day after day among their fellow citizens, talking and debating: the leisure class composed from 5 to 10 percent of the citizenry” (1997, p. 52). From this point of view, critiques about the current state of cities seem to be less sustained in a historical perspective and more driven by a romanticised nostalgia.

¹⁸ “[Nordelta] is hermetically separated of the rest of urban life by a private security service and a permanent system of cameras” (Janoschka, 2005, p. 13).

¹⁹ These claims have probably been much more aggressive in Latin America than in the United States, as in the latter the suburbs were vast and barely occupied, while in Latin America they were filled with slums and low-income households. Even today, Buenos Aires’ Province shows worse social conditions than the central city: Over 50% of its population lives below the poverty line (Thuiller, 2005a), while in the inner city that number is only 12,6% (DGE, 2006).

2012).



Fig. 1.8. Paraisópolis and Morumi neighbourhoods (Sao Paulo, Brazil).
Photo by Tuca Vieira.

Crot states that “all studies essentially converge in observing that the major aspect of the city’s new urban morphology consists of increased territorial fragmentation and segregation” (2006, p. 231), one example being the work of Prévôt-Schapira (2001)²⁰, who argued that since the nineties, increased social polarisation gave form to a fragmented spatial organisation that came to replace the Latin American organic city.²¹ After imitating Spanish or French urban zoning models since their colonial beginnings, the past decades Latin American cities have seen their urban settlements adopting the shape of United States postmodern cities, becoming closed instead of open, and diffuse instead of compact

²⁰ Pérez even talks about a triple fragmentation: “the institutional fragmentation of state and private institutions, a technical fragmentation shaped by the expansion needs of the different services and a territorial fragmentation, whereby different zones of the metropolitan area received different levels of service” (2012, p. 151).

²¹ See also Sabatini, Cáceres, Cerda (2001) and Janoschka (2002b).

(Janoschka, 2002b; Dematteis, 1998).

The recurrent metaphorical figure used by this binary discourse is that of an archipelago, or a bubble; the former sees the suburban areas as formed by “islands of wealth amongst a sea of poverty” (Thuillier, 2005a, p. 5; Vidal-Koppmann, 2009; Donzelot, 1999), while the latter concentrates on enclosure, suggesting the smallest attempt to penetrate them would be enough to see them vanish. Although there have been some scholars, like Girola, for whom this approach is a “simplification (...) that denies, or at least hides, the variety of existent realities” (2008, p. 142), it has found fertile soil in Argentina, becoming the dominant way of framing gated communities.

This dissertation moves away from such ideas suggesting, instead, that gated communities are not a totally unprecedented technology responsible for shattering society apart or for producing irreconcilable social differences among citizens, but rather a new way to articulate existing unequal class and race relations in Argentina. Further, it expands the perception of their residents by stating it is not possible to understand their actions and motivations without attending the new *ethos* that moves them; an *ethos* of comfort, which places positive experiences and well-being as the *telos* towards which they would like to conduct their lives to. Finally, data collected by this research challenges the alleged relationship between gated communities and spatial fragmentation. Gated communities, as we will see, are not secluded compartments nor autarchic islands, but territorial apparatuses whose permeable borders are constantly transcended by a number of different elements.

The study of how different kind of elements circulate, and of the new values and meanings they acquire in the process, is not new to anthropology. One of the discipline’s key contributions to social knowledge has been the understanding of how different cultures relate to what lies outside their self-defined boundaries. Malinowski’s research (1920) on the Trobriand Islands showed how a number of communities –moreover, islands, the epitome of secludedness– were strongly tied to each other through a highly organised and ritualised system of social exchange. On a similar line, Appadurai (1986) studied how objects’ meanings are re-written when moved from one context to another, embodying different

values (see also Gell, 1998). Douglas (2002), on the other hand, reflected on how things are classified and kept in separated categories. Purity arises, she argued, when such order is respected, and contamination is what happens when it is defiled; when things –objects, people, a practice– transcend them, polluting and threatening social order. Her notion of dirt and danger, and her thoughts on community boundaries strongly influenced this research, offering a rich standpoint from where to reflect about permeability and contamination in gated communities.

1.3.2. Power: A Foucauldian approach

Whether Marxist, Liberal, or Contractualist, political theories have traditionally seen power as a commodity that can be possessed, employed, shared and exchanged; a negative force the yielder may use to model others' behaviours through coercion and repression. In the seventies, Michel Foucault came to agitate those ideas. He considered them fit to explain certain societies and institutions, like monarchy in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, but too narrow to comprehend modernity. Power, Foucault stated, is neither something that can be possessed nor a general system of domination, but a multiplicity of relations of force in which we are all inscribed.

Confronting traditional theories that understand power as a negative force that comes to repress and coerce, Foucault proposed that power could be seen as a positive, productive force. He did not try to avoid or reject concepts like coercion and repression, but to go beyond them, stating that the list of political verbs should not be limited to 'reprehend' or to 'forbid', but that they must include "[an] open list of variables expressing a relation between forces or power relation, constituting actions upon actions: to incite, to induce, to seduce, to make easy or difficult, to enlarge or limit, to make more or less probable, and so on" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 59). Social relationships, human life and the self are subjects, Foucault argued, of a number of different techniques which, aligned to certain rationalities, model behaviour and produce social life. Domination, in that scenario, is just the fixation of a system of power relations that has become stable in space and time.

Foucault rejected any attempt to produce a structuralist and universalist social theory, treating the efforts to explain all phenomena in any given society as futile. Taking a different path, he researched different historical periods, proposing the existence of what he called 'general economies of power', in which he came to distinguish three major ones.²² First we have the juridical power, or *juridico-legal*, which follows a very simple legal system consisting in the production of a code that divides behaviour between the permitted and the prohibited, and in fixing types of punishments according to different transgressions. This General Economy of Power is epitomised in the figure of the sovereign –the king, the prince–; a public, visible and known individual, who owns the use and display of violence, and has the right *to kill and let live*, which makes of it an essentially negative use of power.

Taking a look at the modern state, Foucault proposed a second economy of power, which emerged with and through modern institutions. It does not rely on force and coercion, but through diverse techniques of control, examination and training that produce disciplinary subjects. His analysis suggested that modernity tends to brake and displace royal power in a series of disciplinary apparatuses. The figure of the culprit appears as a new social actor, located at the same time inside and outside the code, and a new series of “adjacent, detective, medical, and psychological techniques appear” (Foucault, 2007), under the purpose of surveillance, diagnosis and transformation of individual subjectivities.

Unlike the juridico-legal economy of power, discipline attempts to control and regulate. If the former makes focus in what is obligatory (for example: respect your King, go to war, pay your taxes), the latter concentrates in what is forbidden and has to be prevented. It attempts to create an order out of disorder; hence, to normalise individuals. One must do what has been determined, and everything undetermined is prohibited. It requires, for that reason, to posit an optimal model, “constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary normalisation consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is incapable of conforming to the norm and pose a threat to a stable a comfortable

²² There would be others, of course, if we would look at different periods and cultures.

position of power. In other words, it is not the normal and the abnormal that is fundamental and primary in disciplinary normalisation, it is the norm” (Foucault, 2007).

Under the disciplinary power, an optimal model is posed, and then different power mechanisms and technologies come to scene with the purpose of normalising people, movements and actions. This idea was key to understand gated communities’ role and nature in contemporary Argentina. It provided a suitable framework to comprehend the operations under which a certain ‘proper citizenship’ has been produced in the country, separating the normal –those that conform to the norm– from the abnormals, which are incapable of complying it. At the same time, Foucault’s suggestion of not getting too distracted with the distinction normals/abnormals was useful to look at the norm itself, which in this case contributed to attend the multiple ways homogeneity is produced and imposed in Nordelta. Gated communities, data suggests, operationalised that basic distinction in different instruments of disciplinary power, which combine their essential elements –invisibility, the gaze, the archive, hierarchisation– without fully disregarding juridico-legal tactics such as proscription and punishment.

Besides the juridico-legal and the disciplinary, Foucault distinguished a third general economy of power, more suitable to contemporary times, which he first called ‘biopower’, and later rephrased as governmentality or regulatory power. Its concern is not the body of the individual but the life of the species (Stoler, 1995, p. 82), and its self-defence against its own internal dangers. In Foucault’s words, it is the “set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species” (2007, p. 16). Thus, regulatory power is not concerned with the permitted and forbidden, but rather it establishes an average considered as optimal, accepting a certain degree of prohibited behaviour and elements, but up to a range that cannot be exceeded.

Being concerned with the management of life at the individual and societal levels, regulatory power is a more encompassing economy than those already mentioned, and it may operate

by taking up “and even multiplying juridical and disciplinary elements, and redeploying them within its specific tactic” (2007). As it will be presented later, gated communities are not primarily driven by a regulatory logic, their practices and demands being more aligned with the absolute logic of the other economies of power. No crime, for example, is allowed; it happens, but it is not accepted. There are, however, areas in which a certain degree of dangerous elements are accepted, such as traffic, plagues and pollution in water. Mechanisms to have them not surpass the agreed level are deployed and monitored.

A key element of Foucault’s theory of power is that governmentality is a particular historical strategy that did not fully replace penal or disciplinary economies of power. He made a call to not see things “in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement by a society of government” (1991b, p. 102). Currently –he argued, in the late seventies– regulatory power prevails in Western societies, but all different economies of power co-exist in different degrees of intensity. Taking contemporary racism, for example, the figure can be summarised as this: while overseeing life and mortality, regulatory power demands the use of sovereign power to eliminate threatening ethnic groups. Knowledge about the population is produced, and a standard is devised to divide population between the healthy, pure and superior, and those considered lesser and polluted. Disciplinary power is exercised as well, putting constant pressure on abnormals to conform to the norm. If to make taxonomies (in this case, racial profiles) is to normalise (create the eagerness to be whiter)²³, regulatory rationality effectively has to work along both sovereign and disciplinary strategies, as this thesis will show for the Nordelta’s case.

A microscopic power

Power can be a positive, productive force Foucault argued challenging or, at least, expanding traditional discourses about power. But this was not the only novelty he introduced to

²³ Shein writes: “the idea of whitening is the dual proposition that to be white is better, and to *become* white is desirable” (2004). Although she refers to a different time and place, enough data will be exposed to claim that an equivalent distinction has been relevant in Argentina as well, at least for the past three centuries.

political theory. He also proposed that the exercise of power is not confined to any institution nor possessed by any individual, but rather present in the entire spectrum of social reality. He confronted the idea that there is a “perpetual contest between two abstract entities that is based on the ability of the one to limit the other’s power” (Fournier, 2008), being the king, the state, or any other institutionalised form of sovereignty. Power runs through the whole social system; hence, to study it, one should attend “the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was” (Foucault, 2007, p. 104).

The concept of *Apparatus* was particularly helpful to frame gated communities. Foucault defines it as a heterogeneous ensemble “of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic proposition; the apparatus is the system of relations that can be established between these elements” (1980, p. 194). It refers, thus, to the various mechanisms and structures which enhance and maintain the exercise of power.²⁴ Throughout this dissertation I have called gated communities ‘apparatuses’, as I believe they cannot be solely understood as a territorial delimitation nor as an administrative demarcation. For them to be assembled, it requires a particular set of ideas and practices regarding public space, citizenship, and sovereignty. Gated communities encompass power elements –discourses, mechanisms, technologies–, and can be thought of as a spatial and social machine; an apparatus that produces a certain territory and a set of subjectivities oriented towards the goal of comfort.

Following Foucault’s thoughts, I conducted this research studying power in its extremities; looking at the multiple ways in which subjects relate to one another, and assuming a ‘capillary perspective’ that takes a look at the microscopic, local and unstable practices that comprise Nordelta’s fabric. This implies not giving much importance to the possible causes of why this spatial arrangement came to be, nor to the reasons people may have had to move there, but

²⁴ Minimising its aggregated condition, and giving a definition more suitable of a power mechanism, Agamben defines apparatus as “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (2009).

to analyse the concrete procedures and practices of being; the very effective instruments Nordelta uses to accumulate knowledge, observe, archive, take into account, search and verify, and by them, to produce certain subjectivities.

1.4. THESIS OUTLINE

In this dissertation, chapters have been organised following a spatial concentric structure which starts with a general genealogy of racism and citizenry in Argentina, then moves into Buenos Aires and its suburbs, later concentrates in Nordelta's borders, and finally enters the project. In each of these areas key social actors related with gated communities are recognised: in the first case, Argentine 'proper citizens', defined by whiteness and privilege; then 'improper others', defined by their double condition of being perceived as threatening to Nordelta and unwelcome into the compound; later 'conditional others', which may access Nordelta to perform different tasks but are not granted with the status of a 'citizen'; and finally, *propietarios*. The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Argentine nation-building process: Race, power and identity
Chapter 3	The conquest of the suburbs
Chapter 4	Tracing a line in the sand
Chapter 5	Purification at the Pearly Gates
Chapter 6	Manufacturing Nordelteños: formal mechanisms
Chapter 7	Manufacturing Nordelteños: informal mechanisms
	Conclusions

Chapter 2 discusses the Argentine nation building process, analysing how white-race subjectivity was produced throughout time by a set of historical practices. Focus is placed in the role 'legitimate citizenry' which has played within a dynamic network of power relations, and in the mechanisms and technologies that have been devised to expel and discipline those considered 'abnormals'. After setting the ground regarding race and hierarchies in the country, the chapter takes a look at their geographical counterparts, studying the

urban/rural binarism and the way it has been paired with ideas about the civilised and the barbaric. Against this backdrop, the last part discusses the Conurbano –the vast area that surrounds Buenos Aires–, and how it has been transformed by the last two decades through suburban development, becoming a ‘proper place’ to receive the elites.

Chapter 3 focuses in the areas around Nordelta, reviewing the wide range of power mechanisms directed at producing, assessing, classifying and, ultimately, dominating this particular territory and its people, a threatening subjectivity I have called ‘improper others’. The chapter begins by showing how Nordelta’s foundation process was lived, felt and imagined by residents, both as a personal and an epic achievement. This ‘*Conquest*’²⁵, as they usually call it, has been used by Nordelta to create territorial identity and loyalty to the project²⁶, while *pioneros*’ bold quest is recurrently commemorated in official acts and discourses, discussed in their bi-monthly official magazine, and even re-enacted in some of the settlement’s anniversary parties. Therefore, this way of narrating their own history is a procedure to erase what was there before they arrived: workers, farmers, artisans, builders; a precarious population they do not doubt in calling ‘*negros*’. These *improper others* are always treated with suspicion, and considered the source of different threats, such as crime, diseases and distasteful practices. The chapter takes a close look at the way Nordelteños talk about the area, relate to its inhabitants, and how they have learned to live surrounded by an environment they qualify as physically and socially polluted.

Chapter 4 describes the legal procedures and political negotiations through which Nordelta has temporarily secured control over its own territory, gaining partial autonomy from external powers. It is divided in three parts, and the first one is dedicated to Nordelta’s physical borders: how they were planned, how they are perceived, what they guard, and what would it happen if general public could be allowed in. Second part analyses how Nordelta has attempted to create a ‘shadow government’ to take charge of functions traditionally performed by the public executive power, such as urban maintenance, tax collection, and

²⁵ In a video produced by the developers to promote Nordelta, a voice-over says “the pioneers’ spirit and colonizers’ courage achieve to found a community where before there was only grass” [“*el espíritu de los pioneros y el coraje de los colonizadores logró fundar una comunidad allí donde antes crecían pastos duros*”] (Girola, 2007).

²⁶ AVN even organized a survey to determine who would become the neighbourhood’s Patron Saint.

public safety. At last, the third section concentrates on their own private legal system, and on the tensions arisen by it with both residents and public law. Ethnographic data is combined with theoretical discussion to shed light on the mechanics of power and domination currently deployed.

Chapter 5 makes focus on what I have called *conditional others*, which are lower and middle-class outsiders who regularly enter the compound to provide different kinds of services. Most of them are guards, domestic workers, gardeners, pool cleaners, taxi drivers, and builders, who have been disciplined in the ways of the neighbourhood. The chapter delves in two liminal places. The first one is a bus stop located three km south of the compound; a key spot entangled by the relationships between domestic workers, residents, guards and bus drivers. Particular attention is placed in four kind of elements put under control: bodies, time, space and information. The second place are Nordelta's three main access gates, where a set of identification and examination mechanisms are heavily deployed whether to reject or to 'normalise' threatening subjects. The chapter finishes by discussing the different resistance's tactics people execute to subvert and/or avoid such mechanisms.

Chapter 6 move inside the compound to explore the diverse formal mechanisms currently in operation to produce a certain subjectivity among residents. One of them is the 'book of rules', which intends to regulate internal behaviours primarily by sanctioning transgressions. It contains codes and norms that work along a judicial system, composed of people and technologies, in charge of finding and punish such transgressions. Other analysed mechanisms are the spatial and discursive elements over which the different inner *barrios* have been designed, producing homogeneity while fostering a certain diversity.

Chapter 7 proposes that there is a particular discourse of truth lying at the core of these compounds, which is the ethic of comfort; a new ethic that seeks to avoid stressful and harmful experiences, like interclass interactions, while promoting positive practices related to well-being. The chapter is divided in four sections, each dedicated to different informal mechanisms through which residents' subjectivity is being produced. First, the norm upon which *residents* are measured with is discussed, setting the base for the upcoming sections.

Then, identity and peer pressure are framed as processes through which newcomers' liminal position are dissolved. Finally, section four discusses different existent mechanisms to deal with residents who do not fit the expected normality, such as the nouveau riches, TV stars, and football players.

This thesis is about the imbricated relationship between nationhood, race, elites and space. In the **conclusions**, I review each chapter's main contribution in order to move forwards the idea that, in each period, a certain ethic has defined elites; how they desire to conduct their lives, the way they see themselves, how they see their role in society, and how they relate with others. At least since its independence, the Argentine (male) elites were driven by the quest for glory and recognition in the public sphere. To live a good life was, above other considerations, to become a key actor of the country's fate. Collected data suggests that, since the 1980s, and strongly since the 1990s, a shift in this ethic moved the compass from the public sphere towards the private. In particular, to the realms of family and the self. A re-qualification of domestic life, a new importance of health and beauty, and a fresh concern in happiness and well-being triggered some 'proper citizens' into the suburbs, searching for a suitable place where to conduct their lives. I suggest it is not possible to understand gated communities in Argentina, today, without attending such transformations.

CHAPTER 2

ARGENTINE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS: RACE, POWER AND IDENTITY

*Racially, [Buenos Aires] is a white city within a mestizo America.
A black man in Buenos Aires is as exotic as in London.
And the same is true for a gaucho.
In that sense, it is whiter (extremely white) than New York;
the latter has to employ racism at all costs in order to maintain its whiteness.
[Buenos Aires] has no Indians or mulatos.
Its men and women do not have the same skin and hair colour,
nevertheless, they are white.
This does not constitute a privilege,
especially from an aesthetic point of view,
but it is a good eugenic possibility.
-Escardó, 1945, p. 16*

Much has been written about the role played by racism and identity in the nation-building process that several Latin American countries went through during the 19th century. For a western traditional approach, national identity is usually understood as an imaginary and homogeneous community that extends across a vast territory. Even though most of its members do not know each other, “in the mind of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1991, p. 5). Nations are not necessarily tight or homogenous entities, but the awareness of being part of a collective is strong enough to produce their public institutions and legitimise their authorities. The basic operation to define boundaries is to in symbolically contrast themselves with the *outside*, whose inhabitants are rejected as savages while their own habits are praised as civilised and superior (Levi Strauss, 1952, p. 11; Baczko, 1984, p. 32). Menaces and vices, thus, have to come from these external enemies, from which they must defend²⁷ themselves. In this *épistème*, racism serves as a socio-psychological mechanism through which the *other*, usually a minority, is singled out and unfairly blamed for any suffering the group experiences, in an approach both known as the ‘scapegoat theory’, and as its reverse, the ‘well-earned reputation theory’ (Zawadzki, 1948). Hence, although races do not exist in a biological sense, people tend to behave as if they do, “and, as a result, races do exist as social categories of great tenacity and power” (Wade, 1997, p. 13).

²⁷ As Levi-Strauss clarifies: “Modern man has [attempted] to account for the diversity of cultures while seeking, at the same time, to eradicate what still shocks and offends him in that diversity.” (1952, p. 12).

Taking a slightly different approach, Foucault attempted to explain racism by looking at the mechanisms of power to which it is entangled. In pre-modern European times, he argued, sovereign power was exercised upon individuals by prohibitions and sanctions, punishing transgressions with spectacular displays of force over bodies. In Europe, during the 19th Century, this modulation made way to the disciplinary power, which acted through surveillance and by excluding ‘abnormals’ in order to normalise them, preventing deviations. Later on, as society gained in complexity, sovereignty and discipline receded against regulatory power (2004), driven by securing the health of the population²⁸. Racism, in this scheme, is the answer Foucault gives to the question of how this new form of power – regulatory–, devoted to foster life, is capable of killing. Taking Anderson’s idea of an imagined community a step forward, Foucault introduces the figure of a ‘menacing internal enemy’. In contemporary times, he argues, the sovereign right ‘to let live and make die’ is replaced by its opposite, ‘to make live and let die’, and dividing practices are displaced from marking distinctions with the outside, between nations, towards distinctions within, among the population.²⁹ Racism is a way the State has to deal with these internal enemies that threaten the survival of society as a whole; a “function of a State that is compelled to use race, the elimination of races, and the purification of the race to exercise its sovereign power” (Foucault, 1991a, pp. 56-57).³⁰

In consequence, throughout this dissertation racism is understood less as a struggle between races than a discourse the state uses on itself; less an ideology or a mentality than a technology of power; and less a sign of moral decadence anchored in prejudices, discrimination and bigotry than “a mechanism intrinsic to the nature of all modern, normalising states and their biopolitical technologies” (Stoler, 1995, p. 88). In McWhorter’s

²⁸ As Esposito notices, this idea is directly linked with Nietzsche’s Will to Power, placed as the fundamental vital impulse that affirms, at the same time, “that life has a constitutively political dimension and that politics has no other object than the maintenance and expansion of life” (2008, p. 9). The state, as Kjellen declares, is not so much an institution created by a contract among people, but a *living form*, “with instincts and natural drives” (in Esposito, 2008, p. 16). This is not much an organicist theory, but a theory about an organicist-driven society.

²⁹ In 1883, Metchnikoff revolutionised biology by proposing immunity-as-defence: that bodies defend themselves against pathogens (Cohen, 2009, p. 206).

³⁰ This operation resembles the way in which the sovereign modern power creates immunity to protect the community (Esposito, 2008).

words, resentment or hostility towards minorities are not relevant issues, as racism works the same “in the absence of any identifiable racists” (2005, p. 536).

This chapter traces a genealogy of white subjectivity in Argentina, analysing how the idea of whiteness has come to articulate different discourses of truth and networks of power relations through time. This operation is executed because, as Aguiló states, “images of whiteness were instrumental in the establishment and reproduction of a regime of racial domination that subordinated lower-class people with indigenous, *mestizo* and, to a lesser extent, African ancestry” (2014, p. 178). Indeed, ever since its independence, Argentina has forged itself through a highly racialised political exercise, defining legitimate citizenry in terms of race, and devising procedures to deal with the de-humanized population. It will be shown how penal, disciplinary and regulatory power mechanisms were largely exercised to delimitate and defend both the territory and its ‘proper’ population.

The chapter is divided into four sections, the first provides a general overview on how race, class and national identity have been historically entangled in Argentina. Emphasis is placed on how the country was constituted as an independent nation under a project that sought to whiten the population, achieving progress through demographic engineering. The second section focuses on the binary imaginaries of the city and the desert as epitomised figures of civilisation and barbarism, while also addresses the role played by capitalism in the conquest of the ‘wastelands’. Following a chronological sequence, the third section discusses different episodes of the 20th Century, concentrating on its implications for the history and character of Buenos Aires Province. The main focus reflects the central theme of the thesis, and relates to the emergence of gated communities during the nineties, linked to a process of market-led neoliberal modernisation.

Finally, the last section analyses the major social and spatial outcomes of the 2001 crisis, framed by part of the elite and upper middle-classes as a new ‘barbarian invasion’ of their civilised and exclusive lifestyle. Confronted with the –alleged– fall of Buenos Aires, thousands of families decided to exchange the suburbs for the city, despite the widespread view of the former as a sort of desert; an *emptiness* devoid of proper citizens, proper infrastructure, and

proper nature, ready to be transformed and civilised. Overall, this chapter concentrates on the racialised project which has underpinned the history of the country, informing particular patterns of occupation of the territory through historical arrangements of power, knowledge and space. By outlining and analysing this particular genealogy of whiteness, I aim to set out the basis to understand the emergence of gated communities as the newest articulation of race, power and space in Argentina.

2.1. FORGING THE COUNTRY: HOW NATIONHOOD WAS PRODUCED

Local elites have usually imagined Argentina as a ‘European country set in American soil’ (Alberdi, 1979 [1852], p. 82; Bastia, 2014), a discourse that was particularly strong at the beginning of the 19th century, when local creole elites fought for their independence from Spain. Their actions were not so much motivated by an *Americanism* nor by the urge to liberate the country from a foreign force –Argentina, as such, did not exist before–, but by a desire to be treated as equals.³¹ They were, under the law, indistinguishable from natural-born Europeans, but in reality suffered oppression and unequal treatment from Spanish institutions, being discriminated and excluded from high-status positions in private and public areas.³² As legitimate descendants of the old continent, they argued, it was necessary to forge a country³³ where *equals* were treated as such. The key issue became how to define who those *equals* would be.

Modern western citizenship has its roots in the emergence of the modern state, when the ‘nation’ began to be understood as an imagined community of shared interests that found its realisation in the national state (Anderson, 1991). Rather than an inclusive cultural distinction, though, it is a system that regulates internal differences (Holston 2008), granting ‘status’ (Marshall, 1977) to its members –recognised as equals in both rights and duties–,

³¹ “Official insurrections” is how Alberdi called South American Revolutions, as they lacked mass popular participation and did not radically alter class-structure and social relationships (in Schawrtz, 2009, p. 141).

³² According to Anderson (1991), “of the 170 viceroys in Spanish America prior to 1813, only 4 were creole” (p. 56).

³³ I do not assume nation-state as a necessary and inevitable institution of modernity, but as Mitchell proposes, a “powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist” (1991, p. 94). This section concentrates in such practices.

while excluding those deemed unfit. According to Kipnis, such operation “begs the question of the place of citizenship in the production of cultural difference and the structuring of inequality” (2004, p. 259). In Argentina, in the absence of a strong collective identity, and with the collapse of colonial unifiers such as the king and the cross, Enlightenment thinking and racial distinctions became the beacons of the nation-building process; through them, legitimate citizenship was settled, and Argentina was defined³⁴ –and to some extent, still is³⁵– as a ‘white country’ (Guano, 2003; Joseph, 2010; Aguiló, 2014).

Needless to say, this distinction came out of a set of existing normalised practices that already divided the population in relation to what may be considered normal and abnormal.³⁶ In other words, the country may have been defined in Eurocentric terms,³⁷ but for the most part it was populated by *mestizos*, *negros*³⁸ and *indígenas*, all of which “were subsumed in one blind word: Indians”³⁹ (Mouratian, 2013, p. 24). The actions of the creole elite, who sooner than later acquired enough self-consciousness to constitute a different subjectivity, institutionalised these practices at the core of the new state, giving birth to a novel discourse about citizenship. Words were said about Indians and *negros* being equal to Peruvians,

³⁴ Agreeing on an encompassing criterion was not an easy task. Argentina was a vast, poorly integrated territory, and several *caudillos* dominated its provinces. They identified more with their regions than with a larger idea of “nation”, and hindered the creation of an inclusive project (Oszlak, 1997, p. 47). Goddard (2000), for example, describes how indigenous population defined themselves as “Chileans” or “Argentine” sooner than rural *whites*. Following De Certeau’s line of thought, this could be read in terms of resistance and subversion. Speaking about South American natives, De Certeau shows how, while becoming apparently submissive to the Spanish power, they used the imposed rituals, representations and laws for their own purposes. Unable to reject them, they appeared as consenting to their subjugation but only to subvert and resist them (1984).

³⁵ In the year 2000, part of the country was shocked when an historian assured that General San Martín, leader of South America’s struggle for independence, was the illegitimate son of an Indian [Guaraní] woman. Along with one of his descendants, he asked the Senate to exhume his remains to perform a DNA test, which was not granted.

³⁶ To assign barbaric features to indigenous people was extended throughout Latin America but the extent and form of this was not completely hegemonic. For different approaches see, for example, the colossal work of Friar Bernardino de Sahagún in his “General History of the Things of New Spain”, a 2,400 pages ethnographic study on the Aztec culture.

³⁷ Needless to say, this particular ensemble of whiteness is not the same as that of Europeans. Further, one may claim the latter has a superior hierarchy, as it does not include the former whilst vice versa it does; in other words: proper Argentine citizens would hardly be qualified as such in Europe, but it would be more than expected for proper Europeans to be acknowledged and treated as such.

³⁸ According to Schávelzon, in 1810 30% of Buenos Aires was black and the percentage was higher nation-wise (in Greene, 2008).

³⁹ Anderson suggests that: “far from seeking to ‘induct the lower classes into political life’, one key factor initially spurring the drive for independence (...) was the *fear* of ‘lower classes’ political mobilizations: to wit, Indian or Negro-slave uprisings” (2010, p.48).

Chileans or Colombians, but the ideals of the revolution and of pan-Americanism did not prosper –capitalism and imperialism, as well as individual and local interests and ambitions, made that project an ever-elusive one. Using Lamont and Molnar’s categories, a symbolic boundary such as race became a social boundary, and it was used to administre (unequal) access to social opportunities and material and non-material resources (2002).⁴⁰ This section concentrates on such administration and on the two more common strategies followed to deal with the menace posed by this ‘improper population’: one, under a logic of sovereignty, that pursued the exclusion or extermination of the abnormal; and a second one, under the logic of discipline, aimed at their assimilation or normalisation.⁴¹

2.1.1. Strategies of exclusion

Juan Bautista Alberdi, intellectual father of the 1853 Argentine Constitution, thought that an intimate, bottom-up moral revolution was needed to achieve greatness. One of the pillars of his work was the conviction that natives were useless as raw material for nation-building that could not therefore contribute to the making of a modern country:

“Make the *roto*, the *gaucho*, the *cholo* the elemental unity of our popular⁴² masses, go through all the transformations of the largest instruction system. In a hundred years you will not make of him an English worker, who works, consumes, and lives in dignity and comfortably... Instead of leaving these lands to the savages who today control them, why not populate them with the German, English and Swiss?” (1979, p. 38).

Although there were some who thought otherwise, such as Francisco Bilbao and José Martí,⁴³

⁴⁰ Avoiding the *scapegoat* explanation of racism, Foucault argues that race is not always used by those in power against minorities or a different kind of *other*, but also by those “contesting sovereign notions of power and right; by those unmasking the fiction of nature and legitimate rule” (Stoler, 1995, p. 69). Without occupying the highest positions of the country, but attempting to do so, creole elites made use of race as a way to legitimize themselves while, at the same time, leaving others out (Skurski, 1994). Following the very same logic, it may be possible that excluded natives developed, as well, a particular racial discourse, but to investigate it would be a matter of a different research.

⁴¹ Evidently, neither of these strategies were accepted without internal disagreement or resistance. There were legislators and other key actors of the political elite who demanded more humanitarian and egalitarian policies. See: Grimson, 2006; Nagi, 2012.

⁴² In Spanish, one of the uses of the word ‘popular’ is to refer to the working class population.

⁴³ See Roig, 1981.

Alberdi's remark was not isolated. Sarmiento, one of the three *historical presidents* [forefathers] of the country, agreed that *Indians* could not be part of the novel nation and wrote the following, justifying their genocide. Looking as he frequently did, towards the United States as an example, he commented:

“It may be very unjust to exterminate savages, to suffocate civilisations in the process of being born, to conquer people who are in possession of privileged territories, but thanks to that injustice, America,⁴⁴ instead of remaining in the hands of savages, who are incapable of progress, is occupied today by the Caucasian race, the most perfect, the most intelligent, the most beautiful, and the most progressive that roams the Earth” (1938, p. 218).

Indios were praised for their barbaric features, such as their strength and courage in battle, but these attributes were cherished as long as you wanted to declare war on a country, not so much if you needed to produce one.⁴⁵ A different set of skills was required to reach modernity: abstract thinking, sense of private property, high culture⁴⁶ and mental emancipation; capacities that were seen as necessary to foster the creation of industry, market, democracy and civilisation in general (Zea, 1976, p. 90; Navarro, 1999). Thus, race was used to make a foundational division between those who must live and those who must die, whoever did fit the racial profile associated with these features was to be excluded,⁴⁷ left on a liminal state or directly eliminated. In Foucault's words, it was at this point where “the State had to look like, function and present itself as the guarantor of the integrity and purity of the race, and had to defend itself against the race or races that were infiltrating it, introducing harmful elements into its body, and which, therefore, had to be driven out for both political and biological reasons” (Foucault, 2004, p. 86).

One of the remarkable, and not so commented, technologies implemented by this social

⁴⁴ He refers to the United States of America.

⁴⁵ Current southern regions of Argentina and Chile were previously occupied by different indigenous communities, particularly Mapuches. In Chile, however, their fierce and successful resistance against the Spanish occupation was valued by the rising republic and given a place of honour (Soubllette, 1984), although this status did not last.

⁴⁶ Alberdi even proposed to change the country's official language from Spanish to French (Alberdi, 1838), being Paris, and not Madrid, the archetype of civilisation (Romero, 1993, p. 51).

⁴⁷ “The indigenous population does not participate nor contribute to our political and civil society. We who call ourselves Americans are nothing, but Europeans born in America” (Alberdi, 1979, p. 82).

project was the Zanja de Alsina [“Alsina’s trench”], a plan approved in 1873 to separate and protect *civilised* territories from those controlled by barbarians.⁴⁸ It consisted in a 650 kilometre trench, two meters deep and three meters wide, that would divide the country in two, from mountains to coast. About 350 km. were actually built, marking the boundaries of both domains (Fig. 2.1). Its main purpose was quite pedestrian, though: to reduce the common raids that the *Indians* made to rob cattle. The Zanja was a technology of power put in operation to contain –resist, prevent– menacing *Indians*, who were ‘unable to understand private property’.

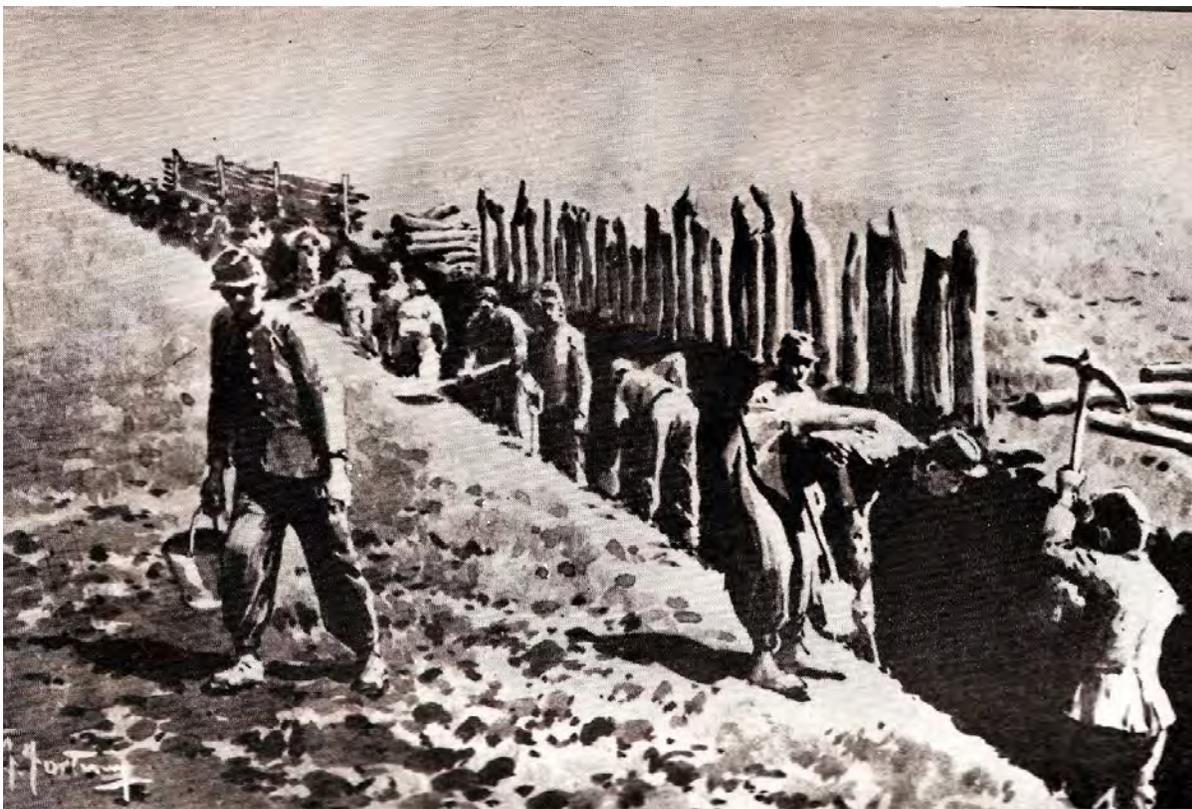


Fig. 2.1. Alsina’s Trench.
Source: Abad de Santillán, D. (1971).

The disadvantage of such strategies was their indirect recognition of *Indian* authority over the region, acknowledging them as civilised and able to rule. This was resisted by many,

⁴⁸ Although in 19th and 20th Century Argentina the word *salvajes* [“savages”] was most commonly used to refer to these ‘unfit and threatening’ population, I have preferred to use the word ‘barbarians’ instead, as the former being an untamed human being while the latter is one that cannot be tamed; by definition, someone who tries to destroy or overtake civilisation.

especially when it was known that Chile, the neighbouring country, was after those same territories. Between 1864 and 1870, Argentina fought the War of the Triple Alliance alongside Brazil and Uruguay against Paraguay, and the episode contributed to consolidate the country's professional army and its centralised State (Halperín, 1979, pp. 74-75). In 1877, Alsina died and Julio Roca assumed the Ministry of War. Rejecting his predecessor's policy, and having an experienced army at his disposal, he took the relation with *Indians* further than in the previous 350 years and went for their annihilation (Delrio et. al, 2010).

During the 19th century several military campaigns were conducted. The most systematic and violent being Roca's Conquest of the Desert (1878-1885), qualified by Viñas as "the superior stage of Spanish conquest" (1982, p. 45). Roca used pillage, ethnic persecution, assault on civil population, kidnapping, identity cleansing of children, and the creation of several concentration camps to exterminate and civilise indigenous population (Aranda, 2010; Delrio, 2005). In less than a decade, a large number of Indians were killed⁴⁹ and about 15,000 displaced, most of whom had no choice but to become servants⁵⁰ or slaves (Mouratian, 2013).

Induced to a great extent by the increasing needs of capitalism, as it will be later discussed, these military operations were fashioned and promoted in the name of social purification. Victory, thus, was publicised as the eugenic triumph over threatening enemies, and the eradication of biological perils to the legitimate race: "The more inferior species disappear, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated; the fewer degenerates a species has, the more I —as individual, and as species— will live, stronger, vigorous and able to proliferate." (Foucault, 2004, p. 265). It is not difficult to hear the spirit of those words in José Ingenieros' voice, a respected intellectual of the time who wrote: "The inevitable result of mixing inferior races with superior ones is an undernourished progeny, ape-like, with all the flaws of the race accentuated by the villainous race" (1957, p. 117).

The Desert Campaigns were deliberate attacks on cultures that were deemed inferior and,

⁴⁹ About 1,000, according to Mouratian (2013) and 13,000 according to Bartolomé (2004).

⁵⁰ This is well portrayed in the novel *Quilito*, by Ocampo (1985).

more importantly, dangerous to the country's wellbeing. According to Rose, "all the eugenic projects of selective reproduction, sterilization, and incarceration" are derived from the idea that every life "has a value that may be calculated, and some lives have less value than others" (2007, p. 57). It reminds us that racism is not something the State uses out of hate or fed by the desire to give death to its enemies, but to justify selection and discrimination for the sake of a longer, healthier and purer life of its population (Foucault, 2004, p. 265).

Without being able to rely on the indigenous population, the energy needed to forge the country, populate its vast lands⁵¹ and improve the local race, *had* to be brought from Europe: "With three million indigenous people, Christians and Catholics you will not make the republic (...). It is necessary to promote the Anglo-Saxon population. It identifies with the steam, trade and freedom, and it would make it impossible for us to eradicate these things among us without the active cooperation of this race of progress and civilisation" (Alberdi, 1979, p. 126). The logic underlying this kind of thought was that "a population contains individuals that can be ranked according to their quality, where quality is an overall summation of their evolutionary fitness" (Rose, 2007, p. 56). Europeans were at the highest of the scale, and to attract these "living parts of civilisation", as Alberdi called them (1979). The 1853 Constitution included an article⁵² promoting European immigration. Further, in 1876 a law was promulgated offering prospective migrants the benefits of overseas travel, free stay in Buenos Aires upon arrival, free passage to the final destination and the possibility of gaining access to affordable land and seeds, while also setting minimal barriers to naturalisation and political citizenship (Bastia and Vom Hau, 2014). These benefits were offered to Europeans but did not apply to Asian, African or people from neighbouring countries, as neither of them met the desired racial profile (Devoto, 2003).

The implementation of these eugenic policies was, at first sight, successful, and the immigration trend reached its peak between 1880 and 1920, when 30% of the country and

⁵¹ Interesting to notice that this case was, in a way, the opposite of China, where overpopulation –and not the contrary– was seen as a threat to modernisation. For more about this, see Greenhalgh's work in Rose, 2007.

⁵² Article 25: "The Federal Government shall encourage European immigration, and it may not restrict, limit, or burden with any tax whatsoever the entry into Argentine territory of foreigners whose purpose is tilling the soil, improving industries, and introducing and teaching the sciences and the arts". Still in force.

50% of *porteños* were foreign-born.⁵³ Their significance in Argentine culture was so radical that still today the country is presented as ‘one of immigrants’.⁵⁴ Not quite as expected, though, this success soon proved to be a mirage, as most of the immigrants came not from England or Sweden but from the poorest countries of the Mediterranean basin, being 80% from Spain and Italy (Mouratian, 2013).⁵⁵ Rather than the ‘living parts of civilisation’ eagerly anticipated by Alberdi, these were uneducated workers and peasants from Italy and Spain, to whom the political elite looked with concern, worried for the demographic and cultural transformations they could bring to the country. A well-known painting by Campodónico portrays a group of migrants arriving by sea, proud but carrying just a handful of items (fig. 2.2). For the Minister of Agriculture and Public Works, Ramos Mejía, they were unfitted to populate the country: “any skulled animal is more intelligent than the immigrant just disembarked upon our shores. He is something amorphous (...) [with] a slow brain, like that of the ox next to whom he has lived” (1966 [1899], p. 188).

⁵³ According to Aguiló, their impact was “less substantial and many regions, particularly the north, continued to have a large indigenous and mestizo population” (2014, p. 178).

⁵⁴ Garguin warns that this was not a simple or unchallenged process: “the making of this national identity was never a smooth, linear process. Sectors of the elite challenged it periodically, raising the traditional creole *gaucho* as the national hero” (2007, p. 163).

⁵⁵ In what probably is one of the first trans-oceanic seasonal works produced by globalised capitalism, many Europeans used the aforementioned benefits to travel as seasonal workers. Locally known as *golondrinas* [swallow], they spent harvest season in Argentina and travelled back to their countries for their own harvests (Whitaker, 1964, p. 11). Acknowledging this practice, the government decided to maintain their support, expecting they would spread, in Europe, the rumour that Argentina was a wealthy and accessible country (Cook-Martin, 2008).



Fig. 2.2. Portrait of migrants arriving at Buenos Aires.
Painting by Juan Campodónico.

Whilst many European immigrants were, in fact, respected and considered *civilised*, the discourse regarding their contribution to society was eroded by three different but related reasons. First, regarding the economy, they were considered a menace to the productive continuity of Argentina for being slow, weak and lazy. Secondly, regarding politics, they were seen as a threat to national security for their role in the organisation of labour unions, and their involvement in the “rise of anarchist, socialist and communist parties” (Joseph, 2010, p. 343). And thirdly, regarding culture, Argentine elite was worried about the consequences this massive arrival of immigrants would have on the already fragile national identity, particularly in the light of transnational communist ideals. At that time, the State was a consolidated and distinctive agent, and, as population grew, the country saw the emergence of a regulatory power, occupied with the well-being of society as a whole. In a span of forty years, immigrants went from being perceived as the most suitable medication for the sick national body to be a threat to its survival.⁵⁶

In the following decades, over 50% of European immigrants returned home, the Euro-centric model lost approval, and the ideal model of *Argentinity* required a new hero. Something

⁵⁶ The elite coined a new nickname for them: *chusma ultramarina* [“overseas scum“].

seemingly 'authentic' was needed, and the creole elite was not able to provide it. As Bhabha says, they had a "doubly shifting field of categories" (1985, p. 162), caught in a position that, at the same time, defied and accepted modern European culture.⁵⁷ Lacking sufficient authenticity to claim authority, they turned over to the country in search of a new representation. The figure of the persecuted *gaucho*⁵⁸ was then rescued. Just a couple of decades before, Sarmiento was making a call: "Do not spare gauchos' blood. It is the only human thing those bipeds have" (1861, p. 1), but now his extinction was mourned, his features romanticised, his history used to rewrite a new collective past, and his figure seen, until today, as the crystallisation of Argentine identity (Waisman, 1987, p. 42; Svampa, 1994). By re-defining citizenship via shared heritage and tradition⁵⁹; that is, through culture and not civilisation, migrants fell a step in their recognition as *equals*, and Indians and mestizos were once again excluded. The survival of the latter, despite how vigorously sovereign power was applied over them, was seen with regret and shame; a kind of reminder of "a nation that can never be modern and never be one" (Andermann, n.d., p. 11).

2.1.2. Strategies of (forced) assimilation

A different strategy to deal with 'non-white' population was to redeem them through absorption. By the end of the 19th century, Colombian Pedro Fermín de Vargas made the following call: "it would be very desirable that the *Indians* be extinguished, by miscegenation with the whites" (in Anderson, 1991, p. 46). In Argentina, on the other hand, Census Director Gabriel Carrasco presented the results of the 1895 process in a similar fashion: "The issue of race, so relevant in the United States, does not exist in the Argentine Republic, where sooner than later its population will be completely unified under a new and beautiful white race, product of all the European nations fecundated on American soil" (Gobierno de Argentina,

⁵⁷ As Chatterjee asserts, the foundational principles legitimising the domestic elite's rule are split between a commitment to national autonomy and an acceptance of "the very intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based" (in Skurski, 1994, p. 612).

⁵⁸ Goddard defines it as "the nomadic or semi-nomadic population of mixed origin that, until the 1870s, relied on hunting wild cattle, and irregularly became employed as herders on the farming establishments (...) It is still used to describe certain qualities and a certain style of comportment and dress" (2000, p. 1). These qualities were honour, freedom, authenticity, and virility.

⁵⁹ The exaltation of "the nation" through monuments, celebrations and museum are very well discussed in Andermann, 2001 and 2009.

1898, p. 28). Fuelled by social evolutionism, demographic engineering was used to get rid of these unwanted *barbarians*. By diluting their indigenous blood into the more 'suitable' European gene pool, the country was supposed to move forward, not only towards a better race, but also to a more homogenous one; a community that could be more easily referred to as a 'nation' (see Wade, 1997, p. 30-35).

These eugenicist⁶⁰ biopolitics were not exclusively used by creoles on the indigenous population, but also attempted on themselves. Creoles saw mating with Anglo-Saxons as a way to surpass the flawed features of the Spanish gene pool. Furthermore, even Mapuche deliberately promoted mixing with the Argentine, in order to become stronger (Goddard, 2000, p. 9). In northern communities, *white* women were not highly valued, but Mapuche prized them for "their special erotic talents, and, as a result, they tended to incorporate [them] (...) as slaves-concubines" (Socolow, 1992, p. 87). In a way, this means that the very same technology was used by almost the entire population with excluding and inclusive purposes: whether creole, mestizo or indigenous, miscegenation was as a way to become part of a superior culture while leaving behind their 'inferior' –*Indian* or Spanish– traces.

In similar fashion, *caciques* frequently organised *malones* [raids] to capture livestock, goods and hostage (Fig. 2.3). Adult men were killed upon capture, children were kept to be raised in their culture, and young women were particularly valued by *caciques*, used as tokens in many different ways, childbearing being one of them⁶¹ (Rotker, 2002; Operé, 2008). In some tribes, *white* women were not highly praised and were rarely taken as wives, but in others they were seen as a fine alternative for young men who did not have enough resources to pay the 'bride price' (Socolow, 1992). Spaniards had a hard time understanding why many of these women insisted on staying with them, even when offered a chance to return, and the fantasy of the Indian's sexual capacities –again, their *savage* features amplified– was

⁶⁰ In 1883, Galton defined Eugenics as "the science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to judicious mating, but which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had" (in Rose, 2007, p. 55).

⁶¹ Although this does not seem to have been particularly relevant, as their particularly low fertility rate suggests (Socolow, 1992, p. 95).

elaborated as an explanation.



Fig. 2.3: *El malón* [“The raid”].
Painting by Mauricio Rugendas, 1845.

Giving the strong and complex discourses of *mestizaje* in Latin America, where race is not suitable to be grasped just in terms of “biology, blood and genes” (Wade, 2002, p. 101), a more efficient strategy to normalise abnormalities was via disciplinary mechanisms, such as labour⁶² and education. After the military campaigns, a dozen concentration camps were established along the country, and the church was put in charge of producing civil individuals; not fully recognised citizens, but “subjects with a proper name and a soul” (Andermann, 2007, p. 172). Adults were also sent to plantations to serve as cheap work labourers, and women and children were assigned to different households in cities and *haciendas* in order to be instructed ‘in the ways of civilisation’. Figure 2.4 is the frontispiece that adorned Humbolt’s *Atlas géographique et physique du Nouveau Continent*, published in Paris in 1814. In it, the figures of Athena and Hermes appear comforting a (submissive) Native American for the conquest’s wreaths, bringing the highest gifts of *humanitas* [culture],

⁶² To a detailed account on how labour was designed to discipline Indians, see: Campi (2009).

litterae [literature], and *fruges* [crops, grains].



Fig. 2.4. Frontispiece for Humbolt's *Atlas géographique et physique du Nouveau Continent*, published in Paris, 1814.

Disciplinary power was placed in motion and the population was moulded upon the Anglo-

Saxon ideal. Even Roca, the General in charge of the genocide and twice President of the country, stated that he was not fond of the US reservations and preferred “a system of integration of the *Indian* through work” (Goddard, 2000, p. 23). Whilst his argument was probably motivated by a sovereign necessity of putting the entire territory under control, it also reveals how Indians were seen as suitable to be normalised. Concentration camps were places devised to take these ‘bare lives’, devoid of humanity, and make them cross the threshold into a ‘human life’ (*bios*), recognised and protected by social order. These policies were not received without suspicion, and Zeballos, for instance, the founding director of the Argentine Geographical Institute, warned: “In the very moment they are allowed to leave the camps they will turn into savages once again, if they are not escorted by veterans” (1881, p. 93), which confirms that both discourses –exclusion⁶³ and assimilation– and both powers –sovereign and disciplinary– were at operation at the same time.

It may seem highly paradoxical that modern Argentina was built upon the higher values of freedom and unity while, at the same time, the country was being organised with “ambiguous notions of civilising hierarchy and exclusion” (Skurski, 1994, p. 1). Indigenous, mestizo and negro cultures have been systematically “hidden, annihilated, marginalised or nationally reconverted” (Grimson, 2011), in a movement that echoes what Levi-Strauss called *false-evolutionism*: “an attempt to wipe out the diversity of cultures while pretending to accord it full recognition” (1952, p. 12). However, rather than seeing this as a political failure, I prefer to understand it as an expression of the unavoidable racism that lies at the core of every modern country, Argentina being no exception. This issue cannot be overcome, but precisely for that very reason this research concentrates on the mechanisms and discourses through which it is assembled today. But before reaching that point, we need to review how space has been shaped by these practices. Next section will provide a clearer background of the specific territory where gated communities have been built, and the questions they raise.

⁶³ The extermination of what cannot be civilised clearly reminds us of the Holocaust. In Hitler’s biography, Toland (1976) states: “[His] concept of concentration camps as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history. He admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the Wild West; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America’s extermination – by starvation and uneven combat – of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity”.

2.2. THE CITY AND THE DESERT, CIVILISATION AND BARBARISM

In Argentina, the social distinction between legitimate citizens and the rest of the population was paired with a spatial duality between urban and rural; the former being the *locus* of civilisation, refinement and erudition, while the latter was the place of primitivism and barbarism. This section analyses such associations in two sections: the first one sets out the basis of the relationship between space and culture, while the second looks into the link between power, knowledge and space, analysing the role played by capitalism as a key piece of this particular historical arrangement where discourses, practices and technologies were assembled.

2.2.1. Geographic Imagination

Civilisation and barbarism have been defined as absolute antinomies, and in Argentina –as in other places– each one has a geographical counterpart. In a discourse that has persisted for centuries, *Porteños* tend to imagine the country as sliced in two: on the one hand, cities – for many, Buenos Aires being the only one⁶⁴, and on the other, the ‘desert’. Cities have been thought as the peak of human progress, beacons of light in a sea of barbarism. This standpoint accepts as true the Greco-Roman association between cities and civilisation (*polis/civis* being the place of the citizen), while it distances itself from romanticism and transcendentalism, which, on the contrary, reject them as polluted, inauthentic and perverse.

Besides their moral properties, cities have also been identified as playing a key role in contemporary global capitalism, being perceived as the ‘glocal’ space where the dynamics of an increasingly connected world takes place (Korn, 1940; Zea, 1976; Sassen, 1999). The urban is the natural place where an international flow of people, information, capital, goods, fashion and commodities get organised.

⁶⁴ There has been an historical tension between Buenos Aires and the rest of country, which even led to a civil war after the Independence. For Feinmann, Buenos Aires came to replace Spain as the new central Metropolis, while the provinces were left as the new colonies (2009, p. 12).

Inscribed in this paradigm, the Argentine creole elite encouraged and supported urban life, founding schools and universities, promoting science, and nurturing a public culture of cafes, parks, restaurants and pubs. Identification emerged towards “places and cultures that middle class *porteños* consider fundamentally white” (Joseph, 2010, p. 335), separating themselves from non-white people, practices and regions. They knew their illustrated project could not be accomplished anywhere other than in the urban realm: without cities, there would not be a chance to reach the same state of development as England, France or the United States, reaching their degrees of industrialisation, sophistication and intellectual development life.

If cities became the pinnacle of the achievements of modernity, the dialectic figure was completed with its counterpoint, the desert. The first thing to say about it, is that the word and its image does not make literal reference to a ‘real desert’, of course. In Argentina, rural and scarcely populated areas have been referred to as ‘the desert’ because they have been imagined as devoid of any trace of culture and civilisation. The desert is the domain of barbarians, who had “habits and vices that interfered with the notion of a nature available to all men of good will” (Podgorny, 1997, p. 51), a no-man’s land that posed a great threat to the national sovereign project. In Sarmiento’s words:

“All civilisation centres in the cities, where manufactories, shops, schools, colleges and other characteristics of civilised nations are to be found (...) The encircling desert besets such cities at a greater or less distance, and bears heavily upon them, and they are thus small oases of civilisation surrounded by an untilled plain, hundreds of square miles in extent, the surface of which is but rarely interrupted by any settlement of consequence” (1938, p. 27).

The antagonism between these two opposite forces –city and desert, culture and barbarism, was seen as a problem, and it was intensified from time to time due to the border that apparently separated them tended to blur. Andermann, for example, produced a detailed account of settlers and soldiers’ mass desertions at the frontier; people for whom the Indian lands were somehow magnetic. Quoting Ébélot, the French engineer who supervised Alsina’s Trench’s construction, and afterwards spent years in the frontier: “this free and violent life must have had its charms” (in Andermann, n.d.). The creole elite, however, distant from such

lands, sympathised with Locke or Hobbes when they proposed that nature is a negative state without civilisation, and as such, one enslaved by war and anarchy. They believed the desert was due to be inhabited and civilised, and every bit of menace to the Enlightened project had to be suppressed.⁶⁵

2.2.2. Exploiting the desert

It is undeniable that national identity and social purification were not the only factors at stage in the forging of the country, capitalistic progress playing a major role as well. Capitalism is a rationality that colonises not only time but space, constantly unleashing its centrifugal forces into new areas, while attempting to consolidate a global market where to deploy its hegemonic power (Harvey, 1973; Kipfer et. al., 2012, p. 8). Lefebvre thoroughly reflected on this unceasing urge of capitalism to expand, socially producing spaces not yet reached by its hands: “global uneven development is both the product and the geographical premise of capitalist development” (1970, p. 187). His line of thought follows Marx’s, when the latter claims the commercial war of the European nations had ‘the whole globe for a theatre’ (1974 [1867]).

In Argentina, De Moussy was one of the first authors to describe Argentina’s southern regions as a desert; a desolated area “waiting for humankind (white, immigrant, farmer) to give everything of itself” (Navarro, 1999, p. 1). Soon it became a shared thought among ‘proper’ citizens that natives were not capable of exploiting the land’s rich resources, and that only by reason and modern technology the rebellious nature could eventually be dominated (Muteba, 1998). The role of the army was vital in these efforts, and many authors have framed 19th century military campaigns as vehicles designed to create a slave economy,⁶⁶ to

⁶⁵ Sarmiento was a declared fan of the United States, and usually made comparison between the two countries in order to design a way to achieve that level of progress. Among the commonalities between Argentina and the States were their federal system of government, the low density of population across their territories and the low levels of social mixture with indigenous populations. Politicians and legislators took these common features as a basis to achieve the progress and civility they saw in the northern country. In a way similar to what happened in the United States with the “conquest of the west”, the founding fathers of Argentina saw the country as a big empty land ready to be inhabited and exploited.

⁶⁶ 14 out of the 21 articles included in Law 975 of 1878, regarding the occupation of the recently annexed territories, refer to the capitalisation of land (Andermann, 2007).

spatially expand capital, and to adjust the country to the demands of both the state and the market (Corradi, 1985; Kradolfer, 2014). The image of General Roca conquering the Pampas aboard a British train constitutes, perhaps, the best illustration of a public-private process which aim at the simultaneous opening, creation and connection of the land to modernity and capitalism.⁶⁷

When the Conquest of the Desert campaign finished, Argentina had doubled its size, incorporating over 30 million hectares of potentially productive lands, and opening northern Chaco and southern Patagonia to settlement and exploitation. After the original inhabitants of these regions were expelled, land prices boomed and “the region was soon swimming in colonists, domesticated animals, and investment capital” (Nibert, 2013, p. 150). Most of these *new lands* were distributed among a few oligarchic hands (Navarro, 2007), and their population and exploitation soon proved to be a strategic challenge, due to the shortage of workers and the absence of a reserve army of labour. Alberdi proposed that ‘to rule is to populate’ as the country’s motto, and many procedures were set in motion to attend to this issue. First, and as we have already reviewed, a migration policy was designed to attract European population, particularly those capable of exploiting land and contributing to the development of capitalism.

Secondly, land was provided to every soldier who took part in the campaigns. According to their rank, they received from 100 to 16,000 hectares (Eggers-Brass, 2009, p. 379). At the same time, their salaries were cut, compelling them either to sell or work their estates. This linkage between military conquest and capitalism has been widely discussed, and is probably one of the few subjects where authors such as Marx (1973 [1861]), Weber (1978 [1922]: 973), Smith (2003 [1776]) and Foucault (2002) concur, stating that the army is one of the prime sites of discipline, surveillance, hierarchy, tactics of cooperation, efficiency and bureaucracy, thus configuring the ideal model of the modern capitalist factory. In Argentina, soldiers hardened in battles against *Indians* and in the war against Paraguay were considered apt for making the most of a land as harsh as Patagonia.

⁶⁷ Contrary to what was expected, the oligarchic distribution of land produced an agro-productive based economy rather than an industrial one (Corradi, 1985; Solberg, 1987).

Thirdly, regarding the general population, a number of laws were issued to increase the labour force, and decrees were passed to harden their inspection and enforcement. The law against vagrancy, to give one example, was toughened to force the homeless to become part of the labour force; while the *papeleta de conchabo*, on the other hand, aimed at preventing workers from leaving their jobs before their contracts expired (Campi, 1993), thus providing unfree or semi-free labour to landowners. Furthermore, a considerable part of the *Indians* was transformed into workers (Wolf, E. & Mintz, S., 1957). In his lucid research about the foundation of the Argentine State, Andermann shows how Catholic priests made detailed inventories of ‘exploitable bodies’ in camps, displaying, for each indigenous person captured, their birth name, Christian name, and date of baptism (2007, p. 172)⁶⁸. The production of such reports interlaced knowledge and power to aid capitalist endeavour, and by the end of the 19th century, after being *re-educated* in the army or in camps, thousands of *Indians* had been allocated to haciendas or deported to plantations. *Indians* role in the growing agro-export industry was so indispensable⁶⁹ that slavery, despite having been forbidden for over seventy years, was allowed and even encouraged by President Roca. In Friedman’s words: “The Argentine State favoured agro-export producers because they controlled the state (...) a complete identity existed between economic and political dominance” (1989, p. 5).

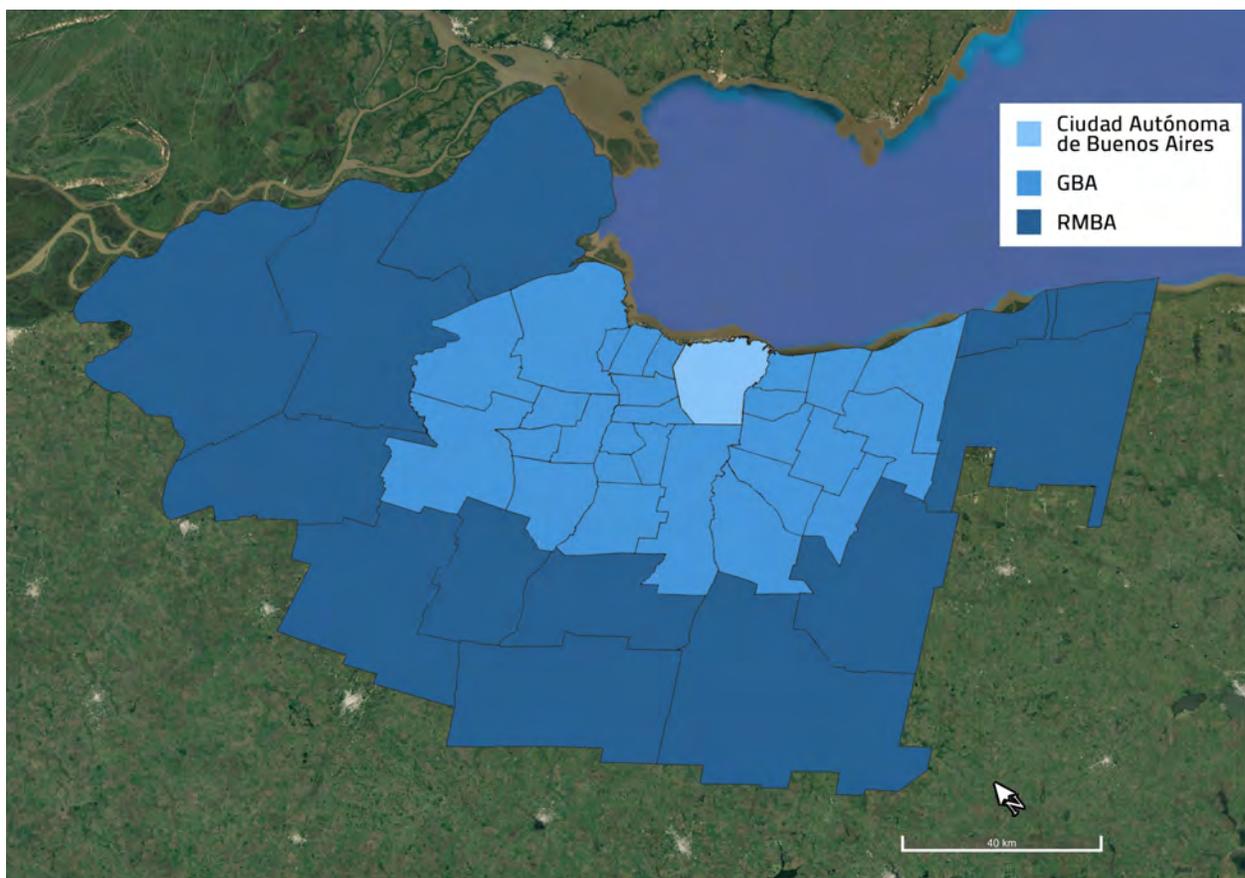
The outcome of the Desert Campaign reveals, with enormous clarity, the symbiotic relation between nation, space, race and capitalism. Social purification, as seen, was a major argument stated by the sovereign power to eradicate and exterminate the indigenous population. Disciplinary power, on the other hand, sought to normalise the abnormal, labour being a very suitable and necessary way to do so. In sum, two different powers worked in harmonic synchrony, one appropriating land, the other appropriating workforce.

⁶⁸ This episode recalls the one discussed by De Certeau, Giard and Mayor in *The practice of everyday life Vol. 2* (1988), where they explored the linkage between knowledge and power by showing how the very same process of collecting data about popular culture in the 19th century France ended up conducting its decline (1998).

⁶⁹ Just to give a number, in 1910, Jujuy’s three major *ingenios* [sugar cane mills] occupied a labor force of 10,000 workers (Ogando, 1998).

2.3. TERRITORIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE

This section focuses specifically on the suburban areas of Buenos Aires, the region where this research is located, to analyse how the different models of citizenship modelled the way the territory was settled. Argentina is a federal country divided into 24 autonomous entities: 23 *provincias* plus the *Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* ["Buenos Aires Autonomous City⁷⁰"]. Also known as *Capital Federal* or CABA, the capital city is encircled by the Buenos Aires Province (fig. 2.5), commonly referred to as *Provincia*, which is subdivided in 135 *partidos*; 24 of them called the *Conurbano*, plus the Capital City compose the metropolitan area of Greater Buenos Aires (GBA). The central city holds a population of three million persons, known as *porteños*. The Province's population reaches 16 million and its gentilic is *bonaerense*. Although both entities are autonomous, they are economically, spatially, and culturally entangled.



⁷⁰ Since the 1994 Constitutional Reform.

Fig. 2.5. Map of Buenos Aires Urban Area. In light blue, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA); in blue, Gran Buenos Aires (GBA); and in dark blue, Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region (RMBA). Produced by the author over a Google Map image.

With a surface of 3,631 km², today the *Conurbano* has a population of almost 10 million (Census 2010), of which 33.8% are immigrants coming from other provinces and border countries such as Paraguay and Bolivia. The area is mostly precarious and impoverished,⁷¹ scattered with informal settlements, environmental contamination, and deficient infrastructure. Poverty is heavily concentrated in the southern *partidos* (Arizaga, 2000a, p. 23), while the West holds a mixed population that combines working and middle-class households, and the North appears as the most heterogeneous, being traditionally preferred by the wealthy.⁷²

Under the assumption that a social process cannot be fully understood without studying the way in which spatial relations are assembled; that is, how people, activities and buildings are distributed and arranged, this section reviews how the Conurbano has been organised and populated. The intention is not to describe its transformations but to trace a genealogy that will reveal gated communities as the latest manifestation of power relations that have continuously given shape to the region.

2.3.1. The *Conurbano* during the first half of the 20th Century

At the end of the 19th century, Argentina was arranged following a productive model based on agricultural goods. As part of the global division of labour, the country's role was to provide cheap commodities to first world nations, and it was quite good in doing so. In just two decades, between 1890 and 1910, railroad tracks grew five times, and the production of meat and wheat increased over ten times. With the aid of international capitals –mainly British, followed by French and German investments–, the country managed to become one of the largest grain and livestock producers, and the world's 6th largest economy by 1928

⁷¹ According to Thuillier, half of the population of the suburbs of Buenos Aires live below the national poverty line (2005a).

⁷² Which does not imply that only rich people live there.

(Gerchunoff and Llach, 1998, p. 79). Being 'the world's granary' had a major impact in the country, especially in the province of Santa Fe and focusing on the expansion of the city of Rosario, that concentrated most of the farming lands and attracted the majority of the work force and infrastructure. But besides a few small cities, crops and a dozen towns, the region –the size of Italy– was scarcely populated (Halperin, 1973, p. 85).⁷³

Slowly but surely, the Buenos Aires Province saw the arrival of wealthy *Porteños* who liked to spend their weekends in their *quintas*, big countryside houses located on the outskirts of the city. Just as the Romans did two thousand years before, and the British by the end of the 18th Century, they found pleasure and sophistication in living in the city while enjoying, from time to time, the benefits of 'civilised nature'. Things started to change as the city grew and new problems arose. In 1867, a cholera outbreak killed over 8,000 people in Buenos Aires. Four years later, in 1871, yellow fever caused 15,000 deaths, around 8% of the city's population. It was probably the biggest tragedy in Buenos Aires history, and during that year, almost two thirds of the inhabitants left for safer and uncontaminated areas, just as the plague and the fire triggered suburban occupation in London during the 17th century (Fishman, 1987, p. 40). These two epidemics outbreaks, plus the increasing influence of British immigrants, accelerated elite suburbanisation. In the thirties, Lagartos and Tortugas, the first country clubs, were founded 40 km north-west of Buenos Aires. These compounds were strongly linked to outdoor life, and the practice of sports such as polo, cricket and rowing (Thuillier, 2005a). They were, however, not to be inhabited full time, but on weekends and holidays only, as the duties of aristocracy were still tied to the city.

During decades, State planning was socially grounded on racial distinctions and spatially conceived under this urban/civilised – rural/barbaric scheme. Urban centres, particularly Buenos Aires, were treated as the crown jewels (Luna, 1982; Ríos, 2006), whilst rural areas were pretty much left on their own. In the absence of the State, housing market was taken over by small and middle scale developers who scattered the region with new neighbourhoods –*loteos populares*. Land was parcelled and sold, and without a regulating

⁷³ The history of the Province occupation and its territorial transformations has been widely researched. See, for example: Torres, 1993; Ballent, 1998; Girola, 2005; and Pérez, 2012.

framework (Ríos, 2005), almost no infrastructure was built, and no services were provided. The function of the region was to be a repository of things considered polluted and menacing for the hygienist and illustrated project, such as slaughterhouses, leather tanneries, garbage dumps and, above all, poverty, which grew at large on the city borders. This led socialist Mario Bravo to argue, in 1917, that: “in Buenos Aires there are two cities: one, north of the Rivadavia Avenue, with European features; and another, in the South, proletarian and unprotected” (“Buenos Aires: los barrios del sur siguen relegados,” 2000, p. 1).

The socio-spatial structure of the region swiftly began to change in the thirties, when international immigration declined, the demand for commodities was reduced by the 1929 international economic crisis, and the lobby of national producers against foreign capital forced the country to reorganise its productive forces (Torres, 1993). Following the advice of CEPAL ECLAC,⁷⁴ like many other South American countries, Argentina partially replaced its agro-export model with one “based on the state intervention, protectionism and import substitution industrialisation” (Svampa, 2001, p. 15). For the Province, this meant the arrival of a number of small and middle-size factories, which attracted over a million immigrants from the most rural and indigenous provinces (Thuillier, 2005a). Internal immigrants, which until then did not have a place in the national project, found one in the expanding working class.

From 1914 to 1947, the country doubled its population (101%) and the Conurbano multiplied four times, rising from 458,217 to 1,741,338 (380%). In 1944, over 1,200,000 workers were occupied in local industries, many of whom settled alongside the new factories, founding and/or densifying existent settlements (Ríos, 2006). Two public policies that had a major impact on the region were the subsidisation of train tickets, which allowed people to live in the suburbs while working in the city, and the creation of flexible housing credit⁷⁵ for working class families (Torres, 1993). Both actions stimulated population growth in the region, promoted by internal immigration from rural areas that usually concentrated in

⁷⁴ UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Acronym in English, ECLAC.

⁷⁵ According to Torres, this policy increased the number of house owners in the Greater Buenos Aires from 26.8% in 1947 to 58.1% in 1960 (1993, p. 14).

informal and precarious areas on the outskirts of major cities (Lattes, 1973). According to Gutman and Hardoy, during the rest of the century this process, and these inequalities, “never ceased to deepen” (1992, p. 227).

2.3.2. Alluvial folklore

Strongly connected with how space has been occupied and class enacted, different actors have questioned *whiteness* as the nation’s standard of legitimate citizenship. Perhaps the most important of these challenges took place on October 17th 1945, when a demonstration changed Argentine history for good. On that day, currently celebrated as *Día de la Lealtad* (“Loyalty day”), thousands of workers marched through Buenos Aires towards Plaza de Mayo, the country’s symbolic centre, demanding the release of Colonel Juan Domingo Perón, who was under political arrest. The march was motivated by the achievement of that sole purpose, but its call was so vast that it ended up demanding a radical political transformation of the country. In Avellaneda’s words: “Peronism shocked the traditional bases of political, economic and cultural behaviours, while, [at the same time] altered social stratification and the rhythm of social mobility” (1983, p. 16). The event has been narrated so many times, and in so many ways, it has become a foundational myth for part of the population.

17th October was revolutionary because it was the first time the ‘other half’, hidden during centuries of exclusion, made an entrance into the *civilised* realm; or at least, the first time they showed up not as prisoners or servants but as citizens, claiming the same rights as ‘proper’ citizens. Martínez Estrada narrated the events as follows:

“We had talked a lot about the people (...) but we did not know them. Perón revealed to us, not the people, but part of the people that for us appeared strange and foreign. On October 17th, downtown Buenos Aires was flooded with a social sediment that nobody recognised. It seemed like an invasion of people from another country, speaking a different language and wearing exotic outfits. Despite everything, they were our brothers, our miserable brothers, the *lumpen-proletariat*. They came asking for answers, demanding a place in the sun, and they appeared with their butchers’ knives at the waist (...). We shivered watching them marching in a silent horde, threatening us with a horrible revenge” (2005, p. 56).

17th October renewed *porteños*' fear of an always-possible invasion, as if the social body could develop, in an instant, a cancer of a thousand uncivilised cells eager to contaminate space and bring society down, as the cover of *La segunda independencia* ["The second independence"] portrays (fig. 2.6). The episode had a major impact on fiction, and some of the country's greatest authors and filmmakers, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Hugo Santiago and Julio Cortázar created influential works about it, some praising it but many others portraying it in quite negative terms⁷⁶, criticising the number of different sub-races or counter-races that "despite ourselves we are constituting" (Foucault, 2004, p. 55).

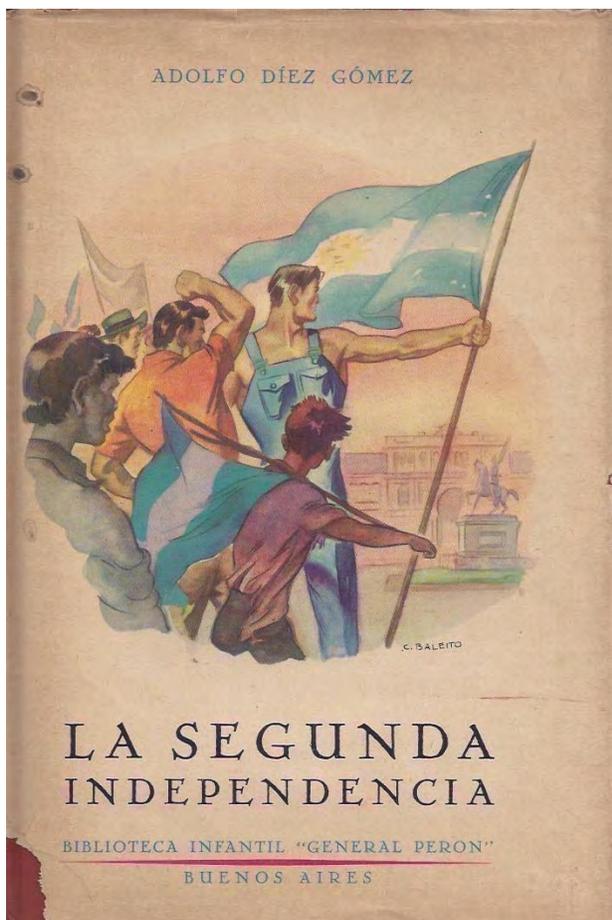


Fig. 2.6. Cover of Díez Gómez's *The second independence*, 1948. It shows a group of young males walking towards Plaza de Mayo and the Presidential Palace Casa Rosada.

⁷⁶ The most relevant of these works include: *Examen sin conciencia*, by Martínez-Estrada; *La fiesta del Monstruo*, by Jorge Luis Borges; *Casa Tomada*, *El Examen*, *La banda* and *Las puertas del cielo* by Julio Cortázar; *El niño proletario* by Lamborghini; *Cabecita negra* by Germán Rozenmacher; *El Matadero* by Esteban Echeverría; *Invasión*, by Hugo Santiago; and *El Campito*, by Juan Diego Incardona.

It was not only intellectuals, but the whole elite who reacted in awe, scared and disgusted with these “barbaric hordes” (Rosano, 2003, p. 8). The act was seen as a direct challenge to the spatial taxonomy that determined each one’s *proper place*, and a fracture of the city’s cultural topography. As Frigeiro explains: “racial-spatial order is based on the perception that particular racialised bodies should occupy particular social spaces, and not others, and that their presence in the latter causes social unrest” (in Viotti, 2018, p. 95). To cross what was perceived, until then, as a tight border separating both ends of the “dual city”, was to defile the very founding criteria of civilisation.⁷⁷

Agamben stresses that even though ‘qualified life’ (*bios*) is built upon ‘bare life’ (*zoe*), it is, at the same time, excluded from it. A ‘biopolitical caesura’ is unavoidable, and life is constantly and violently purified, in a process that distinguishes between citizens and non-citizens. In the Argentine case, I wish to take the liberty to talk not about bare life nor qualified life, but perhaps of a “disqualified life”, a sub-life, almost human but not quite. In these terms, the 1945 “invasion” can be framed as an attempt made by this “disqualified life”, just above *zoe*, to take over *bios* and become a legitimate culture, thus taking over a place that “seems destined to a very different thing” (Cortés Rocca, 2010, p. 186).

The events on October 17th altered power relations and a new ‘language map’ was produced, with a renewed racialised vocabulary and novel discursive tropes. For example, on that sunny day, workers refreshed themselves by rolling up their trousers and dipping their feet in the Plaza de Mayo fountain (fig. 2.7). The expression ‘*meter las patas en la fuente*’ [‘put our feet in the fountain’] was coined, and is still in use to name the improper act in which someone reveals their lack of civilised manners. Even more, in Spanish *pies* are the term used for humans’ feet, while *patas* is mostly reserved for animal’s, so in this phrase it has a derogatory function that highlights their allegedly sub-human status.

Another insult coined that day was the racist nickname *cabecita negra* [“little black head”]:

⁷⁷ Plotkin compares the episode with a carnival, as it temporarily shifted social hierarchies and “put together what it is usually separated” (2007, p. 142).

“The newcomer, the intruder, did not only suffer rejection from the liberal and democratic middle class, but also from his class brothers, his workshop or factory partners. His flamboyant scarf, the pen in the pocket, were reasons of mockery (...) They called ‘little black heads’ to these new and unwelcome conquerors of the city” (Orgambide, 1967; see also: Ratier, 1971).



Fig. 2.7. People freshening up at Plaza de Mayo fountain. Author unknown.
Source: Archivo General de la Nación Argentina.

Under a class-race logic, wealthy *porteños* also started calling these invaders *descamisados* [“the shirtless ones”], mocking them for walking around without a jacket, a tie, a hat and a coat.⁷⁸ In a turn of events, however, Perón and his followers re-signified the concept, and the *descamisado* became the icon of their fight, just as the *sans-culottes* did in France or the *queer* movement in America. The newspaper *La Vanguardia* reported that: “Peronists insulted and laughed at men who wore polished shoes and clean shirts (...) while singing ‘No top hat and no cane, we’re Perón’s boys all the way!’” (in Milanesio, 2013, p. 142).

⁷⁸ Numerous accounts, though, declared that most people marching were in fact wearing tie and jacket. As Milanesio notices, it is interesting that “both Peronists and anti-Peronists alike chose the ‘people in rags’ to construct the figure of the suffering and under-privileged worker, on the one hand, and the stereotype of the brutish and uncultured working-class Peronist on the other.” (2013, p. 143).

These insults bring into light the intersection of class and race, because whoever participated in the uprising, or became a supporter of Perón, was suitable to be identified as a *cabecita negra*, even though the supporters were “the most heterogeneous crowd the imagination could conceive. The traces of their origins were translucent in their physiognomy. Descendants of European southerners were standing next to the Nordic blondes and the curly haired brunettes in whom the blood of a distant Indian still survived” (Scalabrini Ortiz, 1973).

Labels are contagious and can easily cross social dimensions. Regarding space, for example, someone who may not be poor but live in a poor area, is usually identified with poor people’s stigmas, such as being lazy, violent or unreliable. In the same manner, negative values associated with race migrate to other categories, and people who may not identify with *Indian*, *Negro* or *Mestizo* ethnic labels are framed as such anyhow, because they share a socio-economic status.

The events of that day have become mythical in Argentine memory, probably because it was a critical event where national identity was reconfigured, and set the starting point from which the country began to be recognised as diverse rather than homogeneous.⁷⁹ The working class appeared and raised its own flags and symbols; and squeezed between them and the elite, the expanding middle classes also gained consciousness of themselves, asking for recognition (Garguin, 2007, p. 162).⁸⁰ The city was occupied by ‘lesser actors’ demanding equal conditions, and the traditional relationship between space and culture lost the clarity of its borders.

⁷⁹ It may be relevant to say, though, that regarding the indigenous population, Perón moved forward towards their recognition but conditioned it to their incorporation into the Argentine culture. In his 1953 political plan: “Aboriginal population will be protected by the direct action of the State and through their progressive incorporation into the rhythm and general way of life of the Nation” (Presidencia de la Nación, 1952, p. 47)

⁸⁰ To a detailed account of the role played by the incorporation of women to labour market in middle-class identity, see: Pite, 2013.

2.3.3. From welfare state to neoliberal policy

During the first of Perón's administrations, which ran from 1946 to 1955, a new plan to industrialise the country was put in motion (Ríos, 2006). The expansion of the railway network across the Conurbano fuelled the already rising internal and external migration into the area. An affordable housing credit's program was created (Pírez, 2005), but due to improper urban planning and land speculation, the region ended up being primarily occupied with informal settlements. In 1955, a military coup deposed Perón and installed a temporary government, and in 1958, radical candidate Arturo Frondizi was elected for the office and partially continued with Perón's pro-development program, aiming at self-sufficiency in energy and transportation. Instead of prioritising national ventures, though, Frondizi intended to attract the international capital. In his scheme, Buenos Aires Province was part of a plan called National System of Planning and Actions for Development, which invested large sums of money in infrastructure to increase the region's appeal for international interests.

While many welfare programs were maintained during his period, train tickets subsidies were put into a halt, unions were intervened, and the budget of the credit program for affordable housing was reduced by 80% (Romero, 1995, p. 68). As a result, poverty increased, and slums scattered throughout in the suburbs. From 1966 and 1973, a military government took control of the country and reversed Frondizi's policies. Informal settlements were seen as underdeveloped stains that had to be removed through affordable housing plans, and the region experienced a rise in its population.

In 1976, a new military government partially dismantled the model of national development and welfare state (Sourrouille, Kosacoff & Lucángeli, 1985). The military *junta* attempted to develop a neoliberal economic model based on the retraction of the state, privatisation of public assets and market deregulation (Seoane and Muleiro, 2001). This period was known as '*plata dulce*' ["sweet money"], because the country got involved in loops of international credits and loans, and the money brought in ended up increasing the richness of a few rather than reinforcing the country's structural development. Martínez de la Hoz, Minister of

Economy, celebrated that during that period the Argentine moved towards a new mentality based on consumption, competition, economic freedom and individual effort (Martínez de la Hoz, 1981).

The Military Government forced 300,000 people to move out of Buenos Aires; 200,000 of them from the inner-city slums. A small fraction of this population went back to their provinces or countries of origin, but the majority went to enlarge the suburbs, becoming part of what since then has been known as *villas miseria* ["slums"]. The occupation of La Provincia by a marginal population fuelled the already sound imaginary of a dual country, with Buenos Aires as the exceptional beacon of civility embedded in a vast brutish land.

The purpose of the government was to make available real estate of great economic potential within the city, and, according to Oszlak, to *whiten* Buenos Aires (1991). Bastia and vom Hau take the diagnosis further by stating that the elite's obsession with order "was closely entwined with established ideas of racial hierarchies and the whitening of Argentina" (2013, p. 9). Moreover, as Blaustein (2006) and Oszlak (1991) have argued, the inhabitants of these informal urban settlements were seen as threats to the social body, as this press release published in 1976 eloquently reveals: "The Municipality, responsible for the urbanisation and health of the city, cannot and should not tolerate the proliferation of emergency housing, which for being against the basic necessities and spiritual needs of human life, are against the well-being of the population" (in Blaustein, 2006, p. 19).

In 1980, the Ministry of Housing published a report known as the 'Blue Book', which carefully explained the menaces these people posed and the steps to follow. "*Villeros* have brought to the city their cultural customs, failing to fully become a part of society" (CMV, 1980, p. 7), while in a different section it argued: "They did not know how to develop a sense of private property, and for that reason they did not assume their obligations regarding bills, taking care of their houses and conducting themselves in acceptable manners" (p. 7). It also provided careful instructions on how to produce knowledge about these populations, including the use of satellite photos, surveys and a census, through which they were going to be identified and afterwards expelled. To make visible their condition as "polluted

population”, and the urgency of their removal, the main doors of their houses would get painted with a white number inside a black rectangle.

The Blue Book aimed at ethnic and class cleansing, and as such, it informs the biopolitical analysis provided so far. As a result of its application, thousands of people were displaced, and those who managed to stay were harassed and/or concealed. The most famous case of the latter happened in 1978, when due to the World Cup in Argentina, Villa 15 in Buenos Aires was enclosed by a wall to hide it from foreigners. From then on, it has been known as *Ciudad Oculta* [Hidden City].⁸¹ The Province, as said, received the largest part of the displaced, and the number went down from four-fifths of the metropolitan population of Buenos Aires in 1914, to less than a half by 1960. Ten years later, almost two-thirds of the metropolitan population was settled outside Buenos Aires City, and ten years later, around 70 per cent (Pírez: 2012; Yujnovsky, 2000). At the same time, the military government implemented the General Law of Migration and Promotion, described by Bastia and vom Hau as “the most discriminatory migration policy in the history of Argentina” (2014, p. 9). Anchored in the enduring discourse of Argentina as a white country, it intended to prevent migration from neighbouring countries.

2.3.4. Gated communities: From second homes to full-time cities

In 1977, Buenos Aires Province promulgated decree 8912/77, decentralising land planning and giving each *partido* authority to administrate and regulate themselves. The decree abolished the supply of *loteos populares* while, at the same time, mentioned gated communities for the first time “as a distinct legal entity in the planning codes” (Libertun, 2010, p. 609). During the seventies, a decade of social unrest and pre-revolutionary troubles (Thuillier, 2005a), Buenos Aires ceased to be seen as the traditional fortress of civility, and these fenced suburban neighbourhoods appeared to offer the safety that elite and middle class people were looking for. Although written for the London in the 18th century, the following words could easily be transposed to what happened in Buenos Aires a century

⁸¹ Although there is another version of the story that explains the name because the *villa* was built hidden by the large wall of a factory.

later:

“From the early eighteenth century it was the custom for the London middle class to own a ‘villa’ or ‘box’ in the picturesque countryside around the metropolis and for the whole family to ‘retire’ there each Saturday afternoon, returning Monday morning. The modern suburb began when the merchant elite shifted its primary residence to the weekend villa, allowing the women and children of the family to remain wholly separated from the contagions of London while the merchants themselves commuted daily from their villas to London by private carriage” (Fishman, 1987, p. 39).

During the eighties, Buenos Aires Province received the first *country*⁸² planned to be used as full-time residency. The distance to the city was not excessive, and the construction of urban highways such as 25 de Mayo and Perito Moreno, both in 1980, allowed people to swiftly move in and out of downtown areas. In 1988, a new law was dispatched granting municipalities the power to allow gated communities the gating of public streets without them needing to fulfil any formal requirements (Libertún, 2010, p. 612). In 1985, in post-dictatorship Argentina, national newspapers Clarín and La Nación acknowledged *countries* as a distinctive category on their classified sections, recognising them as a new category in the taxonomy of dwelling systems (Torres, 1993).

The neoliberal program reached its peak in the nineties, with the arrival of Carlos Ménem to the presidency. Despite being the candidate of Perón’s party, *Partido Justicialista*, he overrode what was left of the state-led development policy and aimed at improving the country’s integration with global markets. His government reduced trade barriers, fixed the exchange rate,⁸³ liberalised the economy, encouraged private spending, and privatised most public companies⁸⁴ (Torres, 2001; Guano, 2003). Public revenues grew via these policies, and the state’s income increased even more through international loans. However, despite its high

⁸² The most common name for these gated communities, derived from the British “Country club”. From here on, *countries* will be written in italics to differentiate it from its English use.

⁸³ The *Ley de Convertibilidad del Austral* [Austral Convertibility Act] was promulgated in 1991 and fixed the rate exchange between ARG Pesos and USD Dollars at 10,000:1. It lasted until the social crisis in December 2001.

⁸⁴ Facilitated by the 1989 *Ley de Reforma del Estado* [Law on the Reform of the State]. Between 1990 and 1994, Ménem’s government privatised national airline, railroads, fuel distribution, production and distribution of electric energy, communications, postal service, the national bank, steel factories and water services, among others. In 1994, the Constitution was amended to take these practices even further.

economic growth rates, Argentina saw an increase in poverty, unemployment,⁸⁵ precarious labour, vulnerability and social polarisation in general (Cimillo, 1999).

The economic policies of the 1990s also reshaped how the *Conurbano* was regulated and occupied, and how public and private actors associated to produce space. At national, federal and local levels, the state abandoned its central role as a rational planner and preferred to work as a promoter of certain well-selected areas. Housing programs were reduced, welfare diminished, and investment was focused in certain kinds of infrastructure that would potentially attract capital, such as the touristic *Tren de la Costa*⁸⁶ and the construction of 150 km of new and refurbished highways, the Panamericana Norte being the most relevant, as it enhanced connectivity between northern *partidos* –where most gated communities were located– and the city.

Local governments did not have the capacity nor the budget to control these transformations and lead the region's development (Vidal-Kopman, 2007). With scarce resources and basic necessities uncovered, they tried to capitalise their biggest asset: a huge provision of cheap land at a stone's throw away from Buenos Aires. In the past twenty years, 70% of gated communities have been built in the *partidos* with the highest proportion of poor households: Tigre, Escobar and Pilar (Libertún, 2010, p. 609). As a local official of Tigre municipality said: "gated communities are the means, not the end, this *partido* found in order to grow; they are, above all, tools of territorial development" (in Girola, 2005, p. 8).

Another strategy to attract resources, reduce public expenditure and encourage local development was to privatise basic local services. In just a couple of years, all over the more desired *partidos*, ventures of international capital and local entrepreneurs took over water distribution, waste collection, street maintenance and tree trimming, to name a few basic public services. A negative consequence of this was the rise in urban inequality: as the

⁸⁵ Unemployment went from 6.3% in 1992 to 21% in 2001 (UNICEF, 2006).

⁸⁶ The Sociedad Comercial del Plata was the nation's second-largest construction company and played a key role during Menem's privatisation, participating in television, telephone, natural gas, electricity, freight rail services, Buenos Aires metro and water utilities. The *Tren de la Costa* was nationalised in 2013.

provision of services are now market orientated, they do not reach poor neighbourhoods, which are perceived as dangerous and/or whose population cannot afford market prices.

According to Ciccolella, foreign investment grew by around 30,000 million dollars between 1990 and 1997, and concentrated in Buenos Aires Province (1999). A large part of that sum went to finance the construction of gated communities and other semi-public facilities that go along with them, such as shopping malls, strip centres and cinemas. If railroads and subsidised train tickets promoted the settlement of the suburbs by working and middle classes, this new network of fast highways and international capital has promoted the suburbanisation of upper classes (Torres, 1993).

In 1998, a new Land Use Regulation Decree reduced gated communities' requirements even more, dropping restrictions regarding "the provision of recreational utilities, the compliance with different land uses within each gated area, and the residential patterns of the dwellers" (Crot, 2006, p. 231). The idea of an 'excluding modernisation' expanded (Mignaqui, 1998, in Torres, 2001), and a narrative of a dual city (Berti and Del Río, 2005), and a society divided into *winners* and *losers* was coined (Svampa, 2001; Thuillier, 2005a), setting one of the foundations of the 2001 economic crisis, which exhibited the largest debt default registered in history: US\$155 billion.

From 1992 to 2000, real estate speculation increased, and gated communities doubled their population every two years (Carman, 2000), occupying over 30,000 Ha of former rural land. Today, over 600 exclusive residential complexes are scattered across the periphery of Buenos Aires, an area that accounts for 91% of the country's gated communities (Girola, 2007). This spatial movement has been paired with a cultural shift, as privileged *Porteños*, traditionally located in downtown areas and key actors of urban life, radicalizing discourses and practices associated with suburban life, such as replacing city by suburb, collective by the self, and urban by nature (Torres, 2001; Janoschka, 2002b). The Argentine geopolitical order changed, and the way elites were embedded in the larger fabric of social life was transformed.

Argentina began its life as a country at a time where the management of life was a major

political concern, at least in the Western world where they wanted to be located and acknowledged. Health, vitality, contamination, race, and purity were issues the State had to address, assembling them in a careful way in order to produce a proper place, and a proper population. Citizens played their part as well, mobilising eugenic discourses of truth, and different purifying strategies. National identity was proposed as one based on locating *whiteness* at the core of legitimate citizenship, and furthermore, a variety of power mechanisms were used to physically and symbolically get rid of –or at least contain– whomever posed a threat to the social body. The history of Argentina has been one of exclusion and discrimination, gated communities being the most recent link of a long chain of power mechanisms aimed at their production. My aim is to show how they have always been a part of a large political strategy regarding power, privilege, and citizenship. The next section concentrates on the 2001 political and economic crisis, which further eroded the discourse of Buenos Aires as a beacon of civilisation, fuelling the exodus of privilege classes towards the suburbs.

2.4. 2001: THE YEAR BUENOS AIRES WAS OCCUPIED

During the nineties, Ménem’s neoliberal agenda managed to heavily reduce the size of the public apparatus, “dismantling the structure of one of the largest welfare states of Latin America” (Giorgi and Pinkus, 2006, p.101). At the end of the decade, poverty had risen to almost 50%, GDP was decreasing abruptly –minus 4.5% in 2001, minus 10.9% in 2002–, and society was suffering an acute polarisation and social unrest. All around the country people started talking about ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of the economic model, blaming the passive role the State had in controlling global market forces. The whole process ended with a clash: in 2001, Argentina suffered one of its most complicated crises, falling into default, seeing hundreds of thousands marching on the streets and having their President resigning without being able to control the situation.

The ripples of the crisis affected millions during the next years, and the situation created a unique scenario, where for the first time in the history of the city ‘improper others’ were not being heavily domesticated, persecuted or expelled, but rather occupying public space in a

way they never had before. The unemployed became *piqueteros*, people who regularly blocked routes and highways, demanding answers and producing their own visibility. Others became *cartoneros*, who made a living by collecting and selling cardboard, paper and other recyclable materials⁸⁷; yet others survived by begging, stealing or bartering, while others organised communal soup kitchens.⁸⁸

The crisis changed Buenos Aires. Traces of its past glories, dense cultural life and significant role in the region were still around, but the general panorama was dark and threatening, as a screenshot of the first results displayed by Google Images for the search clear portraits (Fig. 2.8). In just a couple of month piles of garbage started to accumulate everywhere, poor people roamed the streets like scavengers looking for precarious jobs, or at least some leftovers, workers took over factories, sex workers became bolder in how they occupied public space, homeless people took over public benches or ATMs at nights, and kids lined up outside every McDonald in the hope of catching a hot meal. The presence of these abnormal bodies was so undeniable, and their looks and manners so distant from the *civilised ways* of the elite, that the imaginary of Buenos Aires as Paris of the Americas could not be enunciated anymore without a sense of shame and regret.⁸⁹ In Aguilós' words: "the anxieties of sectors of the Argentine middle and upper middle classes vis-à-vis the 2001 crisis were crystallized through racial language" (2014, p. 177).

⁸⁷ Their number was not very clear, being estimated around 8,762, 25,000 and 40,000 (Alcorta, 2007).

⁸⁸ On the various responses to the crisis, see Goddard, 2006; Cafassi, 2002; and Svampa and Pereyra, 2003).

⁸⁹ Needless to say, Buenos Aires never truly matches its representation. In Gorelik's words: "I believe we, as society, have huge problems adjusting our representations to reality. Even today Buenos Aires keeps producing this idea of an imaginary capital city of a nation never existed, of a country that never could put itself in that league, of a great lost European city" (in Rossi, Calcagno and Álvarez, 2015). Regarding the crisis, Frigeiro stated: "It is not that before the crisis there was no poverty, it is just that it was spatially inscribed; in other words, hidden" (in Viotti, 2018, p. 97).

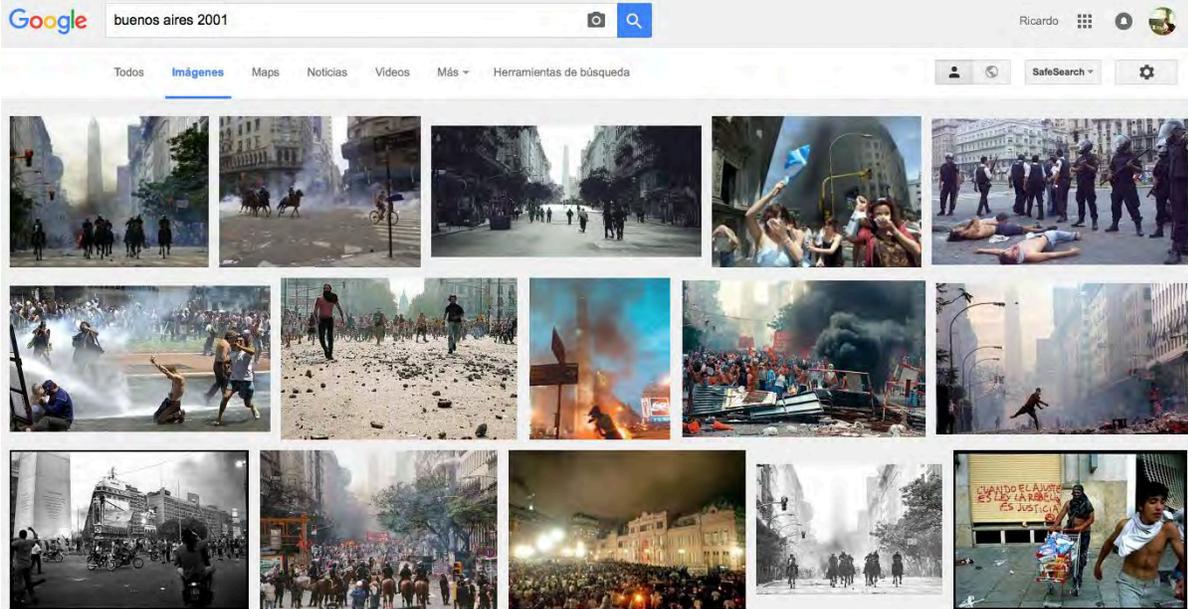


Fig. 2.8. First results for the query “Buenos Aires 2001” at Google Images. Retrieved on September 26th, 2014.

Reviewing the country’s past, one can say elites have always feared, and even expected, an invasion. A hundred years ago, in the midst of colonial occupation, the potential fighting force was represented by ‘barbaric Indians’: Fifty years later, in the growing phase of industrialisation, by the workers who impolitely washed their feet at Plaza de Mayo fountain; and in neoliberal 2001, by an encompassing army of excluded⁹⁰ and *losers*, left out by the market and by the state.

“We used to live in panic”, said Tomás to me on one occasion. He is an upper-class man, son of a Chilean father and an Argentine mother, who lives in Nordelta and works in a factory he inherited in the Conurbano. His mother is a distant relative of mine, so he was one of the first people I contacted upon arriving to the country. When remembering the crisis, he had nothing but sour memories about the city: “We had an alarm in our house, and one day it started beeping out of the blue. We almost had a heart attack and that was it, we said: no more. We were living in fear, worried about being kidnapped, you know? We had installed

⁹⁰ *Sr. Cobranza*, by Las Manos de Filippi, is a very famous protest song produced in 1998. In a raw language, it denounces the corruption of the political class and the awful situation in which they have led the country. Its last verse says: “Shots can be heard in the jungle / It’s the weapons of the poor / It’s the yelling of the *latino* / They have the power, but they’ll lose it”, announcing the arrival of the excluded.

fences, barbed-wire fences, 500 locks downstairs and another 500 locks upstairs, and despite all that we felt nothing was enough.” Although his wife Constanza looked at him smiling and replied: “you are exaggerating as usual, Tomás! Buenos Aires was not like living in the *favelas*”, his opinion reflects how most Nordelteños recall those years [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008].

Consuelo spends her weekdays in a large luxury flat in the Belgrano neighbourhood, just a few blocks from where I lived in Buenos Aires. She lives there with her husband Daniel, her mother, and their daughter Verónica (23). They have two other children who moved out: Mónica, a lawyer who lives downtown, and Diego, settled in Portezuelo, Nordelta, with her wife Claudia. Consuelo and Daniel also own a property in Nordelta, in the Caletas *barrio*, and like to spend their weekends there, “enjoying the birds chirping.” One day I visited Consuelo in her flat in the city, and she wasted no words about how much she loved Buenos Aires, recalling an array of fond memories relating to friendship, random encounters, and cultural life: “But everything has changed”, she stated, gasping, “we used to live in a big house, very close to here, but we had to move to a flat because we didn’t want to hear one more story about crime or violence.” Something happened to you, or yours? “We were assaulted, with guns... I think my husband was a visionary, because he immediately decided to move out: ‘it would become worse’, he said, and he turned to be right... I passed by my former house the other day, and I just couldn’t believe I ever lived there. The streets were empty, and everything looked gloomy.” Their flat is just two blocks away from the train line that goes to Tigre, although they have never used it [Field Notes, August 2nd, 2009].

One of the families I worked more closely with was Patricia and Werner’s, both in their mid-seventies. She is Argentine, he is European, and they decided to live their last years in Nordelta. They have two children, one living abroad and the second still in the Capital but considering moving to Nordelta. Patricia and Werner had lived in Buenos Aires for 24 years, until the crisis prompted them to leave: “We moved out of a place that was falling apart in EVERY way”, Patricia told me with a concerned look. “We built our house from scratch and worked for years alongside our neighbours to improve things... and then, in 2001, we started having robberies”. People from the same neighbourhood? I asked. “No, they came from the

North; neighbouring countries, Paraguay, Misiones.⁹¹ They came to Buenos Aires [Province], and *villas* [slums] were created”.

Besides how vulnerable many people felt in their homes, the presence of these unfit bodies –*villeros, cabezas negras*– in public space affected how the streets were perceived as well. As discussed before, for a long time Buenos Aires was praised for its neighbourly life, a key piece of the widespread discourses regarding friendly immigration and civility previously mentioned. *Porteños* have been proud of living in a place where people from all over the world are to be found on the streets; in a way, just as Aristotle, Jacobs, Sennett or Frug suggested, they have traditionally believed –or believed they believe– that: “the primary function of cities is to teach people how to interact with unfamiliar strangers” (Frug, 2001, p. 140); although of course, as in any Metropolis, it was a discourse that coexisted with its reverse, one of crime and violence (Guy, 1991).

The positive attributes of such lifestyle are beautifully captured in what probably is the most well-known Latin American cartoon, *Mafalda*, written and drawn by Quino, from 1962 to 1973. The comic strip revolves around a young girl of the same name, who spends most of her time on the streets of a downtown neighbourhood, playing with her friends and interacting with people of the entire social spectrum in open, integrated, and neighbourly urban streets (see Fig. 2.9). During fieldwork, Nordelteños frequently drew my attention to *Mafalda*, placing her as the clearest example of the kind of urban life they remember having had. Antonia, a woman in her early thirties, lived for a year in Nordelta. Coming from a rural area of the northern Santa Fe province, she thinks her childhood was simple, but honest: “I spent my entire childhood on the streets. We built houses with cardboard boxes and hid underneath, just like *Mafalda*” [Field Notes, December 19th, 2010].

⁹¹ Misiones is a northern Argentine province.

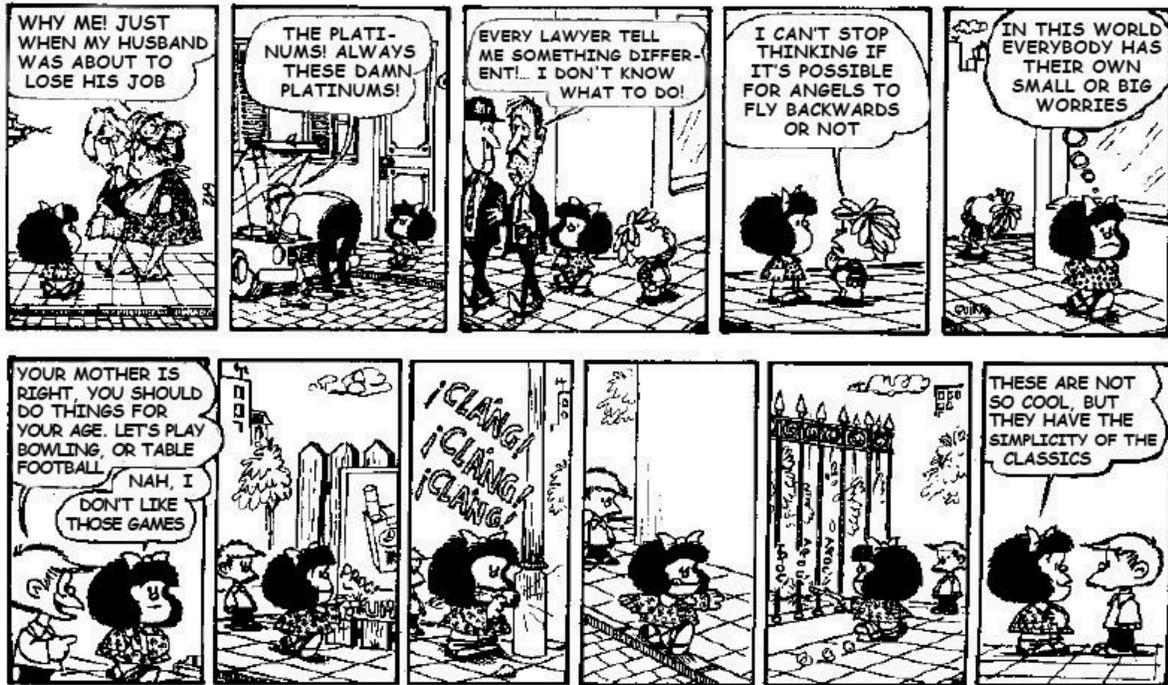


Fig. 2.9. Mafalda cartoons, by Quino.

Months after finishing fieldwork, I was checking my notes about Mafalda and realised Nordelteños only talked about her to offer a testimony of the idealised streets and sanitised urban life they had lost. What drew my attention, was that Mafalda is one of the most political cartoons of the continent, offering a strong left-wing gaze about Argentina and the world during the sixties and seventies; but Nordelteños talked about it in a highly de-politicised way, voiding both characters and situations of any social conflict. It was the very same procedure they followed to think about Buenos Aires. During its entire history, Buenos Aires –like any city– has been a place of struggle, protests, massive demonstrations, and repression. The upper classes, though, have skirted around these complexities, sustaining in broad terms an account of a past, comfortable, and safe urban space. The 2001 crisis came to break this illusion. After it passed, the permanent presence of *improper others* fractured the social pact that sustained this reality, and the city became a threatening place to the elite. Many started calling it ‘Bueno Zaire’ [‘Good Zaire’], mocking the city with a derogatory reference to Africa, while the fear of an ‘Africanisation’ of the country –used as a sign of precariousness and corruption– was frequently stated with concern by different public figures (Frigerio, 2006).

The ethnographic data raised by this research suggests that the 2001 crisis managed to install a state of exception, during which the somehow neat border separating an *outside* from an *inside* lost meaning. At the same time, the menace, violence and polarisation between what lay at both sides of social distinctions intensified. The crisis, in other words, fractured the relation between race and spatial organisation, which commanded that everything had a place considered 'its own', and where it must stay. Contamination occurs when something leaves its proper place and occupies a different one, assigned to something else (Douglas, 2002 [1966]). Thus, to maintain social order is not only to keep things under control, but also to prevent pollution from happening. In Argentina, up to 2001, the countryside and the city were thought of as binary entities, a clear border separating one as a space of civilisation (the city) and another as a realm of barbarism (the desert). With the crisis that border melted, and many felt it was impossible to enjoy urban life anymore: roaming from cafe to cafe, walking around with no clear destination, and having friendly encounters on the streets. More importantly, their children were unable to live the *good life* that they, like Mafalda, were lucky enough to have.

As Low has suggested, a frequent motivation to move to gated communities is to recreate, in an idealised form, the life conditions one experienced as a child (2003). Tomás remembered his childhood with a nostalgic tone: "When we were kids, all of us, about ten, seven or six years old, we were on the streets all day, with our friends, on our bikes, just hanging around, doing kids' stuff." Constanza, his wife, added: "I used to go out with my skateboard, and move around grabbing onto the buses' tail", to which Tomás commented: "Everything we did back then was normal. You were on the streets and acquired life knowledge. Today there's nobody out there, just junkies. You don't see parents, kids and people on their bikes anymore, and that is because of all the robberies, assaults and kidnappings. Argentina has changed" [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008].

Buenos Aires became even more uncomfortable for those who originally moved there from small cities, towns and rural areas. Claudia lived for 18 years in Catamarca, moving to the capital to become an architect. After finishing her studies, she got married with Consuelo's

son, Matías, and together they moved to Nordelta. Last year she enrolled in Buenos Aires University, thus she needs to travel there almost every day. How was your life in Catamarca? I asked her once, and the first thing she recalled was her childhood: “I had lots of friends and we all went to the same small school. Every day we met outside the grocery shop, on our bikes, and life was easier but very hectic! Like going in and out from each other places without stop. We always had something to do: go to the river, play hockey, spend time on the sand dunes or take turns to water the plants, which I don’t know why was one of our favourite things.” And what about Nordelta, how is it to live here? “Here we could recover some of that lifestyle, which was impossible to have in Buenos Aires.”⁹²

In 1871, when a ghastly epidemic of yellow fever spread downtown, rich families moved to northern suburban areas of the city. In 2001, when Buenos Aires ceased to be an archetype of high-culture and a fortress against barbarism, they reacted in a very similar manner, abandoning the city for a safer environment, gated communities being the popular choice: “I would say folks from Nordelta are just regular, common people, who lived at Capital and suddenly realise they wanted something different for their lives. Things changed in Buenos Aires, and that’s why people left, because they became aware their children couldn’t play on the streets anymore”, explained Julieta to me. She moved into Barrancas del Lago in 2004, one of Nordelta’s most family-oriented gated communities, and since then she has dedicated herself to raising her two children.

Some authors have reviewed how the 2001 crisis contributed, through the increased networks of solidarity, to strengthen the feeling of nationhood and the sense of belonging

⁹² An episode that well reflects the tension between tolerance and discrimination among *Porteños* is a short text the writer Juan Solá posted on Facebook in 2015, in which he narrates something he saw at the subway. He was commuting next to a woman and her children when a bunch of poor, dirty, skinny and shoeless kids got into the train. In what is a common practice in Argentina, they approached every passenger leaving a small postcard on their hand or, if people did not want to receive it, on their lap. After covering the entire train, laughing and yelling at each other “without malice”, turned around a start collecting, whether a coin or the postcards. The kid next to his mom, curious, asked her why they were yelling, to which she replied: “Because they are black, and when they grow up, they’ll be thieves, so watch out.” The post was shared over 50,000 times in Facebook, receiving almost a thousand comments and being covered in newspapers and TV. Most people joining the debate defended those kids and criticise the woman’s actions, demanding a more active state and a less hypocritical society. Yet, there were others who justified what the woman said, because the kids were actually dangerous as “80% of them will commit crimes”.

(Campiono and Rajland, 2006). Whilst it may be true that thousands were on the streets dreaming and demanding a better country, we cannot avoid the fact that, at the same time, many others preferred to jump off from what they perceived was a sinking ship into their own comfortable rescue boats. Needless to say, not every privileged family left the city for the suburbs. A considerable number stayed, attempting a different set of strategies, and employing a variety of power mechanisms to reproduce their status and hierarchy. They gentrified areas and isolated selected pieces of affluent neighbourhoods to regroup and concentrate their forces. Another group, large as well, moved to the suburbs, and the beginning of the new millennium found gated communities scattering all around the Conurbano. Among them, *mega-countries* were built, offering those who could afford it not just a safe place to live, but a whole encompassing territorial project where a comfortable life could be achieved. These were places to keep their bodies, their culture, and their assets safe.

This chapter's purpose has been to offer a wider understanding of how white subjectivity has been produced in Argentina through a set of race-related practices. Such genealogy is particularly relevant in a country where whiteness has rarely been seen as a race but rather a *no-race*; a neutral, homogenous category shared by all proper citizens, towards which deviants should be compare with. Race has been primarily understood as a repertoire of signs deployed to set different kinds of people apart, whether to exclude or to normalised them, and gated communities a novel way to articulate race, space and citizenship in contemporary Argentina. From that starting point, the next chapter will analyse Nordelta's strategies to minimise the influence of external actors, with the intention to achieve a state of seclusion and self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONQUEST OF THE SUBURBS

*This is how space begins, with words only,
signs traced on the blank page.
To describe space: to name it, to trace it.*
– Georg Perec, 1997, p. 13

Ethnographic data produced by this research suggests that, if gated communities are power technologies, their product are three major subjects/subjectivities, which are manufactured through a series of institutionalised practices and mechanisms. The first one is that of the *proper citizen*; those who indistinctly answer by the names of *Propietarios* or *Nordelteños*, and who are acknowledged as the compound's legitimate inhabitants. Chapters 6 and 7 will analyse their way-of-life, and the mechanisms through which their subjectivities are produced, examined, and challenged. Chapter 5, on the other hand, will discuss a second kind of subjectivity, which I have called *conditional others*: workers who regularly enter the development to perform their jobs, and whose threatening status is suspended while they are inside, without ever truly disappearing. A third actor produced by gated communities' social and spatial strategies is the one I call *improper other*, which is the focus of the current chapter.

Improper others are human beings deemed unfit to contribute to the social life of gated communities, and whose sole presence is perceived as threatening to its survival. *Improper others* are *abnormal* individuals who dwell and walk around on the profane world that lies outside the protected borders of Nordelta, and although only a few of them would occasionally attempt to gain unauthorised access to the compound, they are all seen as the potential source of threats such as crime, diseases and distasteful practices. This chapter concentrates on Nordelta's surroundings, and on the different ways its residents perceive and relate with these *improper others*. Other authors have called such actors 'unwanted people' (Lynch, 1981; De Munck and Winter, 2012), or in its Spanish translation "*los no-queridos*" (Roitman, 2003), but I have chosen to coin a novel term that incorporates their threatening qualities.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first one outlines the widespread idea among *propietarios* that Nordelta's surroundings were unoccupied before their arrival. Tracing parallels with the Conquest of the Desert, the discussion focuses on two issues that are in apparent contradiction: the way they talk about the process of urbanisation as a capitalist epic tale, and how they dealt with the new savages, in this case called *negros*, that roamed the immediate environs. The second section analyses the construction of a semi-public safe area for themselves; a place where they can meet with citizens from other gated communities to do shopping, have a coffee, and walk around. The third section tackles the various safety procedures implemented to diminish risk and fear of the complex's surroundings, including the presence of private guards, sentry posts, and advice about how and where to move. The chapter's final section studies the reverse side of this issue, asking residents what would happen if *strangers* were to be allowed into the complex.

3.1. THE NEW DESERT

Sofia runs an NGO for kids with a particular chronic disease, and actively participates in the Art of Living Foundation. She is a hectically busy person, always running errands and helping people, and her agenda is so packed we could only meet three times during the two years of my fieldwork. Our scattered encounters, however, were always rich and animated, providing me with great insight about the place of concepts like nature and purity in Nordelta's lifestyle. When I was about to leave Argentina, we saw each other for one last time and I asked her to give me a tour around Nordelta. We drove around for an hour or so, until we came across an empty area where a new *barrio* was being built. Trees and bushes had been removed, builders and construction machines were buzzing all around, and the ground had been flattened, divided and organised in rectangular plots, empty but demarcated by white wooden spikes. Some of the *cul-de-sac* roads were already built, and a team of builders was planting trees following what appeared to be a strict geometrical design. Sofia stopped the car and stared through the windshield as though she were hypnotised by the sight. After a few seconds of silence, she told me the scene reminded her of the first days she spent there: It was 1999; she was struggling through her divorce and a friend told her about Nordelta. Having just sold her former house, she was looking for a new place to settle and decided to

take a look: “The first time I came here I was surprised: there was nothing. No light, no gas, no pipes, no roads, nothing.” Loving its quietness and solitude, and at the same time seeing it as a good investment, she decided to buy: “It was funny and a bit scary too. I came to the office to make the down payment and had to choose a plot from a model. Just then I realised my plot didn’t exist. They showed me this amazing sketch, but I looked through the window and all there was, was a big swamp” [Field Notes, June 16th, 2009].

Her recollections, although unique, are far from being exceptional. Almost every time I asked a Nordelteño about their first years there, the answer was an epic story that combined wilderness, solitude and entrepreneurship, the area being commonly described with words such as: desert, wasteland or barren land. In other terms, as *terra nullius*. Ángel was one of the first Nordelta’s inhabitants, moving in when Alameda was the only *barrio* opened. We were having tea one day on his terrace with his partner Alicia, and he told us, with a great sense of achievement, about the details of those first years: “There used to be nothing here. You turned your car lights down and everything was pitch-black, an absolute desert.” Alicia, who was following his words with a combination of pride and surprise, asked him: “So there was nothing, NOTHING, here? Not a service, nothing?”, to which he replied: “No, I’m telling you, nothing! No supermarket, no shopping centre, not even a gym.” Sitting back, she murmured with a pleased smile: “Wow. You were a kamikaze!” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

Regardless of what *propietarios* may argue, before Nordelta was built the area was – obviously – not a vacuum, but a large plot surrounded by dense working-class settlements⁹³. Their way of describing the place probably had less to do with the area *per se*, and more about the relations residents established with the environment and its settlers. If space, as Latour argues, is “a consequence of the ways in which bodies relate to one another” (1997, p. 174), when Nordelteños describe the area as ‘empty’ they are not really tracing its physical reality as much as conducting a double symbolical operation: to deny what was there, and to highlight what was not there thus identifying themselves with what was about to be.

⁹³ When Nordelta was opened, the Conurbano held a population of around 10 million people, which represented 76% of the metropolitan population and 25,4% of the country’s (Lattes, Andrada and Caveziel, 2010).

Qualified as improper, the area's social and natural features were negated, and the only thing my Nordelta research subjects could relate to, was the promised future they were hoping to achieve.

More specifically, the area was deemed improper for three different reasons: first, because it lacked the amenities, services and infrastructure needed to conduct a 'proper life'; second, because local nature was considered barbaric and untamed, thus opposed to those highly praised values of civility, control and rationality; and third, because local populations were seen as the source of different kinds of contaminations, namely diseases, crime and abnormal behaviours, which threatened the very survival of their own, purified community. This section will describe how the local population was perceived by Nordelteños, and what power mechanisms were put in motion to deal with *propietarios'* daily necessities.

Perhaps a way to start thinking about this relationship is to acknowledge that the emergence of gated communities has usually been explained through the deregulation of land market, privatisation of state-assets, global trends, and the influence of late capitalism (Girola, 2008; Svampa, 2001; Libertún de Durrén, 2007). Without disregarding such variables, I propose instead that they cannot be fully apprehended exclusively as an economic, structuralist phenomenon, nor by framing them as completely new artefacts. On the contrary, only when assuming they are pioneer apparatuses devised by and through already existing power relations, can we understand the full extent of their characteristics, relevant actors and key mechanisms. For Nordelta, to deny and reject the existence of improper population, and to imagine the area where it is located as a wasteland, cannot be solely addressed by looking at the country's recent history. It is also necessary to locate the phenomenon within a wider genealogy of race, class and legitimate citizenry that goes back at least to the 19th century. Through such genealogies we can trace so many parallels between the Conquest of the Desert led by Roca in 1878, and the occupation of the suburbs more than a hundred years later. Perhaps a useful description of the phenomenon would be 'The Conquest of the Suburbs'.

A first common ground between these two historical moments and episodes is that they both

explained themselves as an attempt to put under control *unoccupied* territories. In the first case, the southern part of the country was seen as a wasteland or, which is about the same, as a piece of land populated by unfit and improper people. As Alberdi stated: “What name must be given to a country of two hundred thousand leagues of territory and a population of eight hundred thousand inhabitants? A desert” (1979, p. 127). Just as in the United States the checker board grid was used to found cities in an attempt to neutralise geography and impose capitalistic values over space (Sennett, 2004), the desert was used in Argentina as a discourse that contributed to negate what was not part of the national project; not only in spatial terms, but in a social dimension as well; to deny, as quoted, those with “habits and vices that interfered with the notion of a nature available to all men of good will” (Podgorny, 1997, p. 51). In the case of gated communities, of the almost 600 built in the Conurbano so far, over 70% have been located in the *partidos* with the highest proportion of poor households: Escobar, Pilar and Nordelta’s Tigre, where 20% of the population lived in poverty at the beginning of the naughties (Libertún, 2010, p. 609). Nordelta’s residents, nonetheless, just as those who occupied Patagonia a century before, deny –or at least overlook– these facts whenever they talk about the area. Real estate industry has amplified this discourse by promoting gated communities as utopias built on untouched paradises (González, 2014).

A second parallel between the Conquest of the Desert and that of the Suburbs, is that in both cases newcomers saw themselves as pioneers who were giving life to an inert area through their presence and work. While in the 19th century, this was understood as an operation that combined the military-republican occupation with productive labour. At the end of the 20th century, however, the role of the army and the state diminished, and the narrative of entrepreneurship took the lead. Accordingly, the 19th century process was organised by the state with the aid of private capitals, and in the 20th century roles were inverted: economic private actors took the lead, whilst the state played a secondary but essential role. Anyway, in both cases, people saw themselves as colonisers, courageous enough to conquer the unknown, and savvy enough to detect a great opportunity many others were unable to see.

When I began this research, I was driven by an eagerness to comprehend the multiple

relationships that might exist across a gated community and its exterior, analysing the networks produced between, and maintained by impoverished and rich social classes. What appealed to me was this idea's potential to change the way we were discussing gated communities, class and power, bringing a territorial perspective to the discussion. However, like many Chileans, I was raised to believe Argentina was a highly civilised, inclusive and tolerant country, not like my own repressive and unequal motherland, and during fieldwork I was not sufficiently reflexive and avoided challenging such ideas. I failed to become aware of my own prejudices and preconceptions, and as a consequence I was unable to 'see race' during fieldwork; as was the case with my research participants, I was blind to the influence of race on how society is organised. Everything changed, though, when analysing my data, I scrutinized who did, in fact, occupy Nordelta's immediate environment, and noticing that one word was repeated over and over again in Nordelteño's mouths: *los negros*. Whilst in some contexts the word may not have been used and received as a pejorative term –for example, as a nickname in a group of friends, regardless of their class–, whenever they were talking about their 'outside neighbours', it was used in a derogatory way; not as an individual trait –skin tone did not matter much– but as a collective stigma. From this point onwards, it was impossible for me to avoid the connection between these two 'conquests' of the territory, linked through their racialisation of space, through which race provides an instrument to subordinate those considered as unfit to be recognised as citizens.

One day Tomás organised a welcome dinner for me, and he invited a couple of his friends so they could all together 'answer my questions'. When the night was over, he walked the group to the door and suddenly realised my wife and I were on foot. Genuinely surprised, he asked how we had even managed to get there in the first place: "By train, as usual", I replied with candid honesty. "Noooo! The 'people's train'?? You're way too brave, my friends." I may have made a confused expression because he felt the need to explain his remark. Grinning, he made a frightening face, lowered his voice and murmured: "Because that's the 'people's train' ... you know? because... 'I see black people'", paraphrasing the famous quote from the film *The Sixth Sense*. They all laughed, and we did our best to smile them back [Field Notes, September 29th, 2008].

The train is generally described by Nordelteños as an unsafe means of transportation, or at best, as an absent one. Once I went to a bus stop in downtown Buenos Aires, to catch the private bus to Nordelta. It was a Saturday, the area was quiet, and a young man was sitting there. Blonde, tanned skin, fine clothes, and a last generation iPod in his hand, I figured he was heading for Nordelta as well. I asked him how long had he been waiting there. “Like... almost an hour and a half” That’s sick! Why haven’t you walk to the train? The station is just two blocks away. He looked at me, surprised: “There’s a train? I didn’t know I could get there by train!” How long have you been living in Nordelta? “Five years” [Field Notes, October 17th 2009].

Among upper and middle class people living in Nordelta, the word *negros* was a normalized way of referring to *improper others*, particularly after the 2001 crisis. Before that, their usual colloquial name for them was *cabecitas negras* [“little black heads”], a racist nickname whatsoever but where violence appears to be diminished by its diminutive use. After 2001, the diminutive was dropped, and they simply became *cabezas* [“heads”] or *negros* (Hernández, 2010). Transparent expressions that unveil the violence beneath an unequal relationship. When talking about their immediate neighbours from over the fence, most Nordelteños do not have a problem to refer to them in those terms, as the following tweets⁹⁴ exhibit (fig. 3.1-3.3):



Fig. 3.1. “I think that going out of Nordelta and running from the *negros* was the most exciting thing that happened to me during the day.” Retrieved from twitter on September 2014.

⁹⁴ Taken from the set of selected accounts I followed during fieldwork.



hoy subimos al 60 con maria, y llegamos hasta nordelta
se subieron unos negros sudados un
assssssssssssssssssco

24/01/2013 21:48



Fig. 3.2. “Today we got into the 60 [a public bus] with María, and reached Nordelta. Some sweaty *negros* got on the bus, grosssss.” Retrieved from twitter on September 2014.



Ah ok estaba saliendo de nordelta por atras yt me tope
con unos negros tirandonos besos, menos mal que
estamos en la camioneta

07/12/2011 17:13



Fig. 3.3. “I was leaving Nordelta through the back entrance and I bumped into some *negros* blowing kisses at us. Luckily, we were in a station wagon.” Retrieved from twitter on January 2012.

Nordelta’s borders are seen by residents as liminal places where social contact with these *improper others* is possible and, therefore, a *locus* towards which they feel nothing but fear and disgust. Both the place and its inhabitants have been stigmatised (Castel, 2004), and their feelings are day to day reproduced on a daily basis when *propietarios* cross the fence to visit friends, go shopping or travel to Buenos Aires. On these occasions, glances, words and other brief interactions are produced across the divide. The key area of these interactive margins is General Pacheco City, located three kilometres from Nordelta’s main gate. With almost 50,000 inhabitants, Pacheco –as it is commonly called–, is the third most populated

Tigre *partido*. From an aesthetic point of view, Pacheco is similar to other middle-size settlement in Great Buenos Aires: its cityscape is characterised by low, one-storey buildings, usually a bit run-down. Its streets are rather quiet and is not rare to see people sitting on the sidewalks enjoying the shade while kids play football. Shopping and leisure activities concentrate on the hectic main street, about 15 blocks long, while the rest of the grid is predominantly residential, interspersed with small clusters of print shops, local garages, and grocery shops (Fig. 3.4).

Pacheco was founded in 1927 in the midst of the great rural-urban migration, and during the sixties and seventies it served as the privileged recipient of national and international large industries, such as Techint, Volkswagen, Ford and Kraft. Since the nineties, gated communities started populating the area (Janoshka, 2002a), reaching nowadays a number close to the hundred. According to Alberto, a Pacheco municipal officer, the locality's population is largely composed of low-income working-class families, many of whom come from the *interior* and work in local industries and nearby gated communities, Nordelta being the most relevant, due to its size and particular requirements.



Fig. 3.4. General Pacheco City. Photo by the author.

During the naughties, resident's encounters with *negros* were not limited to these fleeting or critical moments. For Nordelteños, the ideal of self-sufficiency was a very distant aspiration, and because Nordelta did not provide the wherewithal to live, their dependency towards local and metropolitan networks was acute. To see a doctor or to catch the latest play, people went all the way to Buenos Aires; to educate their kids, they picked schools in nearby areas like Olivos, Martínez or Tigre; and for groceries, commerce or service providers to support their daily life, residents had to rely on what the local area had to offer. In direct opposition of the project's core idea, during the first years *propietarios* had to get involved with their exterior neighbours.

Rubén is a journalist who works for one of Argentina's major newspapers. He has lived in Nordelta since 2002; in 2004 he founded Gallaretas, a local newspaper for Nordelteños

which began as a website but due to its success became a widely distributed and commented printed magazine. Rubén has a sound, sharp mind, and he is probably the most knowledgeable person about Nordelta I ever met. He subscribed to the idea that gated communities are not, and cannot be, completely secluded: “they may try, but it’s impossible”, for there is always “some porosity”, especially regarding their immediate neighbours: “Fences do not separate –he argued–, They establish a limit, and that’s it. There’s a huge amount of people who come and go in and out of Nordelta, from one side of the wall to the other: people who work here, or others like me who work there. Also, in the context of daily shopping, it is obvious these places cannot provide everything you need, therefore you have to go to Tigre, Benavídez or Pacheco” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

The fact they had to rely on its immediate outside does not mean they were comfortable with it. Rodrigo, in fact, described his relationship with Pacheco inhabitants as “really unpleasant.” He arrived in 2002 to the Castores *barrio*, and due to his social abilities, free time –he is retired– and predisposition to help others, has been dedicated to solving everyone’s doubts and problems ever since. We were talking about his first years in Nordelta when he recalled how uncomfortable it was for him to depend on Pacheco at that time: “Look at the route and *villas* [slums] around –he said. We used to run off! Imagine it: you went to a shop that looked like a *fonda*, and you found yourself buying eggs from *villeros*... and well, the BMW was parked outside, and the whole thing was a bit unbelievable, you see?”. Needless to say, in Nordelteños homes there are plenty of photos portraying them in Brazil and New York, although no photo captures their presence in their immediate surroundings outside the complex’s perimeter [Field Notes, July 17th, 2008].

To avoid spending time at Pacheco, residents plan their trips ahead, while some go further and send their employees to do their shopping. The latter provides an extra benefit, as if they went there by themselves, they would probably be overcharged: “I usually buy meat for them, otherwise they would’ve been cheated”, Luis told me, a gardener who works at Castores [Field Notes, March 14th, 2009]. People have multiple identities according to the context and who they are speaking with. In Pacheco and around, coming from Nordelta is read in terms of class. That is why Nordelteños constantly hide their territorial identity: “If I

want to ask for a quote, I'd say I live in Tigre, because if you say Nordelta that's it, you'd get a completely different number", Julieta told me, confessing a strategy common to many *propietarios* [Field Notes, March 25th, 2008]. Claudia, another resident, contributed with one of her own experiences: "Once I called a plumber who previously worked for my sister, and did a really good job. He came here, fixed the problem, but charged me three times what he charged her! I asked why, and he say: 'well, because everything in Nordelta is more expensive'" [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

At the end of the scale, there are some *propietarios* for whom differences are so irreconcilable that they refuse to interact with people from Pacheco: "Those are humble neighbourhoods, you see? With very humble houses, vegetable gardens, and a tiny stream, and that's it, nothing more. I've been there many times, and nothing has ever happened to me... but there are people here who are very afraid, who do not want anything to do with Pacheco or Las Tunas", Julieta told me. Why do you think is that? I asked her. "A friend joined me recently to take a pair of boots to a shoe repairman, and when we were coming back, she said: 'never again'... She really *disliked* what she saw" [Field Notes, March 25th, 2008]. Such comments were not rare, and I particularly recall Antonia's reply when I asked her if she ever went to Pacheco or Tigre: "Well, I went a couple of times to Pacheco, but I really don't like it... It's too ugly... some faces you see there!" [Field Notes, 19th December, 2010].

Social differences find a counterpart in the contrast between the perfectly maintained gated community and its rundown surroundings. Whiteness is not aesthetically produced by Nordelta on its own, but by an entire racialized system upon which Argentine culture is supported. An apparently binary hierarchy that locates, on one side, a place of peril; and on the other, an object of envy and desire. Once I was leaving a garbage plant near Nordelta when a woman yelled at me, asking to be filmed: "Handsome boys in London, huh?", she said. "And look at me, working here! I have to get one". I pointed the camera at her, and she introduced herself as if she were in a TV casting: "Hi, I am 30 years old, I live in Tigre, my name is Karina, and you can come to pick me up". OK, I replied laughing, I'm gonna see if I manage to get you someone. "Are you all blonde over there?", she said back, teasing with a smile [Field Notes, October 10th, 2009].

3.2. A PLACE OF THEIR OWN

Nordelta has three access gates, each one equipped with sentry stalls, electronic barriers, surveillance cameras and guards.⁹⁵ The main gate is located three kilometres north of Pacheco and is mostly used by *propietarios*, visitors and service providers coming in cars and buses. The second gate is located towards Benavídez, and is reserved for male service providers, such as trucks drivers and builders. Finally, there is a third access on the northern border, connecting Nordelta with the service area near the river (Fig. 3.5).⁹⁶



Fig. 3.5. Map of Nordelta's accesses. Produced by the author over a Google map image.

For *propietarios*, it is almost as though the Benavídez Gate did not exist. They hardly talked about it, rarely used it, and it is relatively well hidden, so it is not really a relevant part of their lives. Northern and Southern gates, however, are quite significant and distinctive, and

⁹⁵ Every guard carries a radio and a baton. Those who do not attend public also carry a small gun.

⁹⁶ The set of safety procedures applied at these points will be fully reviewed in Chapter 5.

the different sets of practices and values around each of them relates on how those areas were occupied before the project was built. That is, whilst the South was broadly occupied by urban low-income populations, the North was vacant and rural. Therefore, the first was planned as a place that had to be crossed as fast and decisively as possible,⁹⁷ while the second was thought of and designed as an integral part of the new project; a place they could easily transform and incorporate into the Nordelta galaxy.

The distinction they made between both areas can also be spatially framed, enriching the picture, because if one looks at a map of Pacheco, or walks through its streets, it becomes clear that it follows the traditional grid plan present in almost every Latin American city. The northern entrance, on the other hand, follows a spatial structure very much in touch with that of the shopping mall as a *pure type*; that is: one large, straight road, with no diversions or branches, filled with shops and gated communities stretching from Nordelta to Tigre. The chances of an unpleasant encounter and the risks of becoming a victim of crime are reduced by this higher visibility, offering also the possibility of reaching any place by car. Pacheco, on the other hand, as a traditional grid patterned city, has crowds, noise, multiple streets and spatial features that do not allow a pedestrian to control his or her experience.

Another condition the northern area offered to become 'a proper place' was its closeness to Tigre, located just 7,5 kilometres away on Route 27. The city of Tigre was founded in 1820 and is one of the central tourist attractions of the region. Connected to Buenos Aires by a highway and two train lines,⁹⁸ every weekend hundreds of families, locals and foreigners, go there to enjoy its many features. Its streets are lined with different European styles rowing clubs, marinas, and fancy mansions, as well as boutique B&Bs, upscale hotels, restaurants, teahouses and picnic sites (Figs. 3.6 and 3.7). Tigre is also the main gateway to the Paraná Delta, a natural environment highly valued by *porteños*, composed of dozens of rivers and a hundred islands that can be easily accessed by boat.

⁹⁷ In 2006, AVN reported that 10,000 cars go in and out of Nordelta every day: between 5,000 and 8,000 through the southern entrance, and 2,000-3,000 through the northern one ('Más de 10000 por día' 2006).

⁹⁸ One is public, cheap and poorly maintained; the other, in hands of privates and built especially for tourists, is the scenic "Coast's train" [*Tren de la costa*], called that way as its line follows the river's coast. A one-way ticket for the former train cost \$1,2 (£0,21), while for the latter it is ten times the price: \$12 (£2,1).



Figs. 3.6. and 3.7. The city of Tigre, Argentina. Photos by the author.

Being scarcely occupied, spatially easy to control and close enough to Tigre made the northern area a great candidate to hold a private and alternative answer to Pacheco: a lifestyle centre.⁹⁹ Since the nineties, the project always assumed people would value their privacy, safety and homogeneity above everything, and planned to have a commercial area that would respond to those values. Because the idea also was to reduce their dependence on Pacheco, and at the same time to express their leadership as the most innovative and powerful gated community in the country, it would also need to be tasteful and elegant. In the words of Daloz: “What is critical for elites is to demonstrate their dominance vis-à-vis subordinates and to exhibit at least as much supremacy as their peers” (2010, p. 69).

With those ideas in mind, in 2004 CECNOR¹⁰⁰ built Centro Comercial Nordelta [Nordelta's Shopping Centre] in a major plot outside the northern gate. With 70 stores, a deluxe supermarket,¹⁰¹ a private hospital, a movie theatre, a few restaurants, and a McDonald's, the area was quickly appreciated by *propietarios* and, in a couple of years, has successfully managed to replace Pacheco: “It was very complicated to live here before, you had to plan everything in advance!”, declared Verónica, Consuelo's daughter. Do you like it better? I asked: “Of course, it's much more pleasant now. Now you can order pizzas or *empanadas* by phone” [Field Notes, August 2nd, 2009]. Figure 3.8. shows Julieta's fridge, which like most of residents', exhibited over a dozen magnets of services you can order by phone, offered by stores outside Nordelta.

⁹⁹ Also called “Boutique malls”, a 'Lifestyle Centre' is a smaller, top-end and suburban kind of shopping mall.

¹⁰⁰ A partnership composed by Grupo Desarrollista (80%) and Nordelta S.A. (20%). Nordelta received the percentage of the shares in exchange for the terrains.

¹⁰¹ Disco is the biggest supermarket chain in the country, with over 450 branches. Of them all, the one in Nordelta was the first to offer “national and international products that you can't find anywhere else. We will offer to our clients exclusive products such as sushi and game meat; top level clothing and the best wines and cigars (...) all of these taking into consideration our client's profile”, as the company advertised when inaugurated (“Disco inaugura un supermercado en el complejo Nordelta,” 2005).



Fig. 3.8. Magnets on a fridge, Nordelta.

In 2007, a bridge was built to cross over the route without having to stop, allowing people to easily go from the Shopping Centre to an open promenade, also administered by the company. There are top end restaurants and bars, an international hotel, tower offices and a small pier bathed by the river, where three times a day a private catamaran departs to Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires' newest and more exclusive business district in downtown area. Following the same incremental logic of shopping malls, the area never stops growing, and there is always something new being built, feeding the feeling of a fruitful place, with novel exciting things always arriving. According to Girola, the designers' intention was specifically "to re-invent the animated streets of former old towns (...) for which they looked towards an urban-architectonic style which privileges open air pedestrian streets" (2008, p. 80).

In clear contrast with its residential district, the entire service area has not been fenced, so no documents or authorisation are required to enter. A suitable explanation for this decision, presented to me by several residents like Tomás and Werner, is that Nordelta needed to have a 'proper place' for their *propietarios* to shop, but did not have enough population yet to sustain it. What they did, though, was to construct the buildings and its amenities in so much resemblance to Nordelta's inner landscape, that aside from the checkpoint, one could

traverse the access gates without noticing a change. On the *outside*, Nordelta's flags still hang from poles, the name of the project is exhibited everywhere, and its logo shines on trash bins and street signs (figs. 3.9-3.10). When asked, residents do not hesitate to describe the area as part of Nordelta, always adding at the end: "but open." Are we no longer in Nordelta? I asked Sofia after crossing the gates: "No, this IS Nordelta", she replied, clarifying: "but its public part" [Field Notes, June 14th 2009].

During fieldwork, I asked *propietarios* to take me on a tour around Nordelta, to see what things they decided to show me and in which ways. One of the things that drew my attention was that every single time they took me to the service area, describing it as an integral part of the project. Even more, according to their view, Nordelta did not develop those buildings and amenities in an open, public space, but on their own private land, which afterwards they decided to open, and hence the entire area *belongs* to them, and its public features are available to everybody just because they allow them access. This *is* Nordelta, I get it, but what about the streets? I asked Claudia, and she replied without hesitation: "Yes, of course, the streets are Nordelta as well. We opened it to general public, but everything is from Nordelta" [Field Notes, May 5th, 2009].



Figs. 3.9 and 3.10. Nordelta's commercial area. Photos by the author.

The commercial area's liminal status also gets revealed during moments of crisis, such as when Nordelteños complained because AVN started issuing parking fines. One kind of complaint, which will be addressed in chapter 4, regarded the sums involved, and the destination of money accumulated from the fines; another kind was if Nordelta had the authority to perform such acts; and a third was what happened with cars which did not

belong to people from Nordelta. Every car that accesses the compound is registered, and a *propietario* is held responsible for any harm it may cause, but there is no way –yet– to fine those unregistered. In Gallaretas, Marcelo Cantón explained this issue by saying that:

“Those spaces are public spaces, owned by the Municipality, which leads to another debate about who has to take care of them. It is a similar situation to what happens with security, street lightning, asphalt or green areas maintenance: these are municipal lands, but it is us, the neighbours, who are paying, generally to keep the high standards we are looking for” (Cantón, 2014).

Nordelta’s service area can be understood of as a post-modern semi-public place, similar to malls and strip centres; places that exhibit themselves as ‘open and public’, but through different strategies channelled through consumption, surveillance and spatial design tend to exclude and normalise (Judd, 1995; Matthews et. al, 2000). In other words, they discourage poor people’s attendance, minorities and urban tribes, reducing the political and public features of space with the intention of creating a ‘community of equals’ (Staeheli & Mitchel, 2006).

Analysing the transformations of the city of Los Angeles, Davis argues that in postmodern cities certain areas are designed to ensure a continuum of middle-class experience, from labour to consumption and recreation: “the mall designers and pseudo-public space attack the crowd by homogenising it. They set up architectural and semiotic barriers to filter out the ‘undesirables’. They enclose the mass that remains, directing its circulation with behaviourist ferocity” (2005, p. 281). Nordelta’s shopping centre is entangled with the gated community in a way that ensures a seamless experience for residents and; at the same time, it has been designed with spatial features which prevent the arrival and presence of ‘improper others’. Similar to what Austin (1998) found in the suburban malls of the United States¹⁰², Nordelta’s commercial area is scarcely served by public transport, and its poor pedestrian routes make it difficult to arrive on foot.

¹⁰² “[T]he restraints may operate not on a leisure activity itself, but on the mobility required to engage in the activity. For example, the routing patterns of some urban public transportation systems deliberately make it difficult for central-city residents to get to outlying leisure venues like shopping malls and beaches” (1998, p. 669)

Another divisive mechanism implemented in Nordelta's commercial area falls within what Strahilevitz has called 'exclusionary amenities': the development's features which are designed targeting levels of expense that make them accessible only to a certain demographic group (2006). The stores, including the supermarket, are indeed quite expensive for the area, and confirming that this was consciously planned, an unidentified member of the staff declared: "we wanted to maintain the level of our clients, and that's why we are going to bring even more exclusive brands and amenities soon" ("Comenzó la ampliación del Centro Comercial Nordelta," 2016).

In any case, despite the variety of mechanisms deployed, the shopping centre is one of the few places in which people from different social classes interact. Rather than a hegemonic site where actors are passive agents at the mercy of an economic power, the area appears to be a less deterministic scenario, where actors negotiate different practices of occupation (Lewis, 1989; Salcedo and Stillerman, 2017).

To provide an example, I often stopped for lunch at McDonald's, as it is one of the few spots where I could freely spend some time and look around without being looked at with suspicion. The restaurant is usually packed with blonde women feeding and entertaining their brunette kids, and apart from the employees behind the counter and a half-asleep guard, I was usually the only male adult in the restaurant. One summer day, three ten-year-old kids entered the place. They clearly were not from Nordelta, judging from their old and torn clothes, their Boca Juniors¹⁰³ t-shirts and their skin tone, darker than everyone else's in the area. These formal distinctions may not have been so relevant were it not for how the attitudes of pretty much everybody around changed when they came in. Tension was in the air. The boys begged customers for food, and it surprised me that neither the security guard nor the store manager threw them out. A woman stepped up and offered them a cheeseburger, to which they replied by asking for a coke. She said no and they took the burger, leaving without saying thanks. I asked the manager and one of the cashiers about them, and they told me it was pretty usual to have kids "from other places" hanging around. "They come

¹⁰³ Boca Juniors is Argentina's most popular football team. Its classic rival, River Plate, is commonly refer to as "The millionaires".

begging at McDonalds, Petrobrás, the supermarket, and other stores as well” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

Most of the kids that came to beg were from within neighbourhoods that were walking distance away, such as Pacheco, Las Tunas or Benavídez; most of them were male. They beg “to get some money, or to eat ‘a McDonald’s’, which we see everywhere but can’t afford”, as Arturo, an 11 year-old, told me. Their intentions, though, are not limited to beg, as they also like to spend time “where things look nice. Where we live there’s nothing green, and we enjoy coming here and sit on the grass”, Manuel told me. His younger brother. Arturo smiled and added: “and to see *chicas lindas* [“beautiful girls”]. They never look at us, but we have a good time watching them... and perhaps saying something nice to them, tease them a bit” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

As it has been said, *propietarios* are fully aware of their presence, try their best not to get involved with them, and walk around having an eye on where the guards are, in case they need them. Chatting with a couple of teenagers, I asked who usually visits the shopping centre: “People from the *countries*: Santa Bárbara, Santa María de Tigre, which are near Nordelta... and also people from the humbler neighbourhoods around”. And how’s that? I asked. “Well, there are times that... the other day, for example, they were saying nasty things to us, but there are other times when they don’t. They are humble kids, sometimes we don’t get along and sometimes we do” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Because of its liminality, the shopping centre is, at the same time, an exciting place that offers services and leisure, and a threatening spot where dangerous things dwell. These small events are a constant reminder of the perils of the outside, and at the same time of the privileges of the inside, in a similar way to what Canguilhem said about monsters: “the monster is not only a living being of reduced value, it is a living being whose value is to be a counterpoint” (2008, p. 134). Nordelteños are very proud of its top-end shops and amenities, yet frustrated by this contamination that fail be to contained. Fig. 3.11, for example, shows a used condom I found at one of the shopping centre’s bus stops.



Fig. 3.11. A used condom lying on the sidewalk. Photo by the author.

A review on Twitter about Nordelta brings many results where *propietarios* complain about this issue (Fig. 3.12), and of outsiders mocking Nordelteños for their unsuccessful attempt to keep things separated (Fig. 3.13):



Fig. 3.12. “Nordelta’s film theatre is shitted with *negros*, man, how gross.” Retrieved from Twitter on September 2014.



me cago de risa del cine de nordelta xq lo hicieron para q
vayan los negros con guita del country y van los negros
chorros de benavidez ~

02/07/2013 21:18

Fig. 3.13. “It’s hilarious: they built a cinema in Nordelta for the *country’s negros* with money, and the ones who go are the crook *negros* from Benavídez.” Retrieved from Twitter on December 2013.

One day, at Tomás’ place, he and his friend Marcos were discussing possible projects to increase their income. Tomás’ wife, Constanza, was sitting next to them having some tea and reading the newspaper. After discussing the pros and cons for opening a tanning bed centre, a candy store and a Starbucks, Marcos threw in a new idea: “Why don’t we open a *boliche* [night club]? Kids are reaching 14 or 15 years old, and they have nowhere to go!”. Tomás replied: “There’s no way Nordelta would allow us to open it here, for all the noise, alcohol, fights...”, to which Marcos countered: “Not here, on the route, next to the shopping [centre].” Tomás, who had been about to go to the kitchen for the past five minutes, stood up, shook his hand in the air and said in an angry manner: “It would get packed with *negros, boludo* [“moron”]!”. Hearing him, Constanza left the newspaper aside and joined the conversation: “I don’t think so, because people tend to classify themselves. It’s not like the *negro* would like to be where the *conchetitos* are [a pejorative way to talk about rich people], or vice versa, it’s relative” [Field Notes, August 25th, 2009].

Mónica is one of those who really regrets what has happened to the shopping centre: “It’s a shame!”, she claims with a hint of grief. “You go there to have a nice time and find these crappy cars and these people from, I don’t know, ‘Pacheco’, who are there because don’t have anywhere else to go on a Sunday... And you can’t forbid him to enter”, she regretted. “It’s not that I have something against them, but there was a time when they robbed cars.” You think it’d be better if they were not allowed to enter? “Well, I believe that every time you leave something open, these things can happen” [Field Notes, May 22th, 2009]. Safety, once again, seems to be a major concern when inter-class encounters take place (Fig. 3.14). On Gallaretas newspaper, many notes have been published about it, for example this one:

“On Friday the 22nd, two boys from Castores went to the Shopping Centre by bike to have an ice cream. While they were there, they saw one of the bicycles they had left at the parking rack was missing. They asked the guard, who said he had not seen anything, and asked back if they had secured it with a chain, to which they answered no. Afterwards, the security chief told to their parents that they are not responsible for what happened, and that there are too many cases of theft because people believe this is Nordelta and do not take any safety measures” (“El ataque de los Cacos II” 2008).



Fig. 3.14. “Dear Client, take care of your belongings. Management shall not be responsible for any damage, assault or robbery.” Sign posted at Nordelta Shopping Centre. Photo by the author.

This section has discussed Nordelta’s attempts to reduce interactions with improper others by creating a place of their own that would regulate class and racial encounters, avoiding social mixture. Racism, broadly understood as the discourse of a combat to be carried out “not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage” (Foucault, 2004, p. 61). This approach helps us understand why Nordelta was manufactured with features that respond to their taste, and with mechanisms aimed at discouraging the arrival and presence of

abnormal population. However, despite these efforts, by formally leaving the place open to a general public, Nordelta proclaimed the area ‘a liminal place’, where unexpected and undesired inter-class encounters can and do happen, thus putting at risk the optimal survival and longevity of their population. Coming from this scenario, the next section concentrates on the safety issues that arise outside Nordelta’s borders, and on the use of different technologies and mechanisms to prevent dangerous incidents, such as the installation of surveillance technologies, the efforts to take control of public land and the deployment of private guards.

3.3. TO EXCLUDE AND PROTECT

Nordelteños dislike what they see outside their complex walls for many reasons. They find distasteful the way those streets and buildings look, what outsiders wear, how they talk, and the objects they carry. They also disdain their culture, and at the same time feel stigmatised by them for living in a gated community. Camila, a waitress at the local coffee El Récord, in Pacheco, did not hold back expressing the details of this resentment: “These *gringos* came to *our* place, took the most beautiful land, and left us out, as if we were sick or something” [Field Notes, March 3rd, 2009]. Rubén, the journalist, is aware of this feeling: “To confess you are from Nordelta is like putting a stamp on your face saying you are rich, and nothing concerns you. People believe you spend your afternoons drinking champagne on a terrace, and that’s not the reality of anyone here” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. Rodrigo shares this feeling of being unfairly treated: “For everybody around the corner, we are millionaires, and there is nothing of the millionaire about me. Everything I owned is invested here” [Field Notes, July 17th, 2008].

Feeling despised and envied by a what is perceived to be a threatening population, Nordelteños do their best to avoid Pacheco, believing peril is around the corner. Nordelta may have managed to provide an increased sense of security but having just recently escaped from a city that fell into the hands of savages, residents still feel vulnerable in public spaces. Drawing on Van Gennep’s suggestion that danger lies in transitional states (1960), Améndola suggested gated communities indeed produce secure spaces, but by transferring fear from

residential areas to interstitial places of mobility (2000), which seems to be Nordelta's case. Having tea at Patricia and Werner's place, she told me they avoided the surroundings because: "it is dangerous, and the road is not safe. We *never* go there at night... it is a *bad* place". Has anything bad happened to you there, or have you heard of anything? "Not really, but things happen there. You have to avoid that place; these are not times to take chances... People from the outside look at us as if we were different. The truth is we don't have more than this house and our jobs, we are regular people, but they look at us as if we were something else" [Field Notes, June 21st, 2009].

Rubén thinks alike: "Pacheco is one of the most unsafe places in the whole of Buenos Aires", he says, his feelings reflecting what other *propietarios* declared as well [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. "Perhaps you don't remember –he stated–, but four months ago or so, a teenager was killed, a boy from a Maschwitz's gated community. They kidnapped him at the bus stop and kept him at a blacksmiths' place here in Pacheco. People are already very paranoid; can you imagine how much fear this case put into them?". So much fear and contempt towards their neighbours, in fact, that Nordelta's kids renamed the popular card game *Casita robada* ["stolen house"] as *Negros de mierda* ["shitty *negros*"].

This threatening feeling has been enhanced by a series of regular attacks people suffered on the highway, in which cars are slammed with stones thrown from the sidewalk or from a bridge. Almost every month Gallaretas publishes an article about this kind of attack; in January 2006, for example, they wrote the following note:

"It was one of the risky places of Nordelta's northern access: from the railway bridge across Pacheco Golf and Pilgrims [a private school], gangs threw stones at cars passing by. On different occasions there had been an extra effort from the guards to secure the area, but they never lasted. Last month, a Nordelteaño received a strong blow to his face, ending up with stitches and injuries. Red alert was declared, and now guards are placed 24/7 right on top of the bridge" ("Más seguridad en el puente," 2006).

Many *propietarios* try to mediate their relationship with Pacheco by driving there and, hopefully, not getting out of their cars, thus reducing their chances of having the kind of

random encounters that distinguishes urban life from the one sought in gated communities. In a public letter published in Gallaretas, Daniel Adler, a “former Captain of the Israeli Army, International Expert on public safety, and a Nordelta’s resident”, as he introduces himself, provides a few tips on how to live a safer life. He writes:

“To move by car is qualified as highly risky, because it’s easier to get robbed or kidnapped. Therefore, it is very important to set our minds the minute we leave our neighbourhood. Internal alerts must be turned on, and we have to remember our exercises on prevention and dissuasion; remember that being aware keeps us alert, which means 90% safer than the rest. While driving, check your surroundings, make sure no one is following you, use your mirrors, keep your windows and doors closed and locked, and the radio volume low, so as to keep your focus to be able to hear any sound relevant for your safety” (‘Medidas para estar más seguros’ 2012).

Someone under the name of Avi replied to the letter on the online forum saying: “This is not just a rumour. Yesterday, I was going out through Bancalari and they tried to rob me by throwing a stone at me... What would have happened if I had stopped? Things are getting ugly, and I’m afraid this is just the beginning. We should be living a much relaxed life.”

On another occasion, a resident’s car was hit not by a stone but by a bullet. The long and dramatic description of the episode was published in Gallaretas, generating panic in Nordelta. *Proprietarios* demanded more security, and a week later the local government assigned extra policemen to the area. Moreover, the Consorcio Bancalari-Nordelta decided to add reinforcements to patrols, and to install additional lights, a barbed-wire fence and CCTV cameras all along the road. It is in such ways that the symbiotic relation between a discourse of fear and institutional technologies of power are strengthened, solidifying these unequal class relations upon which Nordelta was built. In his research about Argentine gated communities, Thuillier framed this phenomenon in a similar way:

“Even if they often disregard country clubs, the periphery’s poorest residents come from all over the metropolis to gated communities, such as Pilar, to try and get a job, men as construction workers or as gardeners, and women as maids or as nurses. Sometimes, some of them, frustrated by their exclusion from all the opportunities of the gated world, try to get their share by force. As it is quite

difficult, but not impossible, to burgle inside the gated communities, car attacks have increased on the access roads to some gated developments. The proximity to the motorway is thus made even more valuable for residents of gated communities: the more expensive country clubs are those beside the motorway” (2005a).

This kind of fear is a very specific, class-oriented alarm, related to how members of the privileged residents of gated communities perceive nearby inhabitants and how they think they are perceived by them. Focusing on the *piqueteros* movement in Argentina after 2001 crisis, Giorgi and Pinkus suggested their presence in the city changed the balance of power: “As the ‘outside’ becomes more proximate and immediate, violence intensifies. At the same time, it forces a redrawing of the very boundaries of the political” (2006, p. 100). In the case of gated communities, a similar thing happens, and to deal with this threatening scenario Nordelta is constantly enhancing and upgrading its surveillance technologies, especially along its perimeter, access routes and service area. *Propietarios* receive regular notifications regarding the new devices, measures and regulations. Letter 4616, for example, was sent on April 13th 2010 and informed of 14 new items, including the installation of: eight new sentry stalls, seven surveillance cameras, a new audio system to listen to the perimeter, 50 spotlights of 400w and 1000w for dark areas, a few kilometres of Olympic fence that would be used to renew different areas of the perimeter fence, and a new security car to monitor the commercial area.

Nordelta has also hired a large number of private guards who patrol the complex, using a series of technological devices and wearing the same uniform they use inside Nordelta (Fig. 3.15). Their official role is to protect the area and passers-by from crime, preventing assaults, robberies, attacks, rape and kidnapping. Many of these guards are actually police officers who work for Nordelta when off duty. This practice was allowed in 1957 when, as a way to increase their salary, a decree was issued authorising Federal policeman to be hired as private guards. Contracts are not negotiated individually but with the prefecture, which charges £2.2 an hour for a fully uniformed and armed police officer, 10% of which stays in the public treasury. In areas surrounding gated communities this policy has had an unexpected consequence: police do not patrol them unless they are privately hired: “If they

can pay for their own security, we prefer to concentrate on the most vulnerable areas”, explained Nicole, a Benavidez police officer I met a few times. When I told Rubén about this, he rephrased my question, putting it in his own terms: “Why do I have to pay for police officers when I am already paying them through my taxes, you say? And in a place that’s not even inside Nordelta? Well, if we don’t pay, we would never get the police there, ever. And people want police officers” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].



Fig. 3.15. Guards and sentry stall at the service area. Photo by the author.

In liminal areas around Nordelta’s border, it is never fully clear what is private and what is public, and this practice of hiring public officers increases this confusion. In November 2010, municipal officers started patrolling the road between Pacheco and the development, fining drivers going over the speed limit. A few weeks later, they installed CCTV cameras and radars, contesting Nordelta’s self-claimed sovereignty over the area. Further, the head of the local government, Sergio Massa, demanded that Nordelta stop issuing fines on the road: “it is a

public space, and everything done there should be approved by the Municipality. What are they doing with the money they collect? Because it should be destined to a public good, like maintaining the road” (De Domini, 2010).

Even though the entire perimeter is protected through the use of different strategies, guards and devices are concentrated in two areas: on the highway towards Pacheco, outside the southern gate, and on the service area beyond the northern gate. Both places have two things in common: they are widely used by Nordelteños on a regular basis, and they were less busy than other areas. In a way, places which could never be completely taken over by Nordelta but, on the other hand, neither could be taken over by other actors. In a sense, Nordelta saw this attribute as a burden, but also as a potential: an opportunity to take over what the State left aside, and privatise them temporarily. The border has been heavily demarcated as a desire, or as an urgency as, at the same time, Nordelta was being invaded by *improper* and *conditional others*, they also have attempted to colonise territories outside its proper 'domains'. The constant presence of security guards at Pacheco's bus stop and at the shopping centre suggests the border does not really exist as a fixed entity for any of the social actors involved. We can hypothesise that, if the idea of a 'frontier' has such a force, if regulations are so many and so fiercely implemented, it may be because they are trying to demarcate something that does not fully exist yet. A particular event that took place during my fieldwork, described below, may shed light on this idea.

Guards, domestic workers and an anthropologist

Live-out domestic workers have to take buses every day to get in and out of Nordelta, and they can be seen at the bus stops at most times of the day, with the obvious increase in the number of waiting passengers during rush hour. Live-in domestic workers, on the other hand, having their weekends off, usually go out on Saturday afternoon and return to Nordelta on Monday morning. At these times, the bus stops –the ones inside the neighbourhood and the one in Pacheco– get completely packed. There are so many people there, one has to wait up to two hours to get on a bus: “The mornings are the worst”, Lola, a domestic worker, complained:

“There are really long queues! Lots of people... and just when you are about to get on, they say: ‘no more, we’re leaving: the bus is full’, and you have to wait for the next one. The same happens over and over again. A few times everyone has got mad, and a small revolt takes over the road” [Field Notes, January 26th, 2008].

One night I received a text message from Gisella, the first domestic worker I met in Nordelta: “Tomorrow there will be a demonstration at the bus stop, 7.30am. Try to be there.” I immediately called her to know what was going on: “We have had enough –she said. The conditions are getting worse every day, and we are fed up” [Field Notes, September 21st, 2008]. It took me by surprise they decided to take action against what they felt was an awful transport system, and particularly it surprised me they decided to perform it there. Domestic workers do not have “a place of their own”, in De Certeau’s terms; not inside Nordelta, at least, and therefore, to challenge the dominant order they had to make use of Nordelta’s place, or at least of a place Nordelta has occupied as its own. The domestic workers’ tactic was, like every tactic, temporary and not aimed at conquering, securing and keeping a place, but to seize it unexpectedly in order to improve their working conditions; to disturb an order –the other’s order– to gain something they would receive only once order was re-established. In other words, they decided to use the bus stop, one of the few places where they could socialise among peers, to create a temporary space of resistance.

As I learned later, this was not the first time an event like this happened (fig. 3.16). Once before, in March 2007, domestic workers had attempted to cut off the road. That time, though, it happened spontaneously, without a plan. Rosa, the domestic worker referred to earlier, was there that day and told me the fare had been raised from \$1 to \$1,5, and after an hour waiting for the bus under heavy rain, feeling that “no one even bothers to explain anything”, the workers stopped the traffic: “We were like a hundred, all soaking wet... I don’t really know how it happened, but I saw a few blocking the road and suddenly we were all there, trying to help”. According to a note published in *Gallaretas*, the guards did not react immediately and waited for orders from the security manager (“Piquete en Nordelta,” 2007). After a while, they were instructed to clear the access, and without much fuss the event finished. “We were mad but also very cold, so after a while, when the guards asked us to move, we just did”, Isabel told me [Field Notes, March 4th, 2009].



Fig. 3.16. Protests at the bus stop. Source: "Piquete en Nordelta", 2007.

The day after receiving the message I arrived at the bus stop at 7.30 am, and the only difference I found from a regular Monday morning was the extra number of guards: four, instead of the regular two. There were also fifty or sixty domestic workers quietly waiting for the bus, and no signs of the protest anywhere. I looked for Gisella or any other familiar face but could not find any, so I decided to give her a call. She was already at her workplace and told me they decided not to cut off the road this time, as not many people showed up and guards reacted promptly. They wanted to wait for a better time.

In that moment, I decided to intervene. For eight months I had been taking a video camera with me to the field but never used it, at least not at the stop. I always kept in mind Douglas' advice: "society is subject to external pressures; that which is not with it, part of it and subject to its laws, is potentially against it" (2002, p. 4). Knowing the logics of that space, I knew that

from the minute I took the camera out everything would change, and I would become a stranger, a *potentially harmful* 'improper other'. After eight months, though, I felt saturation was reached and no new valuable information was being produced by spending more time there. Following Jean Rouch's suggestion (2003), I planned to use the camera not to film an event but to provoke it, bringing into light features that are usually invisible but part of social fabric.

I crossed the street and installed my tripod on the sidewalk, just a few meters opposite the bus stop. I took the camera out, turned it on and started filming. The reaction was immediate: not being able to show 'normal' behaviour, I became a threatening subject. In ten seconds or less, I was approached by one of the guards while the rest attentively supervised the action from the distance (Fig. 3.17). He walked towards me ordering to shut the camera down: "or I will have no choice but to call the police." Women at the stop looked from one direction to the other, baffled and amused, while drivers and personnel from the bus company smiled. I was not allowed to film there, he said, while looking both the camera and me, because it was private property. I thought it was a public road, I replied, and did not need a special permission. I tried to maintain a calm voice, while his was quite threatening. He kept looking at the camera, and a few times attempted to block the lens, making it clear it was an object mediating our relation. Confused by my refusal to leave, as it is very rare for the routine to get disrupted or the guards' authority to be challenged, he told me to wait there for his supervisor.



Fig. 3.17. Guard approaching. Photo by the author.

After a few minutes, a car stopped a couple of meters away and a man came out. He sat on the hood of the car and moved his hand in the air. Two guards approached him and they talked for a while, pointing at me and looking in my direction from time to time. They waited. I shut down the camera, crossed the street and sat down at the stop. Carlos, the owner of Mary-Go, the private transport system, approached me, and this was the first time he was willing to talk about something besides weather: “There they are: those are from security, you see?” -he warned me, taking my side. “The one wearing a shirt, that’s who they called. He’s the boss, the head of Nordelta’s security... but don’t forget they are not the police, so they can’t even ask for your documents”. I am lucky then, I replied with a smile, because I think I forgot them. “They are here to keep an eye on *us*”. I don’t want to give you any trouble. “I don’t work for them, and they know I don’t like them. The same with the other people [the workers], they don’t treat them well. That’s why they always try to correct us [*ponernos en línea*], but they are the ones treating everybody like shit.”

Suddenly, a police car came by and a policeman joined the circle of guards. They greeted each other friendly, chatted, and after a while he approached me to ask my documents and my

reasons for being there. I explained I was doing a research for the university and we discussed for a while. Despite softening a bit, he insisted I should not film there, asking me to leave “as a personal favour”: “People are very scared here, you know? There is too much violence and kidnapping. So, do this for me, OK?”. I agreed. In two years of fieldwork, I experienced many similar episodes. Every time I took the camera out, guards threatened me and police arrived. However, their intention was never to punish me, but to normalise me; in this case, to coerce my deviated action and make me assume a normal behaviour, like everybody else’s.



Fig. 3.18. Guards. Photo by the author.

Another episode happened on a weekday about 7 PM. I had gone to Matilde’s house nearby, and when heading back to the stop I realised I had never filmed the area at that time of the day. I stood on the roundabout, turned the camera on and slowly made a pan, filming cars and passers-by. When I framed the sentry point, I noticed I was being watched. Suddenly, I saw a guard taking photos of me from the distance with his mobile phone (Fig. 3.18), and besides him there were three other men chatting and laughing. I thought they were making fun of me, but they were laughing because they had called a policeman and he was standing

almost behind me. I turned around and we had the following dialogue:

Police Officer: Hi, good afternoon. Police Sergeant. You can't film here.

Ricardo: Why not?

Police officer: Because this is the entrance to a gated community.

Ricardo: I am sorry, are you a cop?

Police officer: Yes

Ricardo: Can I see your identification, please?

Police officer: Do you want to see my identification? You will see it at the police station.

Ricardo: OK.

Police officer: ... Come on, shut down the camera.

Ricardo: I can, but please tell me why.

Police officer: Because you can't film the entrance to a gated community.

Ricardo: Isn't this a public road?

Police officer: It is the entrance to a gated community.

Ricardo: It is not public property, then?

Police officer: ... Listen, you already had problems before...

Ricardo: Yes, I had, but we sorted them out (smiling, friendly).

Police officer: It's ok (smiles back), but I am telling you now that you can't film here. This is the entrance to a gated community and it's matter of public safety...

What are you filming?

Ricardo: The bus stop. I am doing research for the university.

Police officer: Look, because of how unsafe things are these days, I would say...

Ricardo: Does that change the law?

Police officer: No, not at all. Not at all. The thing is, I don't know why you are filming.

Ricardo: You can ask me, I have no problem in telling you why, but you can't come and order me to turn the camera off.

Police officer: I never said that.

Ricardo: You told me to shut down the camera.

Police officer: Maybe, but what I wanted to tell you is that because of how unsafe things are, you can't film here. I don't know who you are and why are you filming here. Show me an ID or something. Identify yourself.

I handed him my Goldsmiths I.D. and a letter from the university.

Police officer: Look, this is where all the vehicles going to Nordelta pass by. Do we understand each other so far? Uh?... Do you understand what I'm saying?

Ricardo: I do, but I still think I have the right to be here.

Police officer: A-ha... And to film anyone you want?

Ricardo: Yes.

Police officer: Oh, yes?

Ricardo: Well, if you go to Florida [a popular street in the city centre] and see a tourist, do you ask them not to take any pictures because there are too many

people passing by?

Police officer: No.

Ricardo: And is it not the same here? What I don't understand is why the police are here to defend Nordelta's rights and not mine.

Police officer: I am here to defend everybody's rights, not in favour or against Nordelta. I am just in favour of what you can and can't do... I just want to ask you... look, if you got mad because I asked you to turn the camera off... and the identification...

Ricardo: I'm not mad, and I don't have a problem to tell you what I am doing here. Besides, I have told Nordelta about it, I've been here for a while.

Police officer: Yes, yes. They are aware of that. Are you going to stay here much longer?

Ricardo: No, I don't think so. It's late and I'm cold.

Police officer: Ok, no problem. Do your work, no problem.

Ricardo: Great, thanks for understanding. Bye.

Police officer: Bye.

[Field Notes, May 18th, 2008]

During the conversation, I asked for his identification as well and, after many requests, he showed it to me for such a brief moment, I could not distinguish anything (Fig. 3.19). Many weeks later, I mentioned this to Roberto, a guard who works at the main gate, and he told me that even if they are off duty, police officers are used to introducing themselves as cops.



Fig. 3.19. Police officer. Photo by the author.

It may be good to understand my conversation with the police/guard in Foucault's framework. Particularly, when he claimed that: "truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which it extends it" (1980, p. 133). It is quite clear that, in this case, the discourse of lurking perils menacing the area is exhibited as being *the truth*, and it is constantly employed by Nordelta to justify its attempts to regulate, administrate and discipline different actors in its surroundings. In a way, it has produced this discourse of 'threatening others' to uphold their need to modify deviating behaviours such as mine, constituting itself as a necessary institution and legitimising unequal power relations.

In this section we have learned that, despite Nordelta having strongly tried to demarcate its borders, it has felt the need to transgress them as to keep them secured. Although challenged, it is relevant that they have succeeded in almost all their objectives: they managed to suppress domestic workers' protest, keep private transport companies under control, produce a normalised subjectivity for different actors, and claim a temporary kind of sovereignty over public space.

3.4. OUTSIDERS: A LOOMING MENACE

Vignette 1: In 2005, an outsider driving a motorcycle was travelling over the speed limit and crashed into a *propietario's* pickup truck, which was stopped at an intersection. The biker flew over ten metres, and after hitting ground, the bike fell on his head and killed him. "I bet he was running!", told me Julieta when we talked about the accident, "our streets are so much more modern than those on the outside, perhaps he felt the urge to step on the gas."

Vignette 2: In 2006, a woman crashed into a taxi and both drivers suffered severe lesions. Reporting the event, the local newspaper Gallaretas remarked the following: "A relevant datum: neither of the drivers were from Nordelta, which requires to re-think transit laws within the City-Town" ("Accidente en la Troncal," 2006).

Vignette 3: In 2009, at 6:30 in the morning, four young males, aged between 22 and 26, were

killed when their jeep ended up in one of Nordelta's artificial lakes. The event was widely covered by the press and used by a considerable number of people to make sarcastic remarks about Nordelteños. Forums on newspapers burst with comments such as M.'s: "too much money, too small brain", J's: "We have to build more lakes", C's: "It was not a mechanical defect, but a genetic one", or E's: "Four assholes less in the world. Typical of *negritos* [little *negros*] who have never lived in a decent neighbourhood and think our streets are racetracks" (all quotes from "Cuatro jóvenes muertos dentro del country Nordelta," 2009). The car and bodies were recovered from the lake, and the police informed the deceased were not from Nordelta, but from San Martín, a nearby area. The driver was allowed in because he was a frequent visitor, authorised by a friend and granted an electronic card, and after a night out with his friends, drinking and partying at the bay, decided to go back home making a shortcut through Nordelta. With this information to hand, Pedro Segura, AVN's head, remarked that they did not belong to the neighbourhood in every interview, using the accident as an argument as to why the gates of the complex should remain closed.

In all these accidents, AVN and *propietarios* argued –whether directly or indirectly– that they occurred because drivers were *not* from Nordelta, thus they did not know how to properly conduct themselves. This argument relates to the fact that many Nordelteños have gone through a process of normalisation through which they have acquired the required abilities to live in such a place. Although these will be analysed in Chapter 5, I bring the topic earlier to stress that the *improper others*, unaware of which behaviours are unfit, threatening or contaminated, are seen as people who may potentially act in ways that would put everything at risk. To let them in, *propietarios* say, would not only affect those living in Nordelta, but the outsiders as well. In other words, that if outsiders can be dangerous to Nordelta, Nordelta can be dangerous to foreigners. In Mary Douglas words: "The order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors" (Douglas, 2002, p. 3), in this case, contributing to legitimise the particular order they are seeking to produce.

Claudia thinks the problem needs to be addressed through more laws and control, as so many accidents happen here. Hence, with regulatory mechanisms: "The number of accidents is increasing because we are not taking seriously enough what it means to drive a car. We have

to improve internal safety and establish new controls, to have a more responsible behaviour” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009]. Her opinion is not shared by everyone, and other *propietarios* believe in moving from penalty measures towards more disciplinary technologies. In a letter to Gallaretas, a resident proposed not to deal with car accidents through repression, but with more education: “Like advanced societies do, we should make people watch videos and take compulsory courses to train them in safety practices: how to drive, follow instructions and respect the speed limit; to know who has the preference in each place and how to behave inside the car; about seat belts and cell phones; and about where minors have to be seated, to name just a few things.” (Iglesias, 2005, p. 1). A couple of days later, I discussed this proposal with Claudia. She thought about it for a second and replied: “Yeah, it may not be a bad idea to do both things: raise penalties and take driving exams.”

These discussions indirectly tackle another key negative consequence of opening the gates: Nordelta would lose control over its administration. It is not just to decide who enters and who does not, also to determine what particular set of rules are applied to that space, how they are controlled and sanctioned. If the main road becomes public, for example, they would not be able to set a speed limit or ask drivers to take a test. Rubén acknowledges this problem and told to me with a worried voice:

“Nordelta is not a gated community but a *localidad*, and local government will eventually have to take over. We will have to move towards ‘the public’. Every *barrio* would be able to manage its own resources, but there will be things only the State would handle, like security and the transport system (...) The problem is, if we allow public buses into Nordelta, who would make sure those buses meet the safety regulations we ask of everyone else? Who would make sure bus drivers respect transit laws, as we respect them here?” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

There are other *foreign* practices which do not directly threaten people’s lives, but affect the project’s lifestyle as a whole. David, a Nordelteño, commented in the local magazine *Locally*: “It’d be awful if they open the Troncal. A hundred million people having picnics, trashing everything and leaving the place a mess” (in “Un puente a cambio de La Troncal,” 2015). Marito shared his concern. He begun commenting on the post on the digital platform by asking the following question: “Do you remember *Los Roldán*, that sitcom in which a family

from Paternal that moved around on a bus-turned-into-trailer?”. Los Roldán was one of the most watched programs on Argentine TV. It was aired in 2004 and told the story of two families: “Los Roldán”, a popular lower-middle class family which epitomises the adjective *grasa*, and Los Uriarte, a rich family from the northern suburban area of Great Buenos Aires. The plot is pretty straightforward for a Latin American soap opera: Miguel Ángel Roldán, the father, helps an old lady who turned out to be a millionaire with a life crisis, and who, as a reward, names him CEO of her business empire. Enjoying his new status, Miguel Ángel moves next-door to Los Uriarte, invading their neighbourhood with an out-of-place or improper lifestyle (fig. 3.20). Marito’s comment continued: “Well, what if every weekend we have families like that one camping on our green areas, with loud music, kids swimming on our lakes with inner tubes, twenty people on the table, and leaving a trail of empty bottles behind? I know it sounds bad, elitist and politically incorrect, but I decided to live in Nordelta looking for a certain lifestyle” (in ‘Un puente a cambio de La Troncal’ 2015).



Fig. 3.20. Los Roldán arriving to an upper class neighbourhood.

As discussed, residents consider their outside neighbours an uneducated, quasi-barbaric

population that anytime could attempt to take over what they have built anytime. We may say the fear of a new *alluvial folklore* is still alive in middle and upper-class Argentine. I brought these concerns to Werner to see what he thought. What would happen if they open the road? I asked. “Well, they would pee in our lakes!”, he exclaimed quite seriously. Patricia, joining the conversation, recalled something that happened a while before and justified their concerns: “Once we authorised having parties at the SUM,¹⁰⁴ and it was terrible: very loud, with people from outside that destroyed everything.” People from the other *countries*? “From other *countries* and other places. There are not many youngsters here, so they had to come from somewhere else. That day they drank and stayed in the swimming pool until five a.m. The next day, I found spirit bottles in the trash bins... and other strange things as well. We organised ourselves, changed the regulations, and forbade parties again” [Field Notes, September 10^h, 2009].

According to Derrida, Hobbes stated that “it was never justified to disobey political laws out of allegiance to a covenant with God or animals” (2008, p. 55). Hobbes argues that since a contract requires mutual acceptance, it cannot be made with beings unable to respond. Perhaps one of the most eloquent examples of how class and race distinctions entangled a similar civilised/barbaric distinction in Argentina was given to me by Rodrigo: “I have the utmost respect for working class people –he said–, they are sincere, genuine, and they teach you lots of stuff, even more than a university professor may teach you... and that’s because they have a knowledge between the animal and the human, a fusion between the two” [Field Notes, July 17th, 2008]. Thus, *abnormals* are unable to comply with the cultural demands of a purified and proper neighbourhood.

In his work with the Bororo, Lévi-Strauss (1997) eloquently showed how social structure is connected with the inhabited space, and how a threat to such environment is, all the same, a threat to the whole culture. In a similar line, this section has shown the fear Nordelteños feel about letting strangers in, which is broadly perceived as a risk to Nordelta’s safety and continuity.

¹⁰⁴ *Salón de Usos Múltiples* is a collective multi-purpose room available at each *barrio*.

3.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has undertaken an investigation on the particular relation Nordelta and Nordelteños have established with what I have called *improper others*; that is, people, mostly from nearby areas, who do not live or work in Nordelta, nor are related to Nordelteños by friend or kin relationships. Therefore, they are defined by their condition of being socially and spatially circumscribed to the outside, or in other words, of being excluded. They may attempt to enter Nordelta, but if they succeed, their condition would instantly dissolve, as they cannot be, at the same time, *improper others* and occupy a place on the gated community. More precisely, if they gain access with an authorisation, they would immediately become *conditional others*, and if they do without one, they would become trespassers.

To state *improper others* do not belong to Nordelta does not imply, however, they are not part of the project. Any gated community, and particularly one as reserved as Nordelta, has to perform a triple operation to aspire becoming a sanctuary: first, to enclose and secure a space; secondly, to populated it with pure and fit *propietarios*; and thirdly, to keep polluted people and their perils out. So as much as Nordelta's operations appear to concentrate just inside its walls, its developers, administrators and *propietarios* are continuously working on and about the outside, as well, evaluating its hazards, assessing weak spots, and developing mechanisms to keep their community safe. As every time a line is drawn, a dialectic of the limit is installed.

Having reviewed a number of these mechanisms, it can be suggested that, in the relations with *improper others*, Nordelta intends to organise their general economy of power around the logic of the juridico-legal system: less to correct but to punish. The problem is they do not have jurisdiction beyond their own perimeter walls –nor behind them, but that is the subject of Chapter 5–, so despite having created a set of norms that indicates which actions are permitted and which are forbidden, they have not been able to create and enforce a set of punishments that would be coupled with those transgressions. Restricted as such, Nordelta makes use of disciplinary mechanisms to prevent unwanted occupation and practices from happening. On its entire perimeter, access roads, buses, bus stops and service areas, they are

constantly deploying and enhancing surveillance technologies to persuade improper behaviour, while embracing spatial features designed to dissuade unwanted pedestrian movement.

CHAPTER 4
TRACING A LINE IN THE SAND

*There was a wall.
It did not look important.
It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared.
An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it.
Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate
it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary.
But the idea was real. It was important.
For seven generations there had been nothing in the world
more important than that wall.
-Ursula K. Le Guin, 1974, p. 1*

This chapter concentrates on Nordelta's quest for opacity, and particularly on the mechanisms it has used to produce and reproduce its exceptional enclosed space, where the influence and intervention of the State is reduced to a minimum. Such mechanisms respond to a way of seeing the world shared by most Nordelteños, for whom isolation and self-government are the conditions for producing a life that is considered pure and comfortable. What is relevant about these issues, or at least what appears to be so, is that a desire for a new kind of governmentality seems to be developing among gated communities; a 'shadow state' that is arising from a set of practices that may have existed before but are now becoming an object of knowledge, programmed, projected, and mobilised under a novel spatial and political strategy.

The chapter outlines a discussion on sovereignty and citizenship as key underlying issues regarding the privatisation of public space, and its implication for different kinds of bodies. Gated communities have not emerged from scratch. They are instead the institutionalised forms of socio-spatial practices already present in society; practices related to the increasing importance for the upper-middle classes of a comfortable and familiar life discussed in chapter 6. They are also consistent with the historical trajectories of the Argentine path of capitalist accumulation and neoliberal privatisation. At least since the 1976 coup, but without doubt since the 1990s, the country has promoted different processes of privatisation

of land, labour, resources, and former state companies. The existence and character of Nordelta can only be understood if we take into account this historical, political and economic context.

The chapter is divided into three sections, all of them exploring the legal procedures and political negotiations through which Nordelta has temporarily secured control over its territory, warding off the numerous external perils which threaten its survival. The first section reviews discursive and non-discursive mechanisms through which Nordelta's partial autonomy has been pursued. Two phenomena are analysed at large: a scheme, that is to say, that of Nordelta's Master Plan; and a process, which relates to the tensions regarding the potential opening of Nordelta's main road. The second section analyses how Nordelta has attempted to create a shadow government that would take charge of functions traditionally performed by the state or municipal authorities, such as urban maintenance, tax collection, and public safety. The third and last section covers Nordelta's legal apparatus, which has been created with partial independence from the public one. Reflecting on the particular set of mechanisms employed to seduce and induce other actors to allow the establishment of a private state of domination over this territory and its population, this chapter suggests that the assemblage of gated communities requires the collaboration of a large number of different actors. This production of a large and scattered social network contradicts the vision that frames them as autarchic and isolated.

4.1. FENCE ME IN

There were multiple legal procedures and power mechanisms through which Nordelta's borders were drawn. A key device was Nordelta's Masterplan,¹⁰⁵ a guiding blueprint that originally pursued an open and integrative design, but was later re-converted to privilege a gated and exclusive endeavour. A Masterplan is a promise and a contract between the developer and the buyers, in which the former present to the latter how the project will be once completed. Of all the elements contained in Nordelta's planning, probably the most

¹⁰⁵ Masterplan, Master Plan or *Plan Maestro* are names equally used in Argentina to refer to long-term urban planning documents. In Nordelta the first word, in English, prevails.

sensitive and controversial of all has been its main internal road, whose privatisation required a complex set of political schemes and negotiations with public authorities and local actors. Both the Masterplan and the main road have played a relevant role in the way the complex's partial autonomy is perceived and pursued, and this section intend to offer an in-depth analysis of them.

4.1.1. Nordelta's Masterplan

The first steps in the creation of Nordelta were taken during the seventies, when Julián Astolfoni was looking for a large plot of land on the Capital's outskirts to materialise a vision that would perfectly align with those of the 19th century utopian socialists such as Fourier and Saint-Simon: he wanted to create a city that would bring order to a region that lacked urban planning, and suffered from the irresponsible actions of real estate companies. Believing there is a causal relationship between spatial order and social form, he gave Nordelta¹⁰⁶ its first shape (fig. 4.1), looking forward to provide Argentine society with “a solution similar to what has been successful in France for the past 50 years: an integrated urban centre where people can live, work, study and have fun” (in Astolfoni and Costantini, 1999). During the same decade, Astolfoni received from the State part of the land of the Luján floodplain where Nordelta would later be located, and via his company, Supercemento-DYOPSA, he bought the rest “at a very cheap price” (Ríos and Pérez, 2008).

At the end of the eighties, Astolfoni approached Rubén Pesci, one of Argentina's most famous architects and urban planners, famous for his focus on sustainability, to commission a Masterplan for the development. He needed help to give his ideas a physical form, in the shape of maps, plans, models and designs; in Lefebvre's terms (1974), Pesci was brought as an expert who was able to conceptualise space through a system of signs. Pesci accepted the challenge and led on the production of a project whose purpose was to “relieve the overpopulated central city” and to “re-qualify the distressing periphery with a city of global environmental quality” (1992, p. 124).

¹⁰⁶ Originally called *Complejo Urbano Integral Benavídez CUIB* [Benavídez Integral Urban Complex].

One of Pesci's major concerns was to build an open and integrated city, taking fluidity and connectivity as paramount values. In 2014, recalling his work at the time, he stated that: "we established a principle: that the city has to be understood as a system of flows... and in Nordelta's project, we carefully studied how water, waste, transportation, energy, people and activities moved around, and how they would impact nearby territories" (2014, pp. 216-217). As it can be seen in fig. 4.1., Nordelta's first design, from 1989, shows a development that is fully integrated through a vast local network composed of different neighbourhoods, open land, and roads.



Fig. 4.1. Nordelta's first sketch, 1989. Source: Pesci, 2003.

In 1992, Nordelta's first Master Plan was completed following Astolfoni and Pesci's directions (fig. 4.2), and it was approved in the same year, in full accordance with the Law of Territorial Planning and Land Use 8912/1977, by the Federal Government of Buenos Aires Province.¹⁰⁷ Nordelta became a *barrio cerrado* [gated community], but its project was not

¹⁰⁷ July 6th 1992, decree 1736-92.

thought of as the kind of enclosed and self-sufficient neighbourhood Nordelta would later aspire to become.

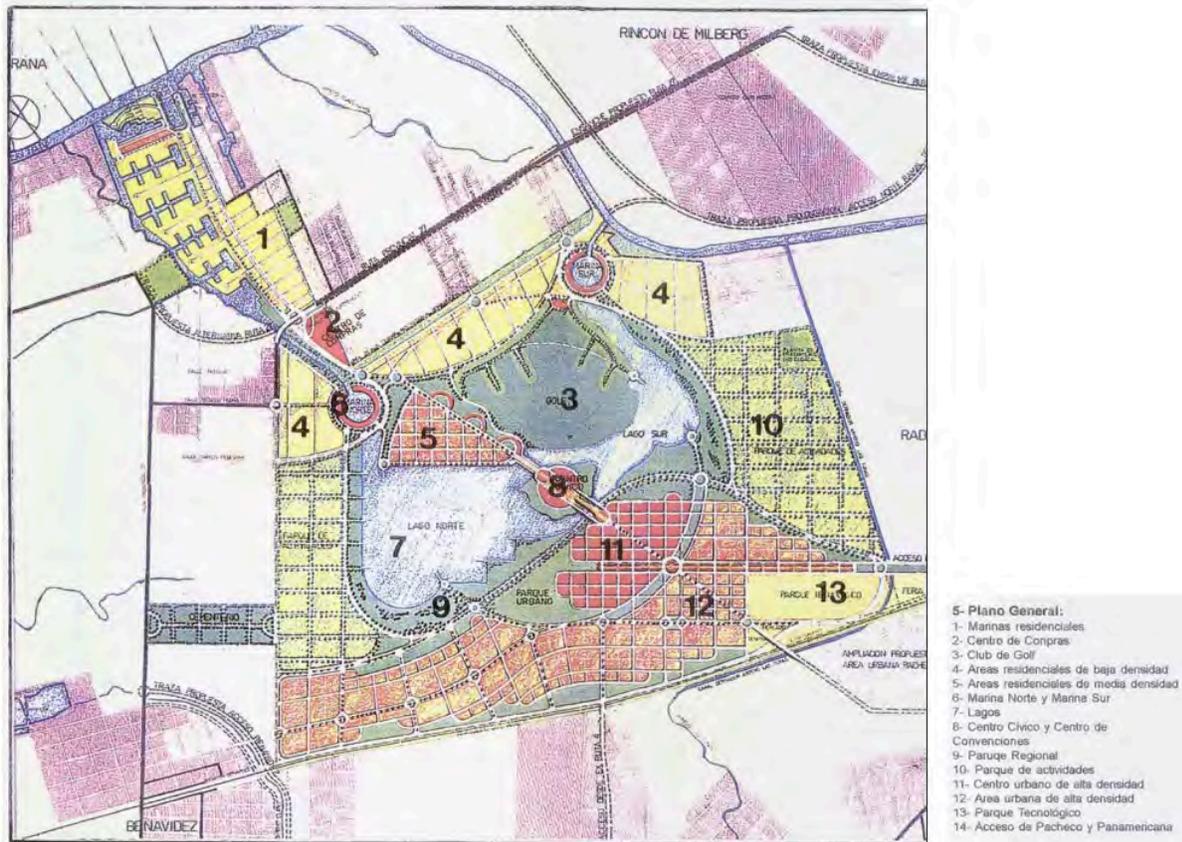


Fig. 4.2. Nordelta's first approved Masterplan, from the 1990s. Source: Provincia de Buenos Aires Public Archive.

During the 1990s, widespread construction of gated communities began to change the geographical shape of the Province of Buenos Aires, and investors turned their attention to its northern suburban areas, buying large plots of land to develop their projects. Concerned to avoid being left behind by the new flow of *sweet money*,¹⁰⁸ and lacking the funds to finance his dream, in 1998, Astolfoni decided to sell half his shares to Consultatio S.A., owned by the steel tycoon Eduardo Costantini, and together they constituted Nordelta S.A.

From that moment on, Costantini took charge of the project and the idea of creating an open

¹⁰⁸ The name of a period that started with the 1976 dictatorship, in which the military *junta* took loans to inject money into the country.

and public town, fully embedded in the local network, was rapidly watered down. In Girola's words: "[Nordelta's] inspiration in French *villes nouvelles* was replaced by the United States' *Master Planned Communities*" (2008, p. 72). Indeed, in Costantini's first interview about Nordelta, he described the development as follows: "Families know what they want: a morally and ecologically healthy environment, with large green areas and clean water (...) They also want good schools and universities, and to enjoy cultural activities (...) Without a doubt, safety is one of their top priorities. Quality access-points and communication networks have, for them, a crucial relevance" (in "Nordelta, Ciudad Ideal?", 2008). In his checklist of positive features, no reference was made to concepts like tolerance, integration, diversity and the public sphere, key values in Astolfoni's conceptual map. On the contrary, the revised project replaced citizens with 'families', diversity with top-end homogeneity, and its public features with the centrality of safety and comfort.¹⁰⁹

Nordelta's current Masterplan was created under Costantini's command and completed in 1998. It is a 58-page volume, with seven annexes, including maps and diagrams, which carefully indicates almost every detail of the development's urban design, such as its subdivisions, land use, building heights, landmarks, circulation system, street arborisation, crosswalks, street furniture, services and sustainability. As one of Nordelta's marketing phrases indicates, "we have planned everything, so you won't have to think about anything other than enjoying it".¹¹⁰

Comparing both Masterplans, one cannot help but to notice how differently they approached the development's relationship with its immediate environment. Before Costantini, Pesci had stressed the need to "put an end to current urban life, characterised by its ghettos: ghettos for rich people and for poor people; the rich, enclosed by walls, guards and dogs, and the marginal ones, located in swamps and waste lands. With Nordelta we are proposing a new

¹⁰⁹ As the project has become more and more successful, and a large proportion of the plots have been sold, Costantini has softened his discourse and recovered Astolfoni's first proposal. In 2008, he said in an interview that: "Nordelta has to be an open town-city. Over 50% of children who attend our schools come from outside. The main road will be open, and it will have hospitals, the shopping centre, an hotel... everything integrated within a local government. We never thought of producing a separatist situation, it'd be absolutely against the spirit and philosophy of this project" ("Nordelta, ¿ciudad ideal?", 2008).

¹¹⁰ Published on its website. Accessed on November 19th 2014.

urban pole, with multiple functions and purposes, rejecting the ghettos (country clubs, gated communities, etcetera) that characterise the dominant trend” (2014, p. 214). With Costantini, though, Nordelta’s borders were clearly demarcated, and a considerable amount of time and effort were placed on sealing the development from its immediate environment, as it has commonly happened with most gated communities around the globe; a process which Reich calls “the secession of the successful” (in McKenzie, 1996, p. 23).

Fig. 4.3 exhibits Nordelta’s current masterplan. In comparison with the previous one, it can quickly be noticed that the developments’ surroundings have been erased, and the only elements drawn in the map are transportation networks. In other words, the one thing valuable enough to be mentioned from the immediate environ was the infrastructure needed to connect the enclave with other equally respectable areas. On the other hand, the first Nordelta’s designs exhibited a squared grid that followed traditional planning and integrated with the surroundings, whilst the last one replaced such pattern with curvilinear streets and *cul-de-sacs*, spatial forms regularly used “to discourage through-traffic and create quieter neighbourhoods” (Southworth and Owens, 1993, p. 274). Reinforcing control over circulation, the newest masterplan eliminated public transport, train and bus stops were moved to the borders; main entrances were gated, and vehicular and pedestrian flow were placed under control at three different access gates. All these measures gave Nordelta a exclusionary design, constraining the way people behaved in space.



Fig. 4.3. Nordelta's current Masterplan. Source: Nordelta's website.

From a legal point of view, Schindler has very eloquently described how urban design is used in the US to restrain egalitarian access to certain areas. For example, “bridges designed to be so low that buses could not pass under them in order to prevent people of colour from accessing a public beach” (2015, p. 1934). She also presented cases in which certain ‘confusion techniques’ were relied on to discourage unwanted presences in an area. Nordelta is no stranger to such things, as it is quite a common experience for outsiders to get lost on the way in. Isabel, for example, a Paraguayan domestic worker I met at Pacheco’s bus stop, told me “the first time I came here it was terrible, because I got lost and it was quite hot. I was coming from my other job, and asked a lady on the bus: Miss, you know where Nordelta is? We just passed it, she said. I got off and started walking. I walked for a long time, but could not find it. After a while I asked some people. I was so tired! And they told me, no, you’ve come in the wrong direction, you have to go all the way back. I wanted to kill myself!” [Field Notes, December 3rd, 2008]. According to Lefebvre, representations of space play a key role

in the history of ideologies (1991, p. 116), and the way the new masterplan frames the figure of the stranger cannot but be understood as a political stand regarding the production of space.

For Nordelta's developer, securing the project's enclosure was necessary to produce the sort of exclusive settlement it aimed for. At the same time, though, the current masterplan has placed careful attention on offering a "high quality infrastructure that will allow an easy commute for those who have to travel [to Buenos Aires, mainly] for work" (Astolfoni and Costantini, 1999). To set these two objectives simultaneously may seem paradoxical, but this is not the case if they are framed as the two sides of the same coin, one that asks: how to keep Nordelta connected with the Capital while, at the same time, not losing control over those open arteries? Circulation was paramount, holding the key to the project's success, and for that reason the next sub-section will take a closer look at how the road transportation system was organised.

4.1.2. Nordelta's transportation system

Nordelta has developed two strategies regarding public circulation and connectivity: on the one hand, to enhance a public transport system by building a new train line and two train stations near the bordering fence; while on the other, to facilitate private transportation by building roads and bridges to improve the development's integration with the main provincial road network, making the area easily reachable by car. I will briefly describe both plans and their outcomes.

Semi-Public Transport System

In May 2008, I stopped by the sentry post on my way to the bus stop. There was a policeman and a guard sitting there, relaxed. I asked them when the next bus was coming, "Half an hour", one said. Is there any other way I can get there? "The only way are these buses", the guard replied, to which the policeman added: "There are taxis as well". The guard laughed at the comment and warned me: "Yeah, but they will kill you [with the fare]! Say you are going to

Nordelta and that's it". So what can I do, is it too far to walk there? "We are talking about 10 kilometres, at least! You better wait for the bus" [Field Notes, May 14th, 2008].

Having shifted towards a more private-oriented urban project, it was not surprising to find that since day one, the plan's private transportation section received heavy investment and priority from Nordelta, achieving its purposes, while that regarding public transportation was left unattended. Fifteen years have passed since Nordelta opened, and the railway has not been built yet. Furthermore, there is no serious project to do so. Lacking a public transport system, for months many *propietarios* had to drive all the way to Pacheco to pick up their domestic workers and gardeners, creating a tension between them and the administration.

Talking to someone that works in Nordelta's public transport system, he said: "Just after [the first plots were sold], they [Nordelta S.A.] realised rich people don't clean their houses, rich people don't cut their lawn, rich people don't drive buses. So, they *needed* to coexist with the poor" [Field Notes, March 3rd, 2009]. Carlos and Miriam started Mary-Go, a small bus fleet, in the 2000, a year just before the crisis. They were approached by AVN in 2002 to solve Nordelta's increasing transport¹¹¹ problem, and they agreed to offer a local service, from Nordelta to Pacheco and vice-versa, mainly aimed at domestic workers; and a long-distance service linking Nordelta and Buenos Aires, used primarily by *propietarias*. The latter makes eight stops between the capital and the gated community, Pacheco being the last one before entering the settlement. The service is scheduled every 30 minutes during rush hour, and once every hour the rest of the day.

Besides cars and buses there are not many ways to reach Nordelta, which is a common problem for workers, service providers and a few young *propietarios*. The place has an area of 1,600 Ha, so walking around is not a very practical option. It takes over an hour to cross

¹¹¹ Mary-Go is a private enterprise, and is independent of Nordelta, although it receives a monthly payment for advertising: every single one of their buses carries big signs promoting Nordelta, a practice that has caused confusion, as almost no one knows that Nordelta does not manage the buses. Once I told Werner, a resident of Portezuelo, that Mary-Go was an independent company and he was categorical: "No! Mary-Go *is* them", he said, "despite what they say".

from one entrance to the other, and an additional hour to go all the way up to Pacheco. There are a few taxi-stops in the area, but workers rarely use them due to their cost. However, more than a few *propietarios* have hired them on a monthly basis to take their children to school and bring them back in the afternoon. Regarding cars, workers are allowed to use them but Nordelta's administration forbids access to vehicles older than 2005 and without an insurance. The same with motorcycles, but guards additionally find excuses to prevent them from entering, such as the helmet being too old, or the bike being too noisy.

Bicycles, on the other hand, are a common means of transport in the area. However, inside Nordelta only *propietarios* can be seen using them. I asked Narda, a domestic worker, about this, and she did not know the reason for this, although she thinks "it's because they [*propietarios*] don't want to see us around... anyway, it's their place and they make the rules" [Field Notes, December 16th, 2008]. Twice I received a similar answer, once by a guard and another time by Luciano –a bus driver–, who thought it was for *aesthetic reasons*. The official answer, though, is that bike paths only go from the northern entrance to La Isla, the southern neighbourhood, and do not reach Pacheco, they [the guards, Nordelta] cannot take the risk of having an accident on the route. Reinforcing a spatial design that makes the area hard to reach, the main access route was built without sidewalks nor a bike path. I asked in the administrative office if they had a plan to expand the path towards the bus stop, but they refused to answer.

Privatising public roads

In 1999, Nordelta led a group of local gated communities in a series of negotiations with Tigre Municipality and the Government of Buenos Aires Province to build new roads in the area.¹¹² Two main projects were on their minds: the first one was to transform Route 27, until then a poorly maintained two-lane road, into a newly asphalted four-lane highway, a task they managed to achieve in a short period and without major setbacks. The second one was

¹¹² The use of highways and roads to intentionally displace or skip poor settlements has been so common in the United States they have earned a name: "white roads through black bedrooms" (Falk, 2013).

to build the *Corredor Nordelta-Bancalari* (“Nordelta-Bancalari Corridor”, see Fig. 4.4), a project that had remained dormant in the Provincial Development Masterplan for a long time. Without pressure or budget¹¹³ to carry it out, local government had no plan to build it, whilst Nordelta, on the other hand, had both: a large investment fund, and the urgency to have it done it as soon as possible.

Five gated communities gathered under the name of *Consortio Acceso Bancalari*¹¹⁴, agreed on a budget and offered local authorities to take full responsibility of the road’s construction. Just one condition was submitted: Nordelta, being the only neighbourhood traversed by the road, wanted to have restricted access to the section that was going to pass through its land, administered by them. Local authorities agreed on the terms, but limited Nordelta’s control of the internal part of road –formally called “Av. de Los Lagos”, informally called “La Troncal” (see figs. 4.4 and 4.5)–, to 10 years. In 2001, Nordelta Avenue was inaugurated with a press covered celebration.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ The route's price was eight million dollars.

¹¹⁴ Balancing influences, size and population, it was decided that Nordelta would hold 55% of the society, Santa Bárbara 18.3%, Talar del Lago 17%, Talar del Lago II 6.6%, Laguna del Sol 9.6% and Pacheco Golf 3.5% (AVN, 2010).

¹¹⁵ It is rumoured they agreed to coordinate the delivery deadline with that of the local elections. The date also coincided with the 2001 social crisis, and acts such as the road’s opening contributed to give Nordelta a bad name among the general population, creating resentment towards them.



Fig. 4.4. General Pacheco's main roads. In magenta, Corredor Nordelta-Bancalari; in yellow, the five gated communities that form part of Consorcio Acceso Bancalari. Image produced by the author over a Google Map image.



Fig. 4.5. Detailed image of Corredor Nordelta Bancalari with its four segments. Image produced by the author over a Google Map image.

Since 2001 the *Consortio* has been in control of the section of the road that crosses Nordelta, keeping it private.¹¹⁶ I asked Werner why he thought such a proposal was accepted, and he looked at me with a conspiratorial smile: “Look... whoever has money, has... (laughs)... the municipality lives on these things, see?” [Field Notes, September 10th, 2009]. I could not fully grasp his comment at first, but after a couple of months I understood he was talking about bribes and cuts of the profits, along with the importance Nordelta’s taxes have to the local government, a supposition shared by Rubén: “If you put money on the table, everything is easier here” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. He had a more political view, though, stressing economic power may not be enough to solve the problem once and for all:

“In any case, it can’t last forever. This is a game of political pressures. If suddenly a movement of people from Benavidez emerges, demanding the road to be opened, the *Intendente* [local authority] would not be able to stop them. At the end of the day, Nordelta has 15,000 people and most of them are children, so they don’t vote. And voters are more important than money.”

Something like that happened in 2006, when residents from nearby gated communities complained about the road’s semi-public condition. The catalyst to the complaint was that many of their kids attended the schools located in Nordelta, and although they were granted

¹¹⁶ There are several similar cases from around the world, regarding gated communities’ usually successful attempts to privatise, or at least control movement in public roads. A well-studied case is the one in Collier County researched by Starnes (in Rubino and Starnes, 2008).

an electronic pass that gave them access during weekdays and school hours, they argued it was not enough. In a letter sent to Gallaretas, Facundo Alonso, a resident of Pacheco Club,¹¹⁷ stated that: “the life and routine of our kids is NOT limited to school hours. They have birthday parties, extra-curricular activities, friends who invite them in to play, play sports, and so on (...) You say that such restrictions are for SAFETY reasons, but WE ARE PART OF THIS COMMUNITY, even though we don’t live there” (Alonso, 2005). Facundo’s letter stirred a discussion among Nordelteños, and although a few *propietarios* agreed with him, the general opinion, which I could surmise from online forums and through interviews was to maintain this policy. Claudio Merlini, a neighbour from La Alameda, stated the following:

“I want to ask Facundo Alonso if his kids’ friends are allowed to enter Pacheco Club just because they go to school together. I don’t want to be elitist, but I completely disagree about opening the Troncal. This issue was already discussed, and the neighbours’ answer was loud and clear” (Merlini, 2006).

This problem got worse as people from other gated communities demanded the opening of Troncal to reach Route 27, which provides a faster, easier and safer way to Tigre City. In the absence of a positive answer from Nordelta, they filed a complaint with the local government: “If we want to go to Nordelta’s Shopping Centre from Pacheco, or to Troncos del Talar, we have to drive a long way”, a famous blogger from Tigre wrote (“Pase gratuito para ingresar a Nordelta,” 2009). The issue appeared in local and national newspapers, raising concern over the privatisation of public roads, such as the joked presented in fig. 4.6.¹¹⁸ In the end, keeping the road closed was so important for Nordelta that after a series of negotiations they chose to build a new parallel road called El Golf Avenue (fig. 4.7), or the *Camino Alternativo* [“Alternative Road”], as it is more commonly known, which connects Bancalari to the shopping centre while preventing unauthorised people from getting near the residential areas. Nevertheless, they made demands of users of that road, who had to provide personal

¹¹⁷ A nearby gated community.

¹¹⁸ The episode coincided with another one, far widely covered in the press, in which San Isidro municipality, one of the richest of Buenos Aires Province, authorised the construction of a wall separating part of its perimeter with San Fernando, a working-class, highly stigmatised municipality. The Province’s Governor, Daniel Scioli, under whose government gated communities have spread, stated that: “we cannot divide the country between poor and rich neighbourhoods. I work every day to integrate the Province, and to improve safety. If everyone tries to save him itself, no one will be safe” (in “Scioli llamó a “repensar” el muro que separa a San Isidro de San Fernando,” 2009).

identification, and evidence of their car insurance. After the road was built, many Nordelteños claimed there were no more reasons to open the Troncal, as the *Camino Alternativo* served the same purpose: “Nobody needs to get in now. Even more, going through the external road is easier, as it doesn’t have the speed limit and speed bumps we have”, Pablo, a neighbour from Castores, argued [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

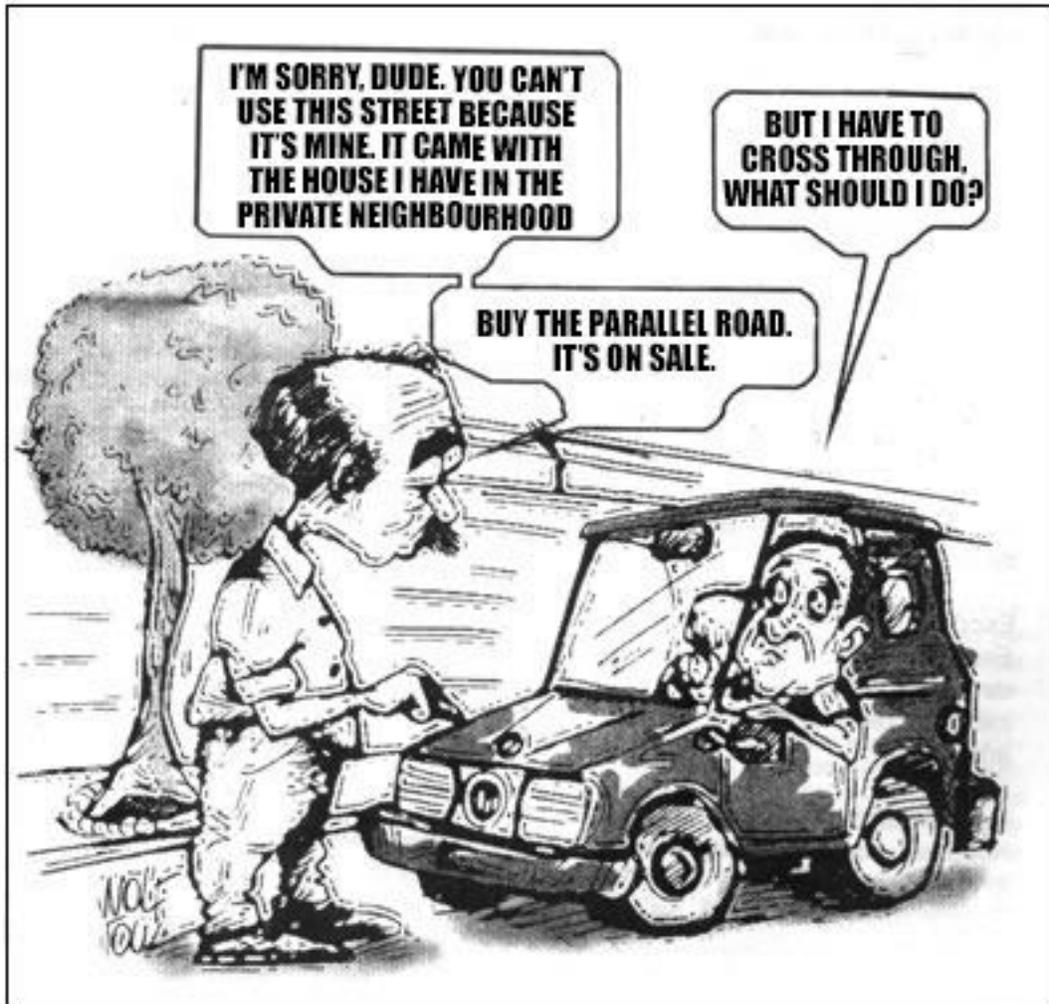


Fig. 4.6. Cartoon. Source: Iglesias, 2011. Translated from Spanish by the author.



Fig. 4.7. In magenta, Corredor Nordelta-Bancalari; in light blue, Nordelta's Alternative Road. Image produced by the author over a Google Map image.

In most *propietarios'* geopolitical imagination, there is no doubt the road is and should remain private. Real estate agents tend not to mention its legal status when they are offering plots and houses, therefore newcomers are usually ill informed, and prone to explain these episodes as a political move by local authorities, or as a change of rules unilaterally executed by Nordelta S.A. In a letter published in 2007, a resident asked the following: "I'd like to know if you have any information regarding the rumours that Troncal will be opened, modifying the masterplan which was sold to us" (Carulla, 2007). In the Nordelteños' attitudes there are inconsistencies, as in this case they suggested buying the road even though it was not included in the masterplan, but for a different case they asked for the masterplan to be respected without changes: "We must not allow the Troncal to be opened to the general public, regardless of the masterplan or the agreements we have made with Tigre municipality", a resident wrote to Gallaretas signing off as 'a neighbour' (in "Una carta que levanta polvareda", 2010).

Nordelta's *propietarios* are disgruntled about sharing the street with outsiders, and their preoccupation with keeping a restricted access is maintained up to the point that, in 2005,

an ambulance on its way to treat two victims of an accident was denied access, on the basis that its insurance had expired. Nordelteños were alarmed when they realised they were on their own in a situation of emergency, and complained through Gallaretas and in their Council Meetings. After months of discussion, it was decided to keep 'foreign' (*de afuera*) ambulances out, and hire one exclusively for their own, which would be stationed inside the compound. Among other arguments, some residents stressed that public ambulances were ill-equipped, and that Nordelta's large size made it impossible for an ambulance coming from outside to treat an emergency within an adequate timeframe.

In ANV's Neighbourhood Council Meeting Act #773 (AVN, 2006d), dated May 22th 2006, it was unanimously agreed to pay a private health company ARS\$34,000 (£5,400) a month to keep an ambulance inside Nordelta. The service was hired to cover life threatening emergencies only, and limited to cases within the compound. I asked Werner what would happen if something was to occur at the shopping centre.

Werner: I don't think they'd go. People there should have their own insurance.

Ricardo: What if someone from Nordelta goes shopping and suffers an assault, or has a heart attack?

Werner: If it is someone from here, I think they would go.

Patricia: But the shopping centre is occupied by other people as well!

Werner: The ambulance is forced to... well, they can't be asking around: 'are you a *negro*?' ('¿sos negro?').

Patricia: But it is us who pay for the insurance.

In 2010, another critical episode happened when the initial agreement with Tigre approached its expiry date, and the possibility that the main road might have been opened escalated to become once again Nordelteños' main concern. This time, though, Nordelta S.A. refused to pay the compensation required to keep the road private. The neighbours went into a state of panic, discussing all possibilities through social networks, in restaurants, by phone and letters. In Claudia's words: "It was a complete mess, because we didn't want to open it, and we said: 'no, and that's it, it won't happen'" [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. Rubén added: "There was a lot of pressure from the neighbours for the Troncal to remain closed.

People complained to AVN, to Costantini, and to the Intendencia de Tigre¹¹⁹ as well. In fact, complaints were so intense, the Intendencia installed large signs outside Nordelta reassuring people the road won't be opened" (Fig. 4.8). And then what happened, I asked. "Well, they negotiated. Intendencia needed funding to build another road nearby Nordelta, so they say to Costantini: 'if you don't want us to open the Troncal, it's simple: put two million dollars down'. In the end we paid, and the discussion was postponed for two years" [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].



Fig. 4.8. "To answer malicious rumours, we want to clarify that the Municipality has no intention of opening Nordelta's Troncal Road to the general public."

Source: <http://conurbanos.blogspot.cl/2010/08/nordelta-es-una-massssssa.html>

In 2011, a new crisis arose when a municipal officer declared to the press they were about to open Sarmiento Road (see Fig. 4.9), a key artery of the local network which was built by

¹¹⁹ As explained before, Buenos Aires province is composed of *partidos* (local governments), each one run by an Intendente.

Nordelta to connect Los Alisos and Los Lagos, two new *barrios*, to the rest of its local system. People from those places, as well as from the bordering *barrios* of Los Sauces and La Alameda, felt betrayed by Nordelta because they were never informed the road would become public, and organised a protest. They held meetings with Nordelta S.A., AVN and local authorities, making noise through letters and in online forums until the developer agreed to pay for another public road in exchange for keeping that one closed for another 15 years. Since then, unhappy with the result, over 200 neighbours have been discussing, since then the possibility of buying the road themselves, to keep it closed in perpetuity: “We prefer the road to remain private, because that way we can solve our problems among ourselves, and administrate everything from here”, said Ignacio, one of the leaders (“Una movilización de vecinos logró mantener cerrada una calle en Nordelta,” 2011). Chatting with Ángel a few years before, he came out with a similar solution: “Nordelta should buy the street and keep it private... what will happen to us otherwise? Nordelta may disappear, and all that would be left would be a bunch of small gated neighbourhoods” [Field Notes, August 25th, 2009].

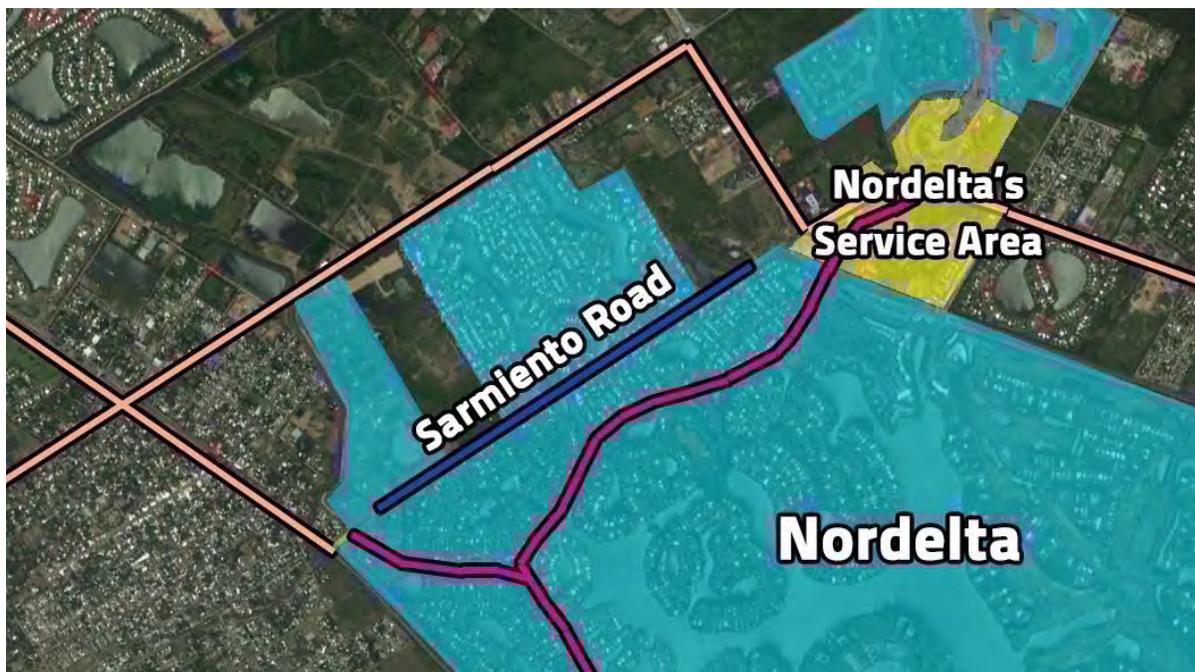


Fig. 4.9. Sarmiento Road. Image produced by the author over a Google Map image.

This issue, as we can see, is a matter of great concern to Nordelteños, although Costantini and Nordelta S.A. do not have any intention to keep disbursing funds to maintain the road

closed. Their interest in this matter has been strictly commercial, and they understand that keeping Nordelta gated has been necessary to sustain the plots' sale; that without a fence, they would not be able to attract the kind of people they are targeting. But now that the project is at an advanced stage, and success is fairly well secured, they have been changing their discourse. A first sign of this happened in 2012, when Costantini announced that, eventually, gates will be opened:

“Every day, around 20,000 people enter Nordelta, and over half of the students who attend our schools –built on plots donated by Nordelta–, come from the outside. It'd be crazy to create an autonomous and self-sufficient neighbourhood when you're talking about 80,000 people, which is the number we are expecting to have in Nordelta. It is obvious that integration with the rest of the community penetrates us from every direction” (“Costantini: Estoy tranquilo porque Cristina se involucró en el tema de los countries,” 2012).

In 2015, when the deal with the local government was about to expire, the developer Nordelta S. A. declared they would not pay for the construction of new infrastructure in exchange for keeping the Troncal close, “the issue is now in the neighbours' hands”, they added (“Un puente a cambio de la troncal,” 2015). Although they were the exception, a few *propietarios* shared the developer's opinion. Discussing the opening of the Troncal with Rubén, he was emphatic that gated communities were not islands: “Neighbourhoods like ours are luxury enclaves located in the poorest areas of the city, and as much as we try, we cannot isolate ourselves. Fences don't separate, they just set limits, and that's it. There will always be movements of people from one side to the other, of those who work inside, and those who live inside but work in the city” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

In any case, I have no doubt that the mismatch between the expectations of the developers and the residents will eventually escalate into a conflict. Nordelta S.A. does not want to keep paying to have the Troncal gated, while Nordelteños cherish their seclusion as a primary value. For them, opening the road is tantamount to abandoning a power technology that has proved to be extremely useful, both in a symbolic and in a functional way. It is one of the main ways they have at their disposal to draw the line between *us* and *them*, exercising, without a doubt and without a flaw, the biopolitical task to *make [us] live and let [them] die* (Foucault,

2004). In that way, the problem of opening the gates relates to much more than handing over the administration of space: it is to allow, into *their* place, a series of threatening elements which may potentially ruin their purified community.

Using a wide array of legal and political manoeuvres and techniques, Nordelta has gained control over its territory, and secured the management of its borders, both seen as conditions of possibility to –allegedly– create an immune bubble. As should be clear by now, Nordelta’s *success* in these matters is not based on its ability to overcome the power of public institutions, but rather on how it has effectively seduced and persuaded these or their representatives to support their efforts to shelter itself from what they perceive to be a hostile environment surrounding the site. In the next section I will review how Nordelta has tried to diminish its dependence on the administrative functions and services provided by the Municipalities of Pacheco, and Tigre and the Federal State of Provincia de Buenos Aires, hence reducing the risk of social interactions with outsiders inside the development.

4.2. ONE GATE TO RULE THEM ALL

This section discusses the mechanisms through which Nordelta has managed to reduce and stabilise its relations with external actors, while also securing the administration of its domains. While analyses of global capitalism have challenged and expanded the concept of government and citizenship to a greater scale, Nordelta's case offers us an opportunity to look at other ways –more contained and on a smaller scale– of constituting a political community. In Nordelta's case, these objectives have been pursued via the creation of two parallel institutions that have come to replace, as thoroughly as possible, the functions of both executive and legislative official powers. Whilst the next section will focus on Nordelta's own legal and juridical systems, which includes private mechanisms and institutions created to design and modify norms, and to see them enforced and sanctioned, this section concentrates on its attempts to create a private executive government. I will discuss how AVN, the development's neurological central apparatus, has come to replace public functions within the area, providing and organising functions such as security, urbanisation, tax collection and garbage disposal, among others. Discussion will be based on interviews with different actors, media analysis, and ethnographic data produced in relation to ongoing relations with private/public service providers, such as guards, police officers, teachers, gardeners, and bus drivers.

It may be necessary to say that this kind of social organisation is not exclusive to Nordelta, and that similar cases have been analysed in different gated communities. Garreau calls them 'shadow governments', and suggests they prosper only when there is a political vacuum. Hence, they become relevant when and where the State –by its action, or by the lack of it– has set the conditions which make them possible (1991). In a similar fashion, Wolch has described the rise of shadow states as part of a society-wide trend toward privatisation (1990). Shadow states present similar structures and equivalent functions as regular modern states, although they usually lack accountability, their citizens not having many ways to participate in decisions nor to ask for reports: "shadow governments can tax, legislate, and police their communities, but they are rarely accountable, are responsive primarily to wealth, and subject to few constitutional constraints", Garreau explains (1991, p. 187).

Although it would be interesting to dedicate a whole research project to investigate Nordelta's executive and legal apparatus, that is not my intention here. I do not plan to cover every single one of its actors, functions and processes, but only concentrate on those that enable a better understanding of Nordelta's particular quest for purity. Attention is paid to how and to what extent these elements contribute to the creation of a particular 'white' subjectivity, creating a habitat where those *proper citizens* may live a comfortable life. This section in particular will discuss the mechanisms devised by the executive power to reduce and control the influence of external institutions, while reducing the incoming flux of threatening 'abnormals'.

4.2.1. Nordelta's political institutions

It is not easy to decipher Nordelta's political organisation. It took me months of reading documents and making enquiries to complete the whole picture. Further, none of the *propietarios* I worked with –even those involved in their local neighbourhood councils– were able to fully describe how and by whom they were being governed. The first thing to clarify is that, legally, Nordelta is not a juridical person. As an entity, Nordelta is only acknowledged by the State as a *localidad*, which is the equivalent of a district; that is, a piece of land which is part of local government and has no local representative nor independent public administrator. Nevertheless, Nordelta is brought into being through the assemblage of different actors¹²⁰, processes and objects, whose forces, although stabilised, recurrently enter into relationships of friction and collaboration.

The main actor of this scheme is the *Asociación Vecinal Nordelta*, AVN [Nordelta's Neighbours Association]¹²¹, the development's executive government. AVN is a non-profit institution with three major functions: first and foremost, it is in charge of administrating the common areas within the development, which include internal roads, green areas, internal lakes, the club houses, and sports facilities. This role includes tasks such as general maintenance, pest control, safety, and waste management. As such, one could say AVN is essentially an economic

¹²⁰ To which one should add the State, as guarantor of their legitimacy.

¹²¹ Commonly known in the United States as Homeowners Association, or HOA.

actor in the Aristotelian sense; that is, one devoted to the optimum administration of a domestic environment. Secondly, AVN performs several legal and juridical functions, issuing, supervising, and sanctioning the development's encompassing rules, a matter which will be discussed in the next section. Finally, a third function AVN performs is to guard and guide Nordelta's development and identity, creating rituals and symbols such as a flag and promoting the use of a gentile for each *barrío*, which will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6.

While AVN operates as the central authority for the development's common areas, each *barrío* enjoys relative autonomy¹²², having its own institutions and procedures, which can be divided into three actors: one, the *Administrador* [Administrator], equivalent to a Chief Executive Officer; two, the *Consejo de Administración* [Administration Council], who sets the *barrío's* policy, and supervises the Administrator's actions. The *Consejo* is composed of six to ten elected councillors, one appointed as President, another as Vice-President, and a third as Secretary.¹²³ Finally, every *barrío* has a *Tribunal de Disciplina* [Disciplinary Court], a judicial organ composed of three elected members, that is in charge of sanctioning law, and punishing culprits with sanctions that can go from a fine to expulsion from the neighbourhood. To cover the area's maintenance, and the costs of these institutions, each household has to pay fees in the range of ARS\$ 500-1000 a month,¹²⁴ varying according to the size and location of the plot.

Whether they are directed towards AVN, or to each *barrío*, most fees are spent on service provision. To take the example of Portezuelo, on the legal document entitled *Reglamento Interno del Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago - Portezuelo* (see Appendix 1), it is stated that *expensas* (services charges) will be used to pay for:

“Basic residential services: street lights; waste collection; pruning and watering green areas; leisure areas' maintenance; drinkable water provision, and regular checks of its quality; management of sewage, electric energy, and gas; approval of private constructions' plans and drawings; supervision and inspection of

¹²² Their decisions have to comply with AVN's actions and regulations.

¹²³ The first members of the Council, which ran from 2005 to 2013, were designated by Nordelta S.A. From then on, they are elected directly by *propietarios*. Candidates must be residents, debt-free and adults (+18).

¹²⁴ An average of £200 a month.

constructions and repair works; pavings, culverts and drains construction and maintenance; security, vigilance and gate-keeping; fees collection; weeding empty plots; rodent control, disinfestation and fumigation; social, cultural and recreational services, and general maintenance and management, among others.”

Taking a look at the list, it is clear that most of these services, if not all, are publicly provided by the local government, and people from Nordelta are entitled to have them provided by the local authority because they are included in their taxes. They prefer not to, though, and to hire private services because they expect to receive top-end services which, they believe, the municipality is not able to provide. In addition, municipal services would imply accepting the presence of threatening people within the enclave; *others* over whom they would have almost no control. In that scenario, they have preferred to hire their own security guards,¹²⁵ gardeners, garbage collectors, pest-control experts, technicians, and cleaners. These are some of the workers I have called *conditional others*. To normalise and keep them under control, Nordelta has devised a number of power mechanisms to which I will return in more detail in Chapter 5. Just to give a clearer understanding of how relevant it is for them to keep the place under control, I will briefly explore the case of garbage collection.

To prevent public waste trucks entering the compound, several tenders have been issued to search for private providers, one for the common area, and 24 for each *barrío*. Additionally, they have looked for waste companies to handle recycling and to promote sustainable practices. Etilplast, a cooperative created by former *cartoneros*, was selected. Having seen the trucks a number of times collecting garbage, I looked for the headquarters’ address and decided to pay them a visit.

Etilplast facilities are located in Benavídez, about fifteen blocks away from Nordelta’s service gate. The area is an informal settlement of gravel streets, populated with fragile houses, workshops and warehouses. As its streets have no visible names, I got a bit lost looking for the place. An 8 year-old girl was playing outside and I asked her for directions. Seeing me

¹²⁵ Among other things, they have been trained as basic firemen, and are in charge of delivering mail. The other side of those measures are that mailmen are not allowed to enter Nordelta, and firemen have limited access.

with a camera hanging on my shoulder, she asked me with a confused face: “Do you want to take photos of the *basural* [“rubbish dump”]? It’s an awful, smelly, and ugly place. Super ugly! They bring dead dogs, and cats, and my dog almost died eating something there.” I asked her whether she would like me to film another thing, instead. What’s nice around here? I asked. “Anything *but* the *basural*, please!”, she replied. After complying with her request, the girl walked me to Etilplast, and when we were getting there, we saw a man getting into a car outside the facility [Field Notes, October 10th 2009]. Having read about the cooperative, I recognised him as Ramiro, its founder and coordinator, and approached him in a hurry. I said: “Hi, are you Ramiro? I work at the university and read about your work. I think it’s amazing what you have accomplished!” With a very tired expression, he told me he had been working all night on a project and was about to take a nap. “But as you came all the way here... I can stay and show you around”, he said smiling. We spent over two hours together, and two more the next day. He was quite proud of what they had achieved and was eager to talk about it. I asked him about his relationship with Nordelta, and he recalled:

“I got in touch with them around 2002. We were doing workshops in schools to promote recycling, and one time we got into a school where kids told us they couldn’t do any recycling because they lived in a gated community, and even though they would divide everything up, no *cartonero* was authorised to enter and take things out. We found out that there were about a hundred of these neighbourhoods in Tigre, and immediately thought of working with them” [Field Notes, October 10th 2009].

I asked: “What did you think when you went to Nordelta for the first time, how did you find the place and the people?”, to which he replied:

“Well, Nordelta wanted us there, which made things very easy. They published an article on their website introducing us, and they also allowed us to knock on every single door to explain our work. I personally talked to everyone, and while some of the *propietarios* didn’t have time, or didn’t want to participate, most of them were very friendly. They know that if someone knocks on their door, it is because you were allowed in, so it’s not like in the street, like here, where you can think: ‘s/he may be a thief’. Additionally, we were wearing our uniforms, and carrying a sign which said that we were environmental promoters. They were also glad because we organised a party at the club house. We invited people to bring their recycling materials, giving them a plant in exchange. It was a process

of exchanging garbage for life.”

I asked Ramiro what about the administration, how was it working with them? “Different, I guess, but fine,” he replied. “Nordelta asked us what they ask everyone they work with: to be clean, to be insured, and to behave.¹²⁶” As with every other worker, to be allowed in, garbage collectors have to be individually checked on a database managed by security guards, and must pass through a series of mechanisms designed to identify and control incomers. “You have to understand”, one of Ramiro’s partners explained, “that these are people who said: ‘we come to live in a gated community not to have a *cartonero*¹²⁷ walking around *our* streets’. If they moved there, it is because they want to live in isolation from what’s going on outside”. Ramiro agreed, adding: “For them, everybody is a suspect, and because they don’t trust us, a guard has been assigned to follow us the entire way” (fig. 4.10). I commented that that must be annoying. “Yeah, sometimes, but at the end I think it’s good for us. It gives us peace of mind, because no one can say anything. Otherwise, if something should happen, how could you claim that it wasn’t you who took it?”

¹²⁶ If a *Conditional Other* behaves improperly, according to a set of rules written and known by everyone, s/he is banned from the development for six months, and whoever is responsible for him or her is fined.

¹²⁷ People who made a living by collecting and selling cardboard paper and other recyclable materials.



Fig. 4.10. Garbage truck being followed by a guard.

By Fernández, M. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15102056@N05/2250271285/>

On their way out, every waste truck has to stop at the gates to be examined by two guards. One guard usually checks the content of the truck, stirring the trash with a shovel and looking through the driver's window, while the other uses a mirror to inspect it from below. After that, the driver has to crush all the trash before leaving, in front of the guards: "so if you stole something, it would be destroyed", Rubén explained to me. In any case, garbage collectors' threatening condition –like that of other workers– is not cancelled out by having gone through these decontamination and examination processes. Their status is only put on hold while they are at work in Nordelta.

Rather than approaching this situation as a problem, federal and local governments have usually turned a blind eye to them. The arrival of gated communities is seen by them has been a positive force of transformation in traditionally poor regions, that has attracted private

investment, contributing to public finances and created a high number of jobs in the area. When analysing their influence in Pilar, a northern suburban municipality, Thuillier found that “the poorest residents of the periphery come from all the metropolitan areas to where gated communities concentrate, looking for jobs” (2005a). According to figures given by INDEC, during the nineties Pilar received 89,000 new residents, while gated communities only hosted 15,000 of them (Thuillier, 2005a). Each house in one of these developments creates a large surplus army of workers: 1,8 permanent jobs, plus another 60 while being built (Vidal-Koppman, 2000; Iglesias, 2000). At the same time, gated communities do not make demands on local governments, for services such as street cleaning or garbage collection, which is a relief for public institutions. An episode that well summarizes this situation relates to former Governor Ubieta, who according to Costantini was “unconditional [in his support] to this kind of development”, and told him when Nordelta was being built: “I am not gonna put any pressure on you. I will support, and help you with permits, but don’t ask me for a single dime” (in Genoud, 2015).

Propietarios’ views on this matter are contradictory because, on the one hand, they do not want public institutions to interfere in the area, while on the other, they complain about the lack of public investment. Rubén, for example, told me: “I approached the current *Intendente*, as I did with the previous one, and told him: ‘Why do I have to pay for street lighting twice: one through my municipal taxes and, again, through my fees [to AVN]? Why is the money not transferred straight by the municipality to Nordelta?’ None of them gave me a good answer” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. Gabriela’s thoughts were along the same lines: “Why do I pay the municipality to have my garbage collected, if they don’t come by; if I have to pay a private service to come and pick up my rubbish?” [Field Notes, 14th January, 2008]. According to McKenzie (1996), the first and main ‘call to arms’ gated communities organise in the US usually is about tax relief, a situation in which they see themselves as victims of the state, which does not only fails to provide them with what they need, but also makes them pay for it. Carlos, Mary Go’s executive, criticised *propietarios* for this sort of complaint, which he regularly heard on the buses:

“For me, it is obvious they [*propietarios*] should pay for their things. If they buy a USD\$500,000 house in a *country*, and I am not saying that having such money is bad, I am just saying that if you do, you can pay to have your things cleaned. I mean, it is *you* who wants to live far away from the poor, it is *you* who wants to be as far as you can from dirty, dangerous places, so if you have the chance of doing it, do not cry over taxes, do not ask for subsidies.¹²⁸ That is the moral question they have to ask themselves.”

And he continued: “You ask yourself: How much does garbage collection cost per household per month? \$10 pesos, give or take. And for \$10 pesos, would they let the municipality and its trucks in? Trucks and people they cannot control? No, of course they would not. That’s how they work: ‘I rather have my own. I run things’” [Field Notes, March 3rd 2009].

In their well-known research about gated communities in the United States, Blakely and Snyder have shown how a considerable number of the most consolidated ones are planning or have already implemented forms of secession from their local governments: “There have always been those who complain about the use of “their” tax money to solve other people’s problems, even within the same city or town. The dynamic is an old one, brought to a worrisome new level by its use by these private micro-governments” (1999, p. 24). The idea is no stranger to Nordelteños: “A neighbour used to say that we should declare ourselves an independent municipality. He even looked up ways of doing it”, Rubén once commented. And he continued: “A cousin of his lived in Seattle, in a gated community similar to this one. Seattle is a well-educated city, integrated, multi-racial, without safety problems, and there are lots of places like this. Somewhere outside the city, three different *countries* got together and declared themselves independent. And if in the United States it could be done, perhaps here as well” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. Space is always negotiated, contested, resisted, and transformed.

¹²⁸ He is making reference to the transportation system. Nordelta’s private buses are so much more expensive than public ones, he explains, because unlike public transportation services, they do not receive subsidies. Nordelteños always complain about the fare, but according to him it is not ethical to have “the whole country putting money in, so rich people may move around.”

4.2.2. Hindering opacity

Although the relation with both local and federal governments is usually good, gated community's attempts to keep their affairs to themselves have had moments of considerable tension. In 2008, for example, a joint operation between the Central Government through its Federal Administrator of Public Funds (AFIP), and the Federal Government of Buenos Aires Province through its Collection Agency (ARBA), was organised to detect tax evasion in gated communities. In their first year, they surveyed the area and found that 8% of the houses were not paying their taxes, which corresponded to 2,000,000 square metres of land value tax (Novillo, 2008).¹²⁹ The scrutiny exercise was not free from problems, as the public officers conducting the research were not granted free access in many neighbourhoods.

Since then, regular inspections have been carried out, usually with the government having the upper hand. The biggest exception was in 2012, when the AFIP Director, María Gabriela De Castro, sent each gated community household a form requesting personal information, such as the number of people who lived there, which schools their children attended, if they were members of a particular club, if they had recently travelled abroad, and if they owned valuable works of art, among other information protected under the 25.326 law regarding Personal Data. Residents did not react well to what they felt was a form of political persecution, and their indignation was channelled through media and lobbying that resulted in De Castro being fired, and public control of tax evasion relaxed for a while.

One notorious aspects of this tension is that most tools used by the state for inspection were visual technologies applied at distance, such as satellites, drones, and GIS software, which underscored the gated communities' difficult access, even where public officers were concerned. Figure 4.11 presents four images released to the press by AFIP, presenting new technology aimed at the detection of tax evaders. Reinforcing the discourse, during those years AFIP aired TV ads and installed large posters at bus stops all over Greater Buenos Aires with the phrase: "We use the technology used to find water on Mars." This exhibition of

¹²⁹ In December 2015, 117,000 square meters in Nordelta were found to be 'irregular' ("Tigre: detectan 400 construcciones clandestinas en el barrio cerrado Nordelta," 2015).

advanced technology by local and national government bodies cannot be seen but as a counter to the claims of the gated communities both in relation to their counter-sovereignty claims and to their aspirations of a better life in isolation from or even opposition to the national community.



Fig. 4.11. ARBA. Source: www.arba.gov.ar

The most common offence pursued by the national tax collection agency AFIP was people that declared vacant plots that were already built on, or that failed to update their house planning permissions, not declaring and not paying for swimming pools or home extensions. In all cases, people were given 15 days to update their information and pay their dues: “These actions are destined to fight these evasion niches. Every person has to contribute to the State according to his/her patrimonial capacity, and the way they contribute is through taxes, so as to sustain a public system that brings services to the whole society, guaranteeing the presence of an active State”, declared Scioli, who was at the time in charge of the revenue office (“Arba profundizó controles antievasión en countries y barrios cerrados,” 2011).

However, despite his words, and even though people were given the chance to comply with regulations, many residents from gated communities refused to do so. Their reluctance should not be seen as a mere tantrum, but rather as a symptom of their ambiguous identification with Argentina, an issue that will be analysed in Chapter 6.

Another node of regular tension is the one between Nordelta and the public legal system. What has concerned the latter is that gated communities' opacity makes them the perfect hideout for bourgeois criminals, such as international thieves, art forgers or drug dealers. Many episodes have given Nordelta a negative reputation, beginning in 2010, a year after the first tax amnesty for undeclared dollars.¹³⁰ That year, a large operation captured national attention, when two Colombians were arrested at the Castores *barrio*, and Los Magníficos, a car wash owned by a Colombian located in Nordelta Shopping Centre, was shut down and investigated by the police. Among the suspects detained was Ruth Martínez, Daniel 'El Loco' Barrera's former wife, one of the most wanted drug dealers in the world, described by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos as 'the last of the great kingpins.' Ruth and her new partner Ariel González were charged with money laundering through real estate operations in the area.

To give a glimpse into the many cases that have connected Nordelta with criminals and drug-dealers, I will mention two events that took place in 2012 and 2013. The first one occurred when the former boss of a Colombian paramilitary group and drug lord Henry de Jesús López (A.K.A., *Mi Sangre* ["My Blood"]) was found living in Nordelta. When the police heard about his location, a warrant was issued, and he was arrested in the nearby municipality of Pilar. Moreover, when *Mi Sangre* heard that 'El Loco' Barrera was also linked to Nordelta, he declared: "If I had known that, I'd have left. It was Barrera who wanted to kill me in Colombia!" (in Messi and Bordón, 2014). The same year, a major operation called *Louis XIV* was organised by UIF (*Unidad de Información Financiera* [Financial Information Unit]), after finding drugs in an antique being packed in Lanús and connected to people in Nordelta's La

¹³⁰ Three other amnesties have been proposed by the State and approved by the Congress in the 21st century: in 2013, 2016, and 2017. They allowed any Argentine to declare their savings in dollars, and bring them from abroad without charges.

Alameda. In March 2013, two businessmen from Pacheco were kidnapped in drug dealing cases, and that same year 100 kilos of cocaine were found in the car wash Los Magníficos, in Nordelta's Shopping Center, and twelve people –most of them Colombians–, were arrested.

I was previously warned about these situations by Gisella, a domestic worker. We were having a coffee at El Récord, in Pacheco, when she lowered her voice: “You may not believe it” she whispered, “but the biggest thing inside are drugs, they move a lot of them... and then there are others into child pornography.” Inside Nordelta? I asked. “Yes, they live there! A *country* is the best place to stay hidden from the outside”. “I don't believe you!” I exclaimed, “how in hell did you find out a thing like that?!”. She replied: “From *las chicas* [“the girls”, other domestic workers], at the bus stop or in the bus, we talk about things” [Field Note. September 20th, 2008].

Due to the controversy raised by these events in the media and public opinion (fig. 4.12), the National Government began to regularly inspect gated communities looking for drugs and international criminals. There were also political reasons. Cristina Fernández, President of Argentina at the time, was under pressure from the G20 group to harden its drug detection policy (Sbatella, 2016). The government organised raids, and for example Miguel Vásquez was found and detained in Nordelta in 2013. Vásquez was a 21 year-old Mexican who was being tracked down for allegedly killing his uncle, the brother of the Major of San Juan City (Mexico). In 2014, just to mention the largest operation in the area, officers from the UIF announced they had found over US\$200 million invested in Nordelta, which their owners could not account for. They managed to freeze US\$100 million, which if added to another US\$500 million frozen in Colombia, made the operation the biggest drug money confiscation in the history of Latin America, according to the head of the unit (Carrillo, 2014).

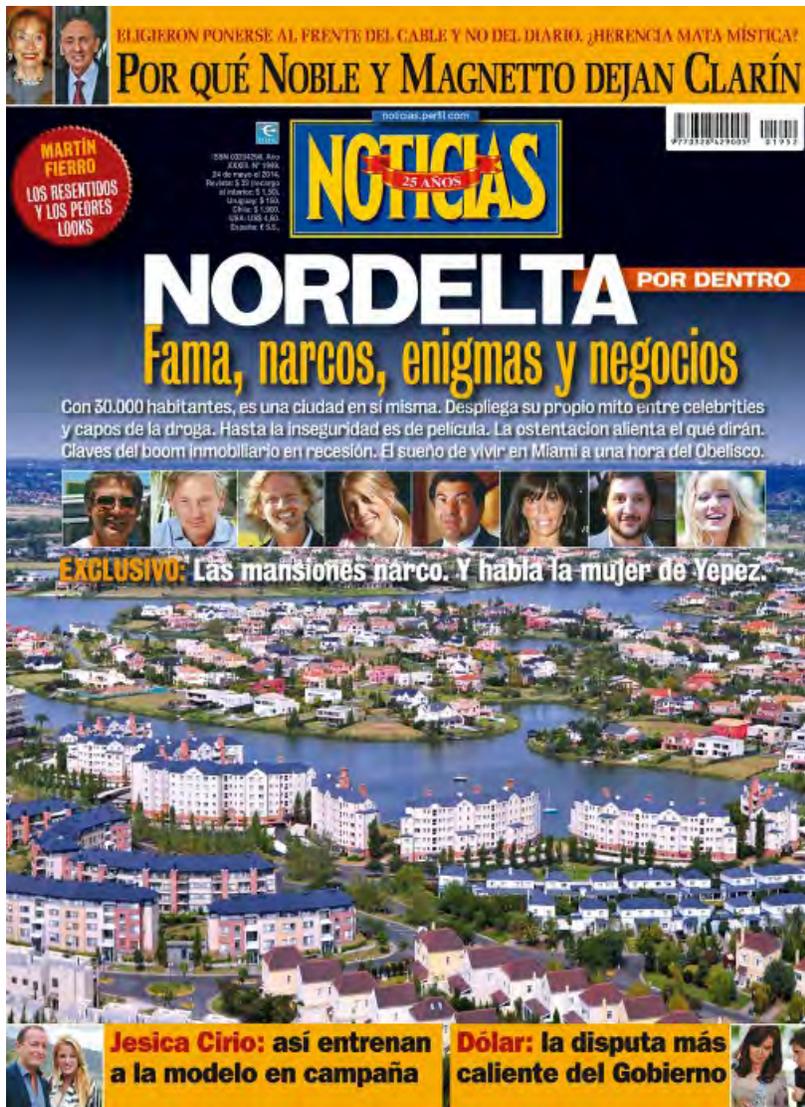


Fig. 4.12. In May 2014, *Noticias* magazine placed a news on its cover regarding Nordelta and drug dealing. Its headline read: “Inside Nordelta: fame, drug dealers, enigmas, and business. With 30,000 inhabitants, it is a city in itself. It deploys its own myth among celebrities and drug lords. Even crime is like moves. Ostentation feeds the gossips. Tips to understand the housing boom during recession. The dream of living in Miami, an hour from Obelisco.”

Over the following weeks, public opinion regarding Nordelta and other gated communities hit its lowest point, and there was not a day without a note or an interview criticising their exclusive seclusion. That year, Messi and Bordon published the book *Narcolandia: Por qué Argentina se convirtió en el paraíso de los traficantes colombianos* [“Narcoland: Why Argentina turned into a paradise for Colombian drug dealers”], and Infobae entitled its book review: ‘Argentina is South America’s Nordelta’ (2014). Trying to contain the situation, Nordelta began to ask every new buyer to provide a criminal background check: “Article

Three. Those persons may become partners those persons who, having backgrounds and occupations that are not contrary to morality and accepted custom, apply for admission in accordance with regulations and statutory provisions, and are admitted by the Board” (Reglamento del Estatuto de la Sociedad Asociación Civil Portezuelo S.A., see Appendix 1).

The new scrutiny was well-accepted by many but criticised by others because –they argued– the identification of ‘abnormals’ was faster and simpler than the mechanism already designed by Nordelta. In a letter to Gallaretas, Marito proposed to take into consideration people’s nationality as a eligibility criteria: “If he is a Colombian and comes with kids, a wife, a domestic worker, and a Colombian gardener; if he moves around in four top-end cars, and nobody knows what he does for a living; if he pays everything in cash, then what would you think he is?... and do you think this ‘background check’ would reveal anything of that? Ridiculous” (“Allanan casas en Nordelta y Villanueva por narcotráfico,” 2013). Commenting on the lack of procedures to address this issue, Costantini let slip a similar comment: “We have a registry office to see our buyers’ faces but can’t really do more than that” (in “¿Por qué los narcotraficantes eligen Nordelta?” 2014). However, it was due to this new scrutiny that in August 2014 a wanted man was caught: “Police had been looking for him for the past two years, but they were only able to close the case when Nordelta detected a male with a history of drug trafficking and robbery, who bought a flat” (“Agradecimiento de la policía,” 2014). This information was shared with the police, who afterwards sent a thank-you note to the entire community.

Costantini was in high demand by the press, and gave a number of interviews about this problem. In general terms, he stressed that this was a completely new and unexpected phenomenon for them and certainly a challenge for every gated community. Reading the interview, I could not help but note one thing he said: “In a report they made about Mi Sangre,¹³¹ he mentioned something that I don’t know if it’s good or bad news: that he chose Nordelta because it was a safe place; that, in fact, two people from the Colombian government came here to kill him, and Nordelta’s safety procedures worked so well that they couldn’t

¹³¹ Nickname of the drug dealer Henry de Jesús López.

succeed, because they were not allowed in” (in Genoud, 2015). There is, however, a simple way to get into Nordelta: to buy a property. Nordelta may try to keep control of new buyers, but houses and plots already owned by individuals may be sold to anyone without having to go through these procedures. Costantini was well aware of the problem, and thought a solution could be the creation of a sort of Central Intelligence Agency in Nordelta:

“We can be in touch with the police, the courts and other entities of control, but we don’t have the power they have (...) Drug dealing is a huge thing [in the country], and what is different about Nordelta is that we may produce more information. We can try to establish mechanisms, a census, and try to ‘make intelligence’ (sic). In Nordelta a thousand units are owned by foreigners. Where do they come from? Where do they work? We have to create an Intelligence Unit, to ‘learn intelligence’ (sic). We are developing a city” (in Genoud, 2015).

The ethnographic data presented in this section comes to suggest that more than a gated community, Nordelta has sought to, and partially succeed in, installing a private government, which has emerged out of a set of normalised practices regarding space and citizenry. Its function –among others– is to keep public institutions as far away as possible, and to supervise threatening foreigners who are temporarily accepted within it. Through different mechanisms and technologies, carefully deployed across its territory, Nordelta has attempted to isolate and distinguish itself from the rest of the area, keeping out threatening practices and actors.

4.3. PRIVATE JUSTICE

Sitting on a patch of grass near Nordelta’s educational area, a group of teenagers were hanging out after school. When they spotted me approaching them, they hastily stopped smoking and put their cigarettes down. They were seven of them: two males and five females, four of whom lived in Nordelta while the rest came every day from nearby gated communities. They all went to the same school, and were in *Quinto ES* [Key Stage 5, 16-17 years old]. Having little to do, they were keen to talk to “a weird Chilean”, as they described me, and we sat for over an hour in which they narrated their daily lives, and their views about Nordelta. But our conversation started with one particular issue: they were quite worried

because a couple of nights before, two of their classmates trespassed an unoccupied house in Castores, stole liquor, got drunk, and threw two bicycles and a stereo into the swimming pool. Hearing noises, a neighbour called the guards, and they were both caught. They were about to go through an internal trial, in which the neighbours would decide their sanction, the most severe being their expulsion from Nordelta [Field Notes, March 3rd, 2009]. In this episode, which is not that uncommon in gated communities, we have an offence, a victim, two suspects, a trial, administrative bureaucracy, law enforcement agents, a witness, a book of rules, and a paired list of sanctions, and every single one of those elements are privately defined and exclusively organised by Nordelta, without almost any influence, assistance or relationship with public institutions.

4.3.1. Nordelta Legal System

Similarly to what happens with its executive government, Nordelta's legal apparatus is distributed across a number of different actors, and in a series of disorganised edicts and regulations which require patience to fully comprehend them. While Chapter 6 will analyse the role of these devices in punishing and normalising *proper citizens*, this section focuses on how they contribute to expand Nordelta's autonomy regarding external institutions.

To begin with, I would like to suggest that Nordelta's legal apparatus is organised around a legal code that divides behaviours between allowed and prohibited, and links each transgression to a type of punishment. The range of sanctions goes from verbal warning to a fine for minor offences, whilst for major felonies they can escalate up to suspension, and even expulsion. The system closely resembles what Foucault described as juridico-legal, where "the person who violates the laws, breaks the social contract and thereby becomes a foreigner in his own land, consequently falling under the jurisdiction of the penal laws that punish him, exile him, and in a way kill him" (2007, p. 44).

The fact that Nordelta's legal apparatus concentrates on sanctioning transgressions rather than on transforming individuals has not been that well received by some *propietarios*, who generally believe that more should be done to discipline transgressors. Patricia and Werner,

who live in Portezuelo and actively participate in neighbours' meetings, always complained about how hard they tried to make their neighbourhood safe, but in despite of it, there are those who disrespect the rules: "We have a speed limit here, but there are some with hundreds of fines", Werner told me once, to which Patricia added: "they have the money to pay for them, and they don't care". But they are expensive, right? "Yeah, for some of us! But they have to go to Buenos Aires to take care of their million-dollars businesses, 'so you give me a ticket for 5,000? Here, keep the change'", she said, moving her hand mimicking a scornful gesture. "I believe", Werner finally said, "that controlling the speed [of vehicles] is totally necessary, but fines are useless. What I'd like to do instead is to stop people speeding, and keep them there, on the road, for two or three hours, detained" [Field Notes, December 18th 2009].

In any case, disciplinary power is quite present in the legal apparatus: surveillance, diagnosis, prevention and regulation of practices and subjectivities. Gated communities are sometimes referred to as "planned communities"; I hesitate to call Nordelta a community, but there is no doubt regarding the 'planned': in there, almost every detail has been thought out and addressed. In Foucault's words: "discipline allows nothing to escape. Not only does not allow things to run their course, its principle is that things, the smallest things, must not be abandoned to themselves. The smallest infraction of discipline must be taken up with all the more care for it being small" (2007, p. 45). Nordelta regularly produces and improves legal documents which purpose is not only to forbid certain behaviours, but also to suggest how things should be done. After months collecting such documents, I managed to compile an assorted and probably incomplete list of 54 entries, which can be checked in Appendix 1.

The length and thoroughness of these many regulations and guidelines are eloquent on how much effort has Nordelta put in organising disorder, setting an ideal model from which it draws objectives, establishes optimal outcomes, and defines courses of actions. Their disciplinary-oriented logic has not produced institutions as the one described by Foucault for Europe –factories, mental facilities and the like–, because such power, in this case, has rather been oriented towards producing comfortable bodies, not annoyed by any peer or stranger, and settlers of an –allegedly– pristine paradise.

It may be necessary to add that these disciplinary mechanisms are part of a larger scheme which include not only verbal devices but non-verbal as well, such as radars and street signs. Image 4.13, for example, was published in AVN's website along with the following text: "We are working on demarcating Nordelta's roundabouts, which would help drivers, diminish risks and prevent accidents".



Fig. 4.13. Non-verbal signs in Nordelta's roads. Source: AVN's website, 2012.

In August 2009, Rafael and I were out on a walk when we bumped into a grey box, located in the middle of the Troncal, which indicated the speed of each passing vehicle (fig. 4.14). He told me there was a funny story about it: "a few of these radars don't show how fast you're going, so I asked the administrator what was going on. He told me, in secret, that Nordelta

rented about 30 of them... well, they rented them with *our* money... anyway, the thing is that only 20% of them are kept working, because they found that they just needed the box to keep people afraid." So, most of them don't do anything? "That's right, nothing at all. But that doesn't mean they are not useful" [Field Notes, 21st August 2009].



Fig. 4.14. Radar installed on the Troncal. Photo by the author.

Nordelta's legal apparatus operates within a walled and clearly defined territory, logically organised following a fractal model whose main shape and disposition of parts are replicated in its interior. AVN locates on the higher level, being the institution in charge of writing, approving, and sanctioning the set of encompassing rules that regulates the territory. Its functions are replicated inside every *barrio* in Nordelta, which has to organise its own legal and judicial institutions, and their particular regulations and procedures. The *barrios* have a great deal of autonomy, but their rules have to comply with those of the AVN. They have also been obliged to acknowledge AVN as the institution which "delegates" the tasks of "setting the coexistence rules, including transit regulations, establishing fines and disciplinary power,

security, etcetera” to each of them (*Reglamento Interno del Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago - Portezuelo*). It may not be the case and they certainly do not believe it is, but their constitutive documents declare that if they have any authority, it is because it has been granted by Costantini.

There are various actors who keep the legal apparatus in motion within Nordelta’s *barrios*. One of them is the Administrator, who officiates as the neighbourhood’s legal representative, and has among its faculties the duty to ensure that regulations are being followed, to denounce transgressions, and to initiate legal actions when necessary. Minor offences are sanctioned by the administrator in what is called a *Juicio Ejecutivo* [Executive Trial]. Records of these processes are written in the *Acta del Consejo de Administración* [Administration Council’s Act]; and fines are determined by the Administration Council. If no damage has been done to third parties, fines can go up to 100% of the household’s monthly fees, and they are added to the monthly fees. Funds collected in this way go to the administrator’s budget, and “in no way have the purpose of generating profit, but to discourage trespassers” (AVN, 2016).

Another relevant actor in this system is the *Tribunal de Disciplina* [Disciplinary Court], the “natural organism to apply sanctions”, granted with the authority “to sanction whenever coexistence norms, on which our community is founded, are transgressed” (in *Reglamento de la Urbanización de la Asociación Civil Portezuelo S.A.*). Courts are composed by three members, elected at the Asamblea by *socios titulares* [“titular partner”, those under whose names properties are registered]” (AVN, 2016). The Disciplinary Court works mainly through *sumarios*, trials that include a suspect, administrative bureaucracy, records,¹³² investigation, and witnesses’ interrogation. Rulings and sentences are issued within fifteen days. Among other things, as said, the Court reviews major offences, which can be sanctioned with the expulsion of the offenders, as the teenagers mentioned above feared could happen to their friends.

¹³² Nordelta’s legal apparatus has a dedicated archive system, formally composed of a Book of Acts and Assembly Assistance; an Administration Book; a Book of *Propietarios*; and the Book of General and Special Drawings.

Sanctions are posted at the porters' lodge, at each *barrio's* entrance, and communicated via email to all *propietarios*. If the culprits are minors, defined within Nordelta as those up to 9 years old, they cannot be suspended nor expelled. Children over 10 years of age can be suspended, which is different from the Argentine law approach where the age of majority is 18, and the only exception that would put them in jail is if one in the range 16-18 is convicted for a serious crime, such as murder or rape.¹³³

While Nordelta's regulations and institutions may not fully comply with public laws and regulations, one cannot say they openly challenge or disregard them; rather, I believe, they have been carefully designed to ignore them. Regarding transit laws, for example, the *Reglamento de la Urbanización de la Asociación Civil Portezuelo S.A.* states, in its article 2.5, that National Transit Law 24.449 and Transit Police Law 11.430 in the Buenos Aires Province will be applied across the residential complex "as long as they may be pertinent". In its article 2.6, it also states that the neighbourhoods' Disciplinary Court will sanction transgressions of any norm, and they will be forwarded to competent authorities "when we consider it necessary."

Propietarios do not always feel comfortable about this situation, and there have been countless episodes of resistance against AVN's legal apparatus; episodes where the 'rules of right'¹³⁴ have been put into question. Marcos, for example, lives in Castores, in an area where the speed limit is 20 km/h. After being fined a number of times, "for driving at 24 or 27 km/h, which is ridiculous", he asked a lawyer if the fine was legal: "He told me that Nordelta was not respecting the hierarchy of our [formal] legal system, because our regulations can never go against a national or a federal law". And in this case, they did? I asked "Yeah, because our radars have not been certified by INTI [National Institute of Industrial Technology], a State's technical thing, so they are absolutely illegal. I don't know how much money they have made,

¹³³ This indication has not been fully followed by courts, and there are hundreds of cases in which minors were sentenced to jail for minor offences.

¹³⁴ Foucault proposed that discourses develop into 'regimes of truth', over which Western society organises itself. These regimes of truth are socially constructed ideas and beliefs from which a society creates its 'rules of right'. Foucault asks the question: "what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth" (1980, p. 93).

but I'm thinking about suing them to let them know they can't do whatever they want" [Field Notes, February 11th 2011].

Following Gregory's proposal, I suggest gated communities may be thought of as spaces of exception (2006), which through dividing practices produce a territory that is both legally an inside and an outside. Nordelta's main institutions –its executive power, and its legal apparatus–, have been fashioned to regulate the distinctions made by such practices, and to ease tensions between them. Moving forward, this section's final part will analyse the role played by private guards in the development, and the points of tension with public police.

4.3.2. Private Police Force

Security is probably scholars' most discussed topic regarding gated communities, and one of the residents' major concerns as well. Svampa and others have suggested this type of development is the natural consequence of a fractured society, in which the privileged have abandoned the republican ideas of tolerance, integration and class encounters. She claimed that their walls are the spatial expression of a social caesurae that divides an 'inside', perceived by the people who live there as a kingdom of comfort and security, from an 'outside', experienced by the same as a realm of violence and perils (Svampa, 2001). For Sennett, postmodern and neutralised cities, characterised by semi-public spaces such as shopping malls, theme parks, and gated communities, look like they "reflect a great, unrecognised fear of exposure. 'Exposure' representing the likelihood of being hurt rather than being stimulated. The fear of exposure is in one way a militarised conception of everyday experience, as though attack-and-defence is as apt a model of subjective life as it is of warfare" (1990, p. xii). The militarisation and fortification of urban space has guided Davis' work, who has named this new postmodern geography 'fortress cities' (1990).

Gated communities have not only been characterised as a symptom of urban fear, but also as one of its causes. Low, for example, claimed they play an active role in producing and disseminating anxiety and distress, contributing to spread the idea of cities as war-ravaged places: "although walled and fortified communities are not new, these recent developments

(...) encode fear in a material sense, producing a literal 'landscape of fear'" (1997, p. 53). As an organism that feeds itself, obsession with security provokes enclosure, enclosure provokes mistrust and unfamiliarity with other social realities, and the sum of these factors leads to an increased feeling of insecurity (Low, 2001). For the Argentine case,¹³⁵ Thuillier has proposed a similar hypothesis:

"The presence of these islands of wealth amongst a sea of popular neighbourhoods creates frustration and envy, and finally generate the very insecurity and violence that gated communities were supposed to remove for their residents. Gated communities are certainly not the cause of the Argentine social crisis, but they tend to carve in the urban landscape the fractures of a torn society" (2005a, p. 5).

Giving these ideas a more dramatic outcome, authors like Caldeira have suggested that gated communities' obsession with security is the final strike against an already moribund public space. Streets, markets and parks once fostered interclass social encounters; today, they are disappearing in the hands of this 'fortified architecture' (2000). Without disregarding their claims, which I partially support, it is not difficult to see how these approaches tend to romanticise traditional cities, while avoiding moving the discussion towards each period's particular power mechanisms and domination apparatuses. In any way, regardless of how one may interpret it, there is no doubt that fear plays a clear role in the success and daily life of gated communities.

There are over 600 gated communities in Buenos Aires' suburbs, and violent crimes take place in them regularly. What is unique, at least in comparison to those committed in the 'open city', is that gated communities get national coverage, and the tone in which they are reported can suggest that the press rejoices in stressing how these compounds fail to produce the paradise they promised. Figure 4.15 presents several news headlines that cover assaults and robberies in gated communities. It is difficult to talk about media in relation to right or left-wing alignment in Argentina, and it is more appropriate to divide the press in

¹³⁵ It may seem useful to support these claims on criminality via statistics, but it is well known that figures are not very trustworthy, especially for middle-up and upper-class families, who are usually reluctant to expose their vulnerability.

relation to their sympathies with or against the Kirchnerismo. Those supporting the Kirchners, such as Infobae, Página 12 and C5N, usually cover these events to denounce social inequalities, and to promote social programs, while non-aligned media uses them to attack the government, and demand stricter security measures.¹³⁶



Fig. 4.15. Crimes in gated communities, covered by the national press. Compilation by the author.

During the PRN dictatorship,¹³⁷ the 1977 Law of Territorial Planning and Land Use was decreed, authorising a number of measures that were critical to the development of gated communities. One of its key articles is number 67, which states the following:

“ARTICLE 67. In existing situations, when a single juridical entity may gather owners of land plots located within country clubs, and there may be public roads involved, they may be able to convene with the local Municipality to determine the total enclosure of the area. Service provision, usually handled by the Municipality, may be transferred to the institution. In every case, public organisms, exercising policing powers, will have free access to the internal roads

¹³⁶ The review of the press was carried out during Cristina Fernández’s Presidency, from 2007 to 2015.

¹³⁷ *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, PRN [Process of National Reorganisation, PNR], or more commonly called, *El Proceso* [The Process], is the military dictatorship which ran the country between 1976 and 1983.

and control over common services.”

One afternoon, walking beyond Nordelta’s borders, I saw three policewomen having lunch at a small restaurant in Benavídez, near the northern gate. I sat at a table next to them and ordered something to eat. After a while, I started chatting with them, and asked about the area. They told me it was very quiet, and people around were good and peaceful. And what about Nordelta? I said. “To be honest, the higher the level, the... Nordelta is considered a different place, a city apart”, one replied. Do you treat them differently? “We don’t intervene. It is known that whatever happens in a *country* stays there. Car crashes, petty crimes, you name it...” Another added: “Police intervene only when things get too big to hide it, and justice is required.” So, if it is a car crash or a robbery...? “Things like that get solved inside.” Have you entered? “No, not once” [Field Notes, February 12th 2011].¹³⁸

In full accordance with the privatising logic discussed above and in Chapter 3, gated communities have done their best to manage these processes without the assistance of the state security apparatus. Such strategy is intensified in this case because the police have a very bad reputation in Argentina; so poor, in fact, that I have never, not even once, heard a good word about them. Officers are seen as lazy, corrupt, violent, and with a severe lack of authority, especially *La Bonaerense* [Buenos Aires Province Federal Police], known as *La Maldita* [“the cursed one”]. In 2007, in fact, due to a wave of burglaries which occurred in the La Alameda *barrio*, AVN asked *La Bonaerense* to start patrolling the Troncal, and Nordelteños were scandalised when they found out. At the *barrio* La Isla people voted, and 90% wanted them out (“Recorridos policiales,” 2007).

To cover the role of public police, Nordelta has a security sector which, at the time of the research, employed almost 250 people. To understand how they work, it is necessary to say that people who live in gated communities usually perceive crime as a force in constant rise, approaching it with a penal rationality: offences are forbidden acts that cannot be excused, culprits are to be found, sanctions need to be issued, and punishments have to be executed

¹³⁸ Despise the law, AVN’s regulation regarding gates control (2006a) states that police vehicles “can enter, but they have to fill a form stating their number, names of the police officers, precinct, and destination.”

for balance to be restored. Quite a different rationality dominates Nordelta's AVN, which follows a regulatory strategy for which crimes are undesirable events that have to be prevented, but are also seen as natural episodes of social life. Hence, their security measures point not to their complete suppression, but to have them on a "bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded" (Foucault, 2007, p. 21).

The person in charge of achieving such balance is AVN's Chief of Security, whose role is to "plan, coordinate, execute and supervise actions destined to preserve the life, physical integrity, and goods of the people who inhabit Nordelta" (AVN, 2016). For that purpose, s/he has at his disposal 50% of the monthly maintenance fees, and it is used for technological devices, supervising third parties, and "aligning resources according to risk analysis". Tasks assigned to security are not limited to engage and dissuade trespassers, and to patrol and guard the area, but also to minimise threats by collecting, anticipating, assessing and weighing data. By producing knowledge, prevention mechanisms can be easily designed and rationally deployed.

AVN's Chief of Security is the head of a crew that includes: a Security Supervisor, in charge of overseeing security companies, or in other words, of watching the watchmen; a head of *Barrios*, in charge of supervising the correct implementation of security measures for each neighbourhood; a Central Operations' Operator, in charge of monitoring alarm systems, such as panic buttons, microphonic cable fence sensors, and CCTVs, and managing the emergency call centre; a Head of the System of Access Control, in charge of the three main gates, and of the different systems which regulate and keep control of circulation; a person in charge of the vehicles scale; an Administrator of the Disciplinary Courts, in charge of issuing infractions, keep contact with members of the court, and report fines to the economic department; and a controller of the security systems, in charge of the deployment and maintenance of technological devices. Besides them, almost 200 private guards currently work in Nordelta¹³⁹, assisting the Chief of Security, or perhaps the other way around. The purpose of this entire system is not so much to collaborate with police work, but to replace

¹³⁹ The role of guards was discussed in Chapter 3, but only regarding their actions outside the compound.

it and subsume a public service that *propietarios* do not want to receive, and the State does not care to provide.

Replacing police officers with guards may have solved some problems, but created others. Not being *proper citizens* but *conditional others*, guards are not fully trustable figures. They are not seen as people who share the values, habits and rules for action of the compound, and efforts have been made to normalise them through courses and regulations. The contract AVN makes with each security company, for example, includes a clause –Article 10– which states that: “the company declares to know in detail Nordelta’s regulations and procedures, as the features and quality with which it is required to perform its job. It assumes the formal commitment to adapt its behaviour within Nordelta, in line with that of their employees and providers, committing to respect current and future norms.” Guards are asked to adapt their behaviour to that of Nordelta’s, in a way because they are strangers to it.

Probably for that very same reason, whenever a crime takes place, the first suspicion falls on the private guards, who are questioned and placed under surveillance. Cristián Traverso, a famous football player, saw his house completely ransacked in 2008, and the event was covered on every TV channel. I saw him on the TV, mourning and regretting “having lost everything, even my medals, for which I worked so hard.” Giving the camera a defiant look, he said: “I demand that Nordelta tell me how things happened, or how they supposedly happened, and to take care of things, because it is unthinkable something like this can happen in a place like this.” A couple of weeks later, Werner told me the whole security company in charge of Castores’ *barrio* was replaced: “They were working with the thieves, they had to be! Otherwise, how did they [burglars] manage to take everything, all those things? Guards check everything [at the gates] like it’s the end of the world!” It is the first time something like this happens? “No, it happened last year as well, and the year before that too. The more you trust in someone, the more you have to distrust” [Field Notes, June 21st 2009].

Situations like the one mentioned occur on a regular basis: “They change guards every now and then, I’m sure you have heard about it”, Nina told me, “generally they are acceptable, but sometimes it just *happens*, you know? They steal from you; they can’t avoid it... I mean, they

can steal from you anywhere, but *over there* it's another reality, different from ours. That's why they were replaced" [Field Notes, October 29th 2009]. On one occasion I asked Gisella, a domestic worker, about her relationship with the guards, and she told me that the new guards were annoying. I did not know the security company had been changed, I replied. "Yeah, after they robbed", she answered with a nervous laugh. The guards stole?! "Well, people said they did. Or some people, at least. Others believe the *propietario* was the thief, but most pointed at the security guards" [Field Notes, September 20th 2009]. In 2006, AVN asked cable company CableVisión to install CCTV cameras at the entrance to every *Barrio*, which propietarios can watch on their own TVs on channel 98. According to Gallaretas, during the first days of having this new service, "things were stirred up, as we could see that not every rule was being followed. Now the watchers know they are being watched too" ("Portero visor," 2006).

With almost 40,000 inhabitants, in fifteen years Nordelta has not experienced –or at least not made public– a single case of murder, rape or kidnap, and just a couple of violent robberies. The most common crime perpetrated by outsiders are burglaries, which may be another reason why they are punished with the highest sanction. "We haven't had a problem in something like six months", Claudia celebrated, "with the previous guards we had a few robberies. Nothing serious: a bike, a couple of chairs, a few plants, but they were robberies anyway, so we replaced the guards and looked for a new service provider" [Field Notes, May 5th 2009]. There is not much proximity between the crime and the penalty, but without correctional facilities nor a sovereign right to kill or to lock offenders in prison, Nordelta's top sanction is to expel them from its premises, while in some cases they may also transfer them to the public authorities. More than violence, one of the principles of gated communities seems to be, as Améndola has stated, the fear of violence (2000, p. 316).

Usually there is no proof of the guards' direct role in a crime. Ultimately, if they get punished, it is because they have failed doing their job, and by that, they threatened the survival of the entire Nordelta venture. It does not matter if the guards actually committed the crime. Even if they did, Nordelteños do not care about their intentions, particular circumstances, or whether they regret it or not; the only thing that matters is that something unpleasant

happened and should not happen again. Seeing them replaced, thus, fulfils a double purpose: on the one hand, it prevents the alleged offenders from repeating their act; on the other, it makes people believe punishment has been executed, and normality restored.

One may ask why this private legal and judicial system does not contemplate harsher punishments. One reason may be because Nordelta must respect national and federal laws, but I believe that there are other reasons. If no more severe punishment ceremony is imposed, it is because the main purpose of gated communities, as a power technology, is to foster a comfortable life, which in this particular context is broadly understood in terms of well-being, family life, and contact with nature. Within this dominant regime of truth, the physical exercise of violence, its spectacle, is an experience which cannot be justified, not publicly, and not even privately. That is, in regard with the possible existence of punishment institutions. This is why only the *rondines* [who guard the perimeter fence and have no contact with *propietarios*] are the only guards to carry guns.¹⁴⁰

Nordelteños deeply believe they have transformed a desert into a place suitable to foster a proper life, and that they may achieve it without causing harm to others. Moreover, they have escaped harm inflicted to them by such others, responding not with violence, but with a caring response: “So many people come in here every day!”, Werner said, praising Nordelta’s active engagement with its surroundings: “I don’t know how many, but we are a major source of work, because of all the houses we build, and all the services we require.” Patricia added: “We have given so many jobs to the tiny neighbourhoods around us. Oh, god, they are so poor” [Field Notes, June 21st, 2009].

At the beginning of this section, I discussed how Nordelta’s legal apparatus has produced a number of regulations and institutions to conduct almost every detail of their internal life. Such intentions would be nothing without a judicial organ of surveillance and control, which

¹⁴⁰ It may also explain the distress Nordelteños have felt with the arrival of personal bodyguards attending a few residents: “In La Alameda, a family has decided that bodyguards should wait for them at the barrio’s entrance (...) [and] a family who doesn’t live at the Ciudad-Pueblo, but their kids attend our schools, have their bodyguards waiting for them at Nordelta’s entrance” (“Con Seguridad,” 2006).

guards partially fulfil. One intrinsic problem in the system is that guards, unlike other workers, need authority to perform some of their duties, but this is not completely recognised by *propietarios*. Valentina's kids spend their afternoons playing outside, on the Barrancas' streets, and she cannot help worrying about it every time a car passes by: "Maximum speed is 20 km/h but nobody seems to respect it, and the guards are not doing enough about it", she complains. What do you think they should do? "What they are supposed to: to note down the licence plate and report the infraction to the disciplinary committee". And they are not doing that? "Not as much as they should. People go too fast, all the time, and guards try not to confront *propietarios*. They are afraid of losing their jobs. [Field Notes, March 28th, 2008]. According to Rubén, Nordelteños' relationship with guards is strange by its very nature: "because it's clientelist. As you are the one who pays, the connection between safety and authority gets messed up. You are the employer, so there's no authority [to act against a *propietario*]" [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

It is quite evident by now that the Argentine legal apparatus is deemed inadequate by Nordelta and Nordelteños. To replace it, they have secured a place where they dictate and enact their own laws. In this way, Nordelta could be understood as an oasis not of the "winners" of the system, as Svampa has argued, but of the "losers": those who saw their privileges questioned, their neighbourhoods occupied by people they perceive to be threatening, and felt the need to find shelter. They were not able to run things for their own benefit in Buenos Aires, or at least not to the extent they would have wished, and Nordelta is the solution. Perhaps that is why Costantini has acknowledged that open areas are better than gated ones, but Nordelta exists because of the unmanageable levels of fear about urban crime: "From an urban point of view, it's much better to have an open society. There is such a rise of violence, that whoever *has* something, protects himself, and whoever doesn't, is left unprotected. We are agents of the society's organisation, who have come to solve a problem, and provide a habitat to a particular segment" (in Genoud, 2015).

4.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE BOGADO CASE

According to the Supreme Court's ruling on case C.118.411, when Nordelta was being built, in September 1999, Adrián Agustín Bogado, "a 12 year-old kid from a humble family, like many others who inhabited the periphery of major urban centres", took his bicycle and went out for a ride. He was cycling on the side of a small road, "which had been taken out of its normal function by the formidable land movement triggered by the construction of a major urbanisation", and was run over and killed by a dumper carrying soil material to Nordelta. The place was route 27, and according to the witness Jorge Maidana, "a great number of trucks circulated there every day, because of all the construction going on." Being a small rural road, its sidewalks were not clearly defined, poorly built and, in some sections, they were so narrow that pedestrians and cyclers were forced to occupy the main road to circulate. Walter Rivero, a second witness, stated the road was not fit to carry that ceaseless flow of trucks, and according to the Benavídez Fire Service, the situation had already produced over 40 accidents in a short period.

A few weeks after Agustín's death, his parents sued the truck driver, the truck owner, the Federal Police, Tigre Municipality, and Nordelta S.A., arguing their actions, or at least the lack of them, were responsible for his death. San Isidro local Court found the truck driver and its owner guilty, but Nordelta S.A., the police and the municipality were left free of charge. The case was taken to the Supreme Court, which in 2015 ruled against Nordelta stating that: "social progress should not be achieved by ignoring and leaving behind collateral victims of the system." They also exposed documents in which Nordelta S.A. acknowledged the large scale of its operations, promising Tigre Municipality to improve Route 27, repair its bumps, increase its size, install signs, and build a new sidewalk. However, they continued to send trucks along that route –as it was the shortest–, and "abstained from doing [these repairs], caring only for its economic interest", thus setting "the necessary conditions for harm to happen."

The trial's main question was to determine whether Nordelta should, or should not, be held accountable for the acts of the truck. In other words, whether there was a causal relation

between Nordelta and the accident, which would imply the former taking responsibility for the negative externalities produced by the latter. After reviewing the case, as mentioned, the Supreme Court found Nordelta guilty, stating that the truck was indeed doing a job for Nordelta, which was regular, working to time schedule, and subject to supervision. They also found that there were a number of other trucks working for Nordelta, and that their movements were “recorded with precision” on a spreadsheet. Moreover, it stated that the construction was organised entirely by Nordelta, the main actor in charge of, among other things, approving blueprints, keeping the time schedule, buying construction materials, supervising works, controlling workers, and keeping track of tools and building materials. Furthermore, Nordelta’s use of the road was taken into consideration:

“It is evident that Nordelta set in motion a complex range of activities to produce its huge urbanisation, using large machinery and vehicles, taking only into consideration its own interests, and directing trucks through inadequate roads just to save time and reduce costs (...) Risk does not come only from the single truck [that ran over Agustín], but from the entire design of the work plan. We have a fragile and defenceless victim, a kid who, trying to have a good time, went out on a bicycle. And we have the company, which in virtue of its master plan transformed that bucolic place into a site linked to all kinds of dangers. Differences between these two subjects are abysmal, and justice requires that the organiser responsible for the dangerous situation to address the harm done” (Supreme Court’s ruling, case C.118.411, 1999).

This dramatic episode is an eloquent illustration of the discussion outlined in this chapter, for it shows a neighbourhood that has attempted to seclude itself and gain autonomy from external forces, but its actions irremediably produce waves on the exterior. The example may seem pedestrian: Nordelta needed workers, trucks, and roads, and as the Supreme Court has concluded, these actors and objects cannot be thought of in disconnection from it; together they form a unit, spread along the territory. Having covered how Nordelta demarcates its borders and encloses its territory, the next chapter will make focus on the territories in which these compounds have been built, and on the people who occupy them, analysing how upper class newcomers perceive them and the relations they have established with them.

CHAPTER 5

PURIFICATION AT THE PEARLY GATES

*It is only by exaggerating the difference between
within and without, above and below,
male and female, with and against
that a semblance of order is created.*
– Mary Douglas, 2002, p. 4

After describing and analysing how Nordelta managed to produce a *normalised* space in suburban Buenos Aires, this chapter moves forward to explore how its physical and symbolical boundaries are challenged everyday by different actors, while reviewing the mechanisms devised to deal with them. Its object of study are the juridical aspects of bordering: how effectively Nordelta enforces the border itself, and through which specific power mechanisms it identifies, regulates, examines, and disciplines every subject that comes at its gates. The analysis is divided into two parts which are dedicated to liminal sites: the first one to the three access gates, and the second to a bus stop located a few kilometres out from the neighbourhood.

Throughout this chapter, the ways in which the idea of a *purified community* is manufactured and reproduced will be revealed by asking key questions regarding exchange and circulation, such as what things –people, objects, information– can access the compound and how; which things cannot; what things are prevented to leave Nordelta, and which are the normalisation processes that potentially-harmful-things have to go through in order to be accepted in. The analysis will not only review these *dispositifs*, but also the tactics devised and deployed by *propietarios*, workers and visitors in order to avoid, re-appropriate and/or resist them.

The chapter closes by framing Nordelta's security measures as efforts made to face permeability and put under control –whether rejecting, accepting or transforming–, what intends to transcend its material border. The fact that, despite all the energy invested, the surroundings are ceaselessly perceived as conflictive, suggests a blurred conceptualisation of the public/private distinction, and of geographical and symbolical frontiers.

5.1. AT THE BUS STOP

Every day, hundreds of workers coming from all over the Conurbano arrive at General Pacheco, a small city three kilometres south from Nordelta named after a hero of the Desert Campaign, to get a bus towards the gated community. From Pacheco's downtown, walking at a regular pace, it is a 15 minutes' walk along Hipólito Yrigoyen street heading east, up to where it turns into an elevated motorway called Route 197. A small dirt road detaches there, heading down while hiding under the shadow of the highway (Fig. 5.1). Five minutes on that trail and one reaches a train track, which connects to Zárate in the North and Villa Ballester in the South. There is no train station there, but under the rumbling sound of the highway, a few food stalls offer hot-dogs and *chipás*¹⁴¹ to passers-by, composed mainly by domestic workers, private guards and bus drivers (Fig. 5.2) linked to the gated communities scattered in the area. During summer, vendors also sell ice creams and cold soft drinks, and just a couple of meters away there is a big shrine devoted to Gauchito Gil, the most venerated Argentine popular saint.



Fig. 5.1. Map of Pacheco Bus Stop area. Produced by the author over Google map.

¹⁴¹ A kind of bread made with manioc or corn flour, typical of Paraguay.



Fig. 5.2. Highway, General Pacheco. Photo by the author.

Up to this point, nothing seems much different from the regular landscape of any non-Metropolitan Argentine city. Fifty meters behind the stalls, though, behind a thick row of trees that serves as a social and aesthetic buffer, a zone emerges with its own vibe, temporalities and sounds; a place with different actors and rules, commonly known as “Acceso Bancalari”. The name comes from the sparkling Nordelta-Bancalari route, a newly built four-lane street stretching from Nordelta to the Pan-American Highway, four kilometres to the South. On a small roundabout just crossing the trees, a private stall with a big Nordelta logo monitors the area (Fig. 5.3). One to four guards are usually there, listening to the radio, drinking *mate* and watching over the surroundings.¹⁴² In the mornings, a private security car parks nearby, and for the time being, the road is predominantly used by gated communities’ workers and inhabitants.

¹⁴² Regulations are so strict, according to almost every actor involved, that even guards do not fully follow them. Decree regulating main accesses, in its point 1.3., states that guards “cannot sleep, listening to the radio, read or perform any distracting activity” (AVN, 2006a, p. 1).

There are almost no buildings in the area, just an abandoned radio station protected by a high transparent fence, and a newly built bus stop, where the two bus companies¹⁴³ allowed in make their second to last stop before accessing Nordelta. There one can usually see domestic workers waiting for the bus, chatting and checking their phones. Besides their murmurs, the occasional train rumble and the roaring sound of passing cars, the area is rather quiet, and no one seems to be lingering around without a clear purpose (fig. 5.4).

The following section concentrates on this place, following its actors, power mechanisms and practices of resistance. The assumption is that, far from being the secluded island it intends to be, Nordelta is the central hub of a regional network of flows, links and nodes that itself produces and regulates (fig. 5.5). Pacheco, in that scheme, can be understood as a key place where social and symbolic relations between the gated community and its exterior are constantly being negotiated. As the main point of departure of *strangers* towards Nordelta, it has been devised as a safeguard against any kind of harmful thing that would attempt to traverse its borders. The section is divided into four parts, each one focused on a different realm that needs to be placed under control: bodies, time, space and information.

¹⁴³ When Nordelta begun, no public transport reached the area. As the houses needed to be maintained, the lawn needed to be cut and the venture needed to be guarded, the Administration approached a local bus company called Mary-Go and gave them the transport concession. According to Carlos, they started carrying people from Nordelta to Buenos Aires in 2002, and over the years the business grew, until Nordelta realised there was money in moving people around and started a second transport company, this time managed by them and subsidised by every Nordelta inhabitant through their common expenses.



Fig. 5.3. Security stall at Acceso Bancalari. Photo by the author.



Fig. 5.4. Domestic workers waiting at Pacheco Bus Stop. Photo by the author.

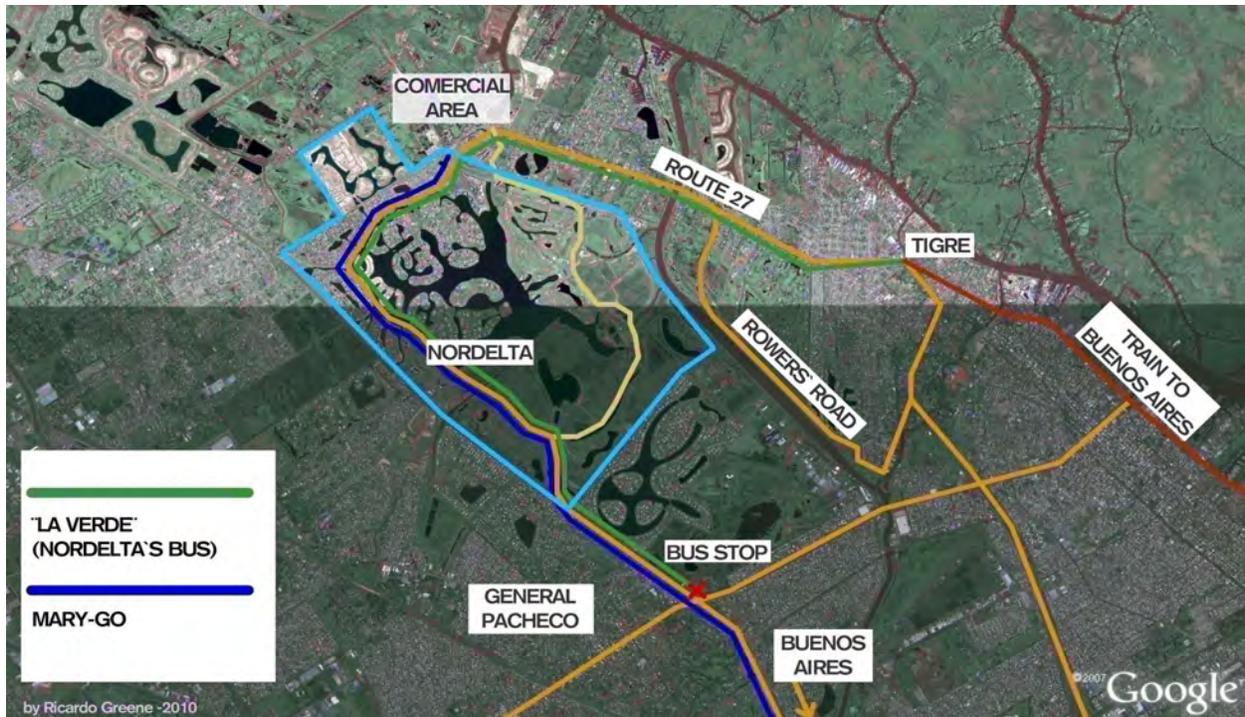


Fig. 5.5. Nordelta's transportation network. Produced by the author over a Google map image.

5.1.1. The management of bodies

Acceso Bancalari mediates between a safe environment –Nordelta– and its polluted surroundings. It is a liminal place where the pure, the contaminated and the yet-to-be-defined get in close touch. The area is regularly occupied by domestic workers, *propietarios*, bus drivers and security guards, each one making use of it in different but quite inter-related ways. Of them, *propietarios* are the more infrequent, as they usually move by car and just occasionally make a stop to pick up their gardener or domestic worker, while those who use buses tend to go straight to Buenos Aires,¹⁴⁴ Tigre or to another gated community, without alighting at Pacheco.¹⁴⁵ From time to time, however, a resident does appear at the stop, and on such occasions a set of institutionalised spatial practices are put in motion, the working consensus being that if a resident is sitting at the stop,¹⁴⁶ domestic workers have to wait

¹⁴⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 4, many female residents prefer to travel by bus rather than car because they fear the surroundings.

¹⁴⁵ When I arrived at Buenos Aires it was frequent to see some residents at the stop, but at beginning of 2009 a service running from the neighbourhood straight to Tigre Train station begun, and since then they became rare.

¹⁴⁶ Status symbols such as clothes and accessories, and racial markers such as the skin colour helped me recognised employers from employees. This set of prejudices may be wrong from time to time, but in a society

standing up, about three to five meters away, and vice-versa (fig. 5.6).

Moreover, *propietarios* and employees hardly ever speak nor look directly at each other, and if there is a group of domestic workers chatting at the stop and a resident shows up, they usually lower their voices and slightly move to compose themselves. These practices, as Goffman suggests: “visible divide the social world into categories of persons, thereby helping to maintain solidarity within a category and hostility between different categories” (1951, p. 294), and dramatizing the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and producing visible patterns of unequal space occupation, especially needed in liminal places such as the bus stop.



Fig. 5.6. Two domestic workers and a *propietario* waiting for the bus. Photo by the author.

The need to demarcate and the fear of getting contaminated with what is seen as *different* is greatly revealed in another practice, not common but not rare either. Every now and then,

so racially segregated it is uncommon to make a mistake (see Montalvo and Codina, 2001).

when private buses coming from Buenos Aires are about to reach the stop, *propietarios* ask drivers to continue straight to Nordelta. Every time I witnessed a situation like that, I asked the passenger sitting next to me what was going on, and the reasons they gave me were varied. The repertoire included three kind of arguments: those regarding travel conditions, such as “we are way behind schedule”, “it’s already too late” or “it’s too crowded, there’s no room for more people”; those regarding social conditions, such as “it’d be better if they have their own buses”; and those regarding bodily issues, such as: “please do not stop, I can’t stand their smell¹⁴⁷.”

Not to get mixed with abnormals is a biopolitical concern, which Nordelta recognises and promotes. *Propietarias* want to avoid unpleasant experiences, such as having their journey delayed, or to get contaminated by these quasi-improper women, of being touched by them and to have their odour particles penetrate their bodies. Their sole presence in space causes immunity repulsion, triggering discriminative practices as defence mechanisms. Aroma, one may think, may pose a small threat, but as Roberts advises, one has to study mass attitudes “as if they were actual secretions or excretion. (...) To put matter at once on the lowest psychological level, it is well known that the smell of one race may offend as much or even more than different habits and customs.” (1938, p. 160; see also Riedemann & Stefoni, 2005).

Griselda, a domestic worker who became a close participant of this research, told me these practices were well-known by everyone: “What happens is that they [drivers] pick you up depending on what *propietarios*¹⁴⁸ say, whether they feel the bus is too packed or not. This is discrimination, there’s no doubt about it. There’s not much else to say: It is dis-cri-mi-na-tion. They see themselves as superior.” In reply, I asked her why she thinks drivers follow residents’ requests to continue without stopping, to which she replied: “They do not have much of a choice, you see? *Propietarios* are the ones paying” [Field Notes, September 20th 2009].

¹⁴⁷ I frequently travel on Mary-Go, and it was not rare to detect a very strong smell on buses. I asked Carlos about it, and he told me they use a strong aromatic spray before every trip, which may be the one residents are taking for domestic workers’ odour.

¹⁴⁸ The formal way workers and administrative staff refer to Nordelta residents is *propietarios*, which stresses their condition of owning a property.

Carlos is a 47 year-old Argentine, self-defined as middle class and one of the top executives of MaryGo bus line. Gustavo is his right hand, and together they spend every morning at the stop; the former selling tickets and the latter supervising drivers and timetables. They also like to be there just in case a problem arises with Nordelta's private guards, a frequent source of tension. When I first met them, they completely denied domestic workers' accusations: "What? That *propietarios* don't want workers on buses? No, not at all. They may say a thing or two from time to time, but no, that's not true. It has never happened to me, and I have never heard anything like that before", replied Carlos without hesitation [Field Notes, October 16th, 2008].

Carlos constitutes a key case for this research because he holds a particular status: he indirectly works *for* Nordelta through Mary-Go, while at the same time he lives in Portezuelo, one of the project's gated communities. After a couple months of regular visits and conversations I became quite close to him, and one day, hanging out on the Bus Terminus, he came clean: "You know that thing you said a while ago about *propietarios* saying: 'we are the only ones entitled to use this bus, and workers should be using a different one?'. Yes, of course. "Well... we denied it before but it's true: we have heard it many times." Another driver looked at me and decided to let it go, as well: "Yup, they are such fucking assholes. Racists motherfuckers", to which the first one added: "We have heard awful things many times, but can't really do much about it. We are not the ones who discriminate, it's the people on top" [Field Notes, March 3rd 2009].

These dividing practices do not only come to separate proper Nordelteños from *conditional others*, but at the same time they fold and replicate as a distinction among workers themselves. Let us take the legal documents which regulates Nordelta's accesses.¹⁴⁹ As any code, they should clearly define what is permitted and what is forbidden at the gates, but there are a number of indications and some of them seem contradictory, particularly

¹⁴⁹ There are two kinds: first, those decreed by AVN which affect the entire development, which are *Accesos Principales a Ciudad Pueblo* (AVN, 2006a) and *Barrios: Consignas Generales y Particulares* (AVN, 2006b); secondly, those decreed by each *barrio* within Nordelta, regulating their own access.

regarding who is required to use the Benavídez Gate, an entrance allegedly reserved for service providers. Such rule has not been written, but every actor in this universe repeats it without hesitation. What I found within the codes, though, is a series of exceptions regarding different service providers who should go through Benavídez, but are allowed not to. The first indication regarding the matter is found in Art. 10 of *Accesos Principales a Ciudad-Pueblo* (AVN, 2006a), which states that no service provider can access by car, except for the architects in charge of constructions within the city. On the other hand, Art. 4 of *Barrios: Consignas Generales y Particulares* (AVN, 2006b) dictates that service providers carrying tools can make it through by car, specifying the cases of skilled workers, such as carpenters or parquet flooring workers.

To make things more confusing, in 2012, AVN opened a bid for its transportation system and clarified that: “Users will be *propietarios*, their relatives, service providers without tools, employees, teachers and students. In consequence, workers are the only ones excluded, and they will keep entering and leaving ND through the assigned spots, paying and using the means of transportation assigned to such end” (“Avanza la licitación del bus interno de Nordelta,” 2012). Thus, service providers carrying tools cannot gain access using Nordelta’s private buses, although they can access by car through the Benavídez’s gate; exceptions are architects and craftsmen, who can use any gate and any means of transportation. The same Book of Rules states that no service provider can enter the compound in a taxi (article 3), while the document *Control Ingreso de Ciclistas en los Accesos de Nordelta* (AVN, 2009) forbids workers to gain access on bicycle. There is no clarification about what a “tool” is, but according to Roberto, one of the guards, it refers to “things people use for construction, like hammers or saws.” A laptop carried by a teacher is not considered a tool, and in the end, every worker can use cars, buses and all three gates except for truck drivers and builders, who are required to go in through the Benavídez gate, and on buses reserved for their sole use.

Data suggests these techniques and procedures have been devised to produce a hierarchical order which separates and subordinates workers who are set aside by their *improperness*, which may be thought of in terms of class, race and gender, but I prefer to define it in terms

of how probable it is they would attempt to perform threatening practices within Nordelta. Additionally, this mechanism aims at separating different kinds of actors, sorting and keeping track of whoever and whatever accesses the neighbourhood, thus contributing in creating a disciplined and purified community. *Propietarios* are aware of this divisive system, and in general terms they support it, although do not feel comfortable with the quality of its facilities. In comparison to the rest of the development, Benavídez gate does not offer an exceptional high-quality standard (fig. 5.7), whilst builders usually access Nordelta in old buses which people resent to look at.

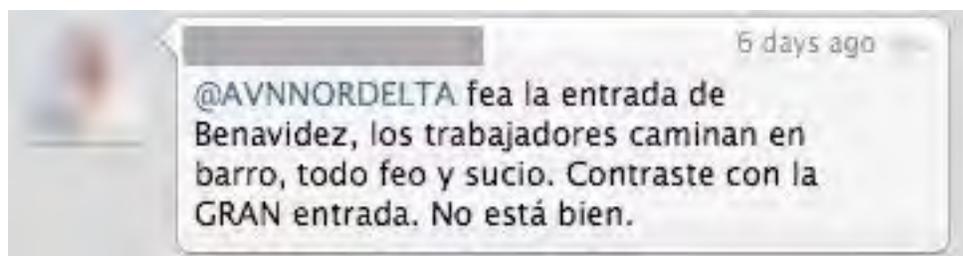


Fig. 5.7. “Benavídez entrance is ugly, workers walking in mud, everything ugly and dirty. A contrast with the GREAT entrance. It’s not right”. Published by a resident on his twitter account. March 2012.

As new houses and projects are constantly developing, about a thousand builders get into Nordelta each day. Claudia, the young architect, thinks they are not allowed on the same buses because women would feel intimidated: “I think it’s better this way. We avoid problems and everybody is happy”. What kind of problems, I asked. “Well, to feel harassed, or to hear something unpleasant” [Field Notes, May 5th, 2009]. A couple of weeks later, Sofía, another resident, female, mid-40s, helped me out to get a more precise idea of this discourse when I asked her to give me a tour around Nordelta. We were in her car, going around from one point to the other, when a green bus, different from the ones I knew, appeared in front of us. What are those? I asked. “They’re for workers”. Just male workers? “A-ha, for men only... it may seem weird, but if you hear what people used to say, you’d also think it’s not such a bad idea.” Why, what used to happen? “Well, awkward situations happened all the time. You can’t mix ladies who work in family houses with construction boys. They used to say nasty things to them, and many *muchachas* complained. I think they [women] are glad to have buses of their own now” [Field Notes, June 14th, 2009].

The threatening condition of males, particular of those belonging to lower classes –as seen, usually referred to as *negros*–, forced AVN to regulate and invigilate with particular strength their presence in the premises. In Nordelta, every worker is seen as a potential source of danger, and it is usual to read in internet forums or hear in cafes different complaints about gardeners or pool cleaners, who spend their free time –while waiting for the bus or between jobs– sleeping on the common area’s lawn, smoking or drinking. The following letter was published in *Gallaretas*: “A couple of days ago we received a call from a neighbour about a very peculiar event he witnessed that morning. He went out jogging, when he bumped into a man lying under a tree with his motorcycle, a bottle of alcohol and smoking a joint (...) Will someone do something about this? How, and under whose authorisation did this man enter Nordelta? Where is Security?” (fig. 5.8).

Nordelta, ¿Qué está pasando con la seguridad?

16/12/2013



Hace un par de horas recibimos un llamado de Alan, vecino de los Castores, informándonos sobre un suceso bastante peculiar que presencié esta mañana.

Alan había salido a correr alrededor de las 8:30 hs, y a la altura de la Av de los Colegios de Nordelta, se cruza a un hombre que estaba tirado bajo un árbol con su moto, con una botella de alcohol y consumiendo porro.

“No es la primera vez que lo veo ahí. Ese hombre no es de Nordelta, y no solo eso me alarmó, sino también el hecho de donde estaba situado, frente a la entrada a los colegios. Yo llevo todos los días a mis hijos al colegio en bici ¿Te imaginás la seguridad que me da esto no... ese hombre y en ese estado, que además ya es la segunda vez que veo ahí?” nos dice Alan.

Él se encargó de hacer la denuncia y alertar a ambas guardias, sin embargo se pregunta, “¿Se tomará alguna medida? ¿Cómo y bajo la autorización de quién entro este hombre? ¿Solo yo lo vi y oí? ¿Dónde está la Seguridad?”

Fig. 5.8. Digital letter published in *Gallaretas* (“Nordelta, ¿qué está pasando con la seguridad?,” 2013).

Builders are a particular case because, unlike other workers such as gardeners, swimming pool cleaners, domestic workers or taxi drivers, they do not have many instances where to

socialise in the logics of the neighbourhood. Builders enter Nordelta on segregated buses, go straight to their construction sites, do not engage with *propietarios*, and get out of their jobs at a different time than live-out domestic workers, so they hardly ever meet at internal bus stops (Fig. 5.9).



Fig. 5.9: Male workers at one of Nordelta's internal bus stops.
Photo by the author.

Deprived of consisting socialising experiences, and therefore lacking a 'sense of one's place', disciplinary power cannot fully operate and sovereign power has to be put in motion, using force and coercion to maintain control over the territory. Fig. 5.10 shows male workers right after leaving their jobs, on their way to the bus stop, teasing around, and Fig. 5.11 portrays a swimming pool cleaner waiting for the bus laying on the lawn; two improper behaviours difficult to control inside Nordelta.



Fig. 5.10. Workers' horseplay while waiting for the bus.
Photo by the author.



Fig. 5.11. Male worker laid down on the grass, waiting for the bus.
Photo by the author.

Among other things, Nordelta's regulation regarding builders' behaviour states they cannot stay on the premises outside labour hours; they cannot bathe, fish or throw garbage in the

lake; cannot bring dogs, nor hurt in any way the flora or fauna of the neighbourhood (AVN, 2007a; articles 28.6 to 28.11). I asked residents if these regulations are complied with, and Carmen told me they once hired a painter who climbed up to the roof without any security measures, and “twice a guard came and give us a fine; the third time, they told him [the painter] he would never be able to work in Nordelta again” [Field Notes, June 7th, 2009].

A key phenomenon to analyse this issue are *piropos*, a particular form of verbal street flirtation widespread in Latin countries. *Piropos* are broadly understood here as compliments said on the streets, ranging from romantic to sexually violent, that tend to go along with whistles and yells. Frequently used by men –individually or in groups– to address women across the entire social spectrum, regardless of age or class. Like any social practice, *piropos* can be seen as a particular kind of relation produced by both parts involved. In Argentina, they are perceived in different ways depending on the gender of the receiver, the kind of *piropo*, and who the *piropero* is. If a woman says a *piropo* to a man, for example, it is rarely seen as an offence, but as flattering banter, and even some women welcome a *piropo* from time to time, being taught they are a sign of their beauty being acknowledged (Gaytán, 2009, p. 109).

Going further, other authors have shown how many Latin American women who moved to the United States felt less attractive, disoriented and even depressed for not receiving compliments on the street (Suárez, Dundes and Dundes, 1990). For others, however, *piropos* are primitive and violent acts that need to be eradicated. Buenos Aires, going no further, was one of the first cities where *piropos* were forbidden, when in 1906 an unpleasant verbal attack on well-educated ladies forced Ramón Falcón, the City’s Chief of Police, to “repress language excesses in public areas”, and punish every person caught in the act with a 50 pesos fine (Balmaceda, 2011). In the past years, public campaigns and an acute awareness about women’s rights have been making *piropos* even less welcomed, slowly being considered a type of street harassment.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ To understand more this issue in current Argentina, I suggest checking the website <http://hablamebien.com>, which collects and maps piropos in order to make visible the daily street violence suffered by women.

In Nordelta male workers are strictly forbidden to say *piropos*, and if they do, they get fined and banned from working in the premises for six months. A second offence, and they are banned indefinitely. Toco is a young Paraguayan carpenter who has been in Argentina for three years. He was unemployed when one of his cousins, already settled in Buenos Aires, insisted he came to work in the construction business. They both share a flat about half an hour away from Nordelta and have worked for real estate developers since then. I visited their place, and when I asked him if he was a *piropero* he replied: “Of course I am. Women want to be seen, you know? To hear nice things. It’s a game we all play”. And how about Nordelta? “No, Nordelta it’s a fucked-up place and we can’t play this game there. If we do, we lose.” So, you do nothing if you see a beautiful woman passing by? “Of course we do. If a hot chick comes nearby, the first one to spot her always quietly whistles or makes a gesture with the head, to alert the others, and then we all smile or tease around... perhaps a *piropo* or two are said but very low, so no one can hear us.” To which Ramón, his cousin, added laughing: “and in Guaraní¹⁵¹! So even if they hear us, they can’t get a thing” [Field Notes, February 10th, 2009]. As previously suggested, male workers are not completely socialised in the logics of Nordelta, their behaviour being a case of what De Certeau called ‘anti-discipline’ (1984), a field of almost invisible practices that give the impression of rules being followed while in fact they are just being subverted, or at least, bended.

Julieta perceives Nordelta as a very safe place: “We came here because we heard it was safe, and we were not mistaken”, she said to me once, “I know nothing’s gonna happen to me or my people while being here.” To feel protected, however, is not the same as feeling comfortable, a distinction I learnt on a different day when we were chatting about her sports and health routine. While explaining how she designs her jogging routes, I suddenly realised one of the factors she considers is to avoid contact with workers: in terms of space, by not passing near construction sites, and of time, by not going out when they are waiting for the bus to go home. I asked her why, but she could not say: “I don’t know, I just prefer not to” [Field Notes, December 3rd, 2008]. Two months later, I was having a coffee at the shopping centre with Julieta when one of her friends, Valentina, showed up. They both have their

¹⁵¹ The most-widely spoken indigenous language of America, and one of the official languages of Paraguay.

children at Northlands School, just one kilometre away from Barrancas, and between both places lies another school called Michael Ham (Fig. 5.12) which, at the time, was expanding its facilities through the construction of a Main Building, a Library and a Science Labs. Valentina sat with us and the first thing she said was: “[My daughter] is pissed off with me! I hired a taxi to pick her up at school, and she hated it. ‘Mom, the best part of the day is to walk back home with my friends, why are you doing this to me?’ Blah, blah, blah. She’s such a drama queen.” After rolling her eyes, she looked at us, got closer and said in a lower voice: “... but there’s just too many *morocho*¹⁵² [working] at Martin Ham’s, and they are probably eating her alive with their eyes when they walk by. I don’t like it” (fig. 5.13). Julieta fixed her eyes on an invisible spot and got lost in her thoughts. After a few seconds, she came back and asked: “How much is it [the taxi]? Perhaps we can share it” [Field Notes, March 24th, 2008].



¹⁵² Morocho may come from “moro” (from Mauritania), popularised in medieval Spain to talk about Africans, particularly Islamics; or from muruch’u, a variety of hard-dark corn in Quechua language. In Argentina, morocho may be used as a racist slur to refer to those with darker skins who may also be of lower social status. It may also be used as a descriptive and aesthetic term, associated or not to sexual appeal.

Fig. 5.12. Barrancas del Lago and the educational area.
Produced by the author over a Google Maps image.



Fig. 5.13. Builders working at Michael Ham's School.
Photo by Mary Fernández.

Nordelta is seen by female *propietarios* as an exceptional place where they can freely use the streets without the fear of being assaulted or receiving inappropriate comments. What is not forbidden, though, is the scopic drive that entangles watching and desire. Nordelta replicates gender hierarchies present in Argentine society, which largely transcend that of class. In other words, women occupy a vulnerable position in relation to men in public space, regardless of their name, family or income. Probably that is why there is a regulation to forbid *piropos* from male workers, but there is none regarding possible *piropos* from female workers, nor from residents towards workers or between themselves. Service jobs are so highly gendered, truck drivers cannot hire female co-pilots (AVN, 2006c, p. 2). Duneier described quite a different situation when researching black homeless book sellers in the

streets of New York. In his chapter dedicated to street harassment, he suggested that: “For the men who sell written matter and panhandle, almost all of the women are so beyond the reach of friendship, romance, or even common sociability that men treat them as objects upon whose interaction tricks can casually be put into play. In turn, this behaviour and the predicaments to which it leads increases the men's exoticism, reinforcing their identities as dangerous objects to be avoided” (1999, p.216). In contrast, Nordelta’s male workers do not play those tricks, or at least not directly, but their sole presence as *conditional others* – allowed, but not recognised as proper citizens–, is enough to create tension and distress.

Having that said, I think it would be a mistake to understand their presence in Nordelta as balancing between being present or absent, insiders or outsiders. Rather, they are both present *and* absent, insiders *and* outsiders at the same time: they are *conditional others*. It is this liminal status that finally grants them the status of inclusion, but not of membership. Workers are the very subject of liminality that menace the constitution of the place, perhaps because they tend to reveal the permeability of the project and its real nature, constituted by several layers of ‘interiors’ and ‘exteriors’, entangled in such a way that any distinction becomes eventually fruitless, regardless of which Nordelta has to keep drawing them.

As we have seen, two rules have been devised to put male workers under control in Nordelta: the first one, destined to segregate and administrate the flow of male bodies in their way in and out of the neighbourhood; and the second one, to prevent a common and threatening practice –*piropos*– from happening in Nordelta. The next section explores how not only bodies are to be administrated but also time, being a valuable asset in the Nordelta scheme.

5.1.2. The management of time

The first time I went to the bus stop there were two women sitting on the bench. I asked them when was the next bus coming: “3:15”, one replied, before adding: “but you never really know”. On the green metallic wall, a timetable and a flyer looking for a domestic worker¹⁵³

¹⁵³ "We are looking for a live-in domestic worker, with excellent and provable references" [*Se busca empleada doméstica con cama y excelentes referencias comprobables. Cel: 15-xxx-xxxx*].

were posted (Fig. 5.14). What do you mean '*you never know*'? I asked, "Well, because there is no way to know, and that's it. Sometimes they show up five minutes before schedule, and sometimes an hour later. You never know". And so it was.



Fig. 5.14: "Wanted: live-in domestic worker with excellent, and checkable, references". Photo by the author.

Private buses come from the central city and are scheduled to pass by Pacheco's bus stop once every 30 minutes in rush hour, and once every hour the rest of the day. Over time, I got used to hear daily complaints about how unreliable the service was, and regrets regarding the amount of time people had to spend there. One day, for example, I was talking for the first time with Narda, a domestic worker who later became a close friend in field. She was waiting for her employer to pick her up, when Rosa, another domestic worker, came and asked us if the bus had already come by:

Rosa: I am sorry to bother you. Is the 12:15 bus gone already?

Ricardo: Yes... I'm sorry.

Rosa: Damn, I can't believe it! What happened, it came early?

Narda: Too early.

Ricardo: 12:10, give or take.

Rosa: I can't believe it!

Ricardo: Yup, I'm sorry, it's gone. The next one comes at 13:15.
Narda: So, it came at 12:10, not at 12:15... It's a shame. Yesterday I missed it too.
[Field Notes, December 3rd, 2008]

This kind of brief, disappointed dialog, was more the rule than the exception at the bus stop. Once, I asked Isabel –a domestic worker from Paraguay mentioned in Chapter 3– about this issue and she immediately got upset: “The other day, the 12:30 bus didn't show up, and neither the 13:05. I had to wait until 14:30! My boss said: ‘we are going to complain, it's unacceptable they leave you stranded there, wasting all that time’. A lot of girls were coming to work at 14:00, and they were left there too. That's not possible, you see? Your life just goes by!”. Part of the problem is that buses do not come on time, part is sometimes their own employers ask drivers not to stop, and part is, from time to time, drivers themselves do not want to stop, or do not let them get on. One day I arrived in the afternoon, and Rosa was there, visibly annoyed:

Rosa: I can't stand them anymore!
Ricardo: Why, what happened?
Rosa: My *patrona* is tired of complaining!
Ricardo: But why, tell me. What happened?
Rosa: They treat us like shit! Like we were dogs. It's horrible. The other day, I ended up crying, and I was this close to *cagarlo a palos* [beat the shit out of him]. I was late for work, and when I arrived at the stop the transfer was already here. I asked the guy if he had any change: ‘no, no’, he said. ‘Ok, no problem’, I replied. The bus went away and I waited for the next one.
Ricardo: Over half an hour.
Rosa: Yeah, like half an hour. Then I managed to get three pesos for the change, but when the transfer came, the driver didn't let me in.
Ricardo: Why?
Rosa: Because he just wanted to! He said they were too packed. So you can imagine how many things happen to us here. If you don't have change, you can't get on; if they are ‘on their day’, you can't get on. I don't care if they are a private company or not, they have to work for the people, right? But they don't. They indulge themselves because we don't have a choice.
[Field Notes, December 3rd, 2008]

As it can be seen, the system's deficiencies frequently cause tension among the actors involved, and the frustration escalates because they know that the costs for these inefficiencies are not paid by those responsible –AVN, or the bus companies–, but by *propietarios* and workers. The former, as they pay a full-time fare but frequently their

workers check-in late, and the latter, because some of them get paid by the hour, and those spent commuting are never counted in the monthly check. Furthermore, the transportation system's discomfort is enhanced by the unusually high fare, almost three times what a public bus charges on a similar route¹⁵⁴. In a letter published in *Gallaretas*, Gabriel and Caroline complained that: "Yesterday the 13:20 didn't come (...). Employees need to work and *propietarios* have work for them, and it's not fair for either to waste time waiting for the bus" (Gabriel & Caroline, 2007).

I spent hours at the bus stop, waiting, watching and talking to people. One of the questions I frequently asked domestic workers there is how they felt about Nordelta, and I can certainly say –to my surprise, at first– that most of them like it. It was not rare to hear comments such as "wages are not bad" and "it is beautiful, so quiet, so green". What they did hate was the process of getting in and out. The feeling was especially acute on those who did not live nearby, which happened to be the majority of live-out workers. As Gisella clarifies: "most of us are from faraway places and we have to take one or two buses to get here. Some of us are from Polvorines, Trancur, Torcuato, Moreno, Merlo, Jose C. Paz or San Miguel. The journey is hard on us, we can easily spend four hours daily on buses" [Field Notes, August 12th, 2009]. Further, on certain occasions, and after already having waited considerable time at the bus stop, workers are not left at their proper stop inside Nordelta. *Gallaretas* newspaper reported it in this way on 2006: "Mary-Go commuters are complaining that during mornings, and with the purpose of ending their trips earlier, buses are making their final stop at Glorietas instead of going all the way to Caletas. This procedure allows them to go back to Buenos Aires on time but leaving people –domestic workers from Alameda and Castores– quite far from their destinations" ("A paso rápido", 2007).

Having lunch with Gisella at Pacheco one day, I asked her if she had looked for an alternative way to get into Nordelta, perhaps cheaper and faster, such as a bicycle, to which she replied they were not allowed to do so: "Of course I would love to use a bicycle, but those are their rules" [Field Notes, September 20th, 2009]. Disconcerted by this protocol, which I did not

¹⁵⁴ Public buses are subsidised.

have any idea about at that moment, I asked around and heard two different explanations: the first one was the official answer, and appealed to safety and accountability. AVN's secretary, Alejandra, told me it was their responsibility to prevent accidents: "We allow motorcycles only if they have insurance and we ask drivers to wear helmets, but what can we do with bicycles? There are no bike lanes and they can't be insured. We can't have a mortal event on our hands" [Field Notes, November 19th, 2009].

Matilde, Ana's former domestic worker, lives just across the Pacheco highway, next to the bus stop, and agrees with this version. According to her, bicycles were allowed until 2008, when an accident led AVN to forbid them. Regarding bike lanes, she said Alejandra's statement is half-true: "I mean, *there is one*, but inside Nordelta, and not connected to Pacheco". What about building one, have you heard anything? "That would be great, but keep dreaming, they will never do it. They keep all their money to themselves and nothing ever comes out" [Field Notes, May 18th, 2008]. After reviewing the projects and amounts invested by Nordelta on its surroundings, we know Matilde's remark is not entirely right, but it expresses a common irritation on how investments, whether inside or outside the compound, seem to focus on improving resident's comfort and not on attending the necessities of the vast number of workers the neighbourhood depends on.

The second explanation why bikes are not allowed in was presented to me by Roberto, a security guard who works on the main access, as well as by Carlos, the Mary Go executive already mentioned. Both agreed it is because of "aesthetic reasons", which means that residents and administrators did not want to see their streets occupied with workers: "Only if you are an *propietario* can you use a bicycle¹⁵⁵.", said Roberto, "I think they don't like to see different people hanging around" [Field Notes, May 25th, 2008]. Carlos, always critical with the administration, went further: "it is part of a whole range of rules they have to keep workers as invisible as possible" [Field Notes, October 16th, 2008].

In a country with a strong tradition in social movements and popular revolts, all these flaws

¹⁵⁵ Formally, the normative regulating bikes, published in NDNET, states they are used by residents and guests and does not say anything about workers.

and problems may be contributing to create –without intending to– the subjectivity needed in workers, fostering in them obedience through endurance and resignation. In words of Agamben: “The development and triumph of capitalism would not have been possible without the disciplinary control achieved by the new bio-power, which, through a series of appropriate technologies, so to speak created the *docile bodies* that it needed” (1995, p. 6). It is relevant to notice how the border operates producing social relations of domination, with an employer that demands absolute availability of their employees, and employees that subordinate their time to Nordelta.

In this scenario, it would seem naïve to look at these procedures and inefficiencies only as a management issue, ignoring Nordelta’s main directive. The previous chapter discussed the processes through which the administration managed to keep the main road closed and reject a public bus line service. With a transport system which shows more flaws than virtues, it seems a bit incomprehensible they turned down such an alternative, but for them, more important than improving a service it is to build up a self-sustained territory, keeping control over who and what accesses the neighbourhood. There is no priority higher than securing the life and continuity of the project as a whole. In time, Nordelta will probably invest to make the system better, but never at the cost of jeopardising its sovereign control over the area. Until that happens, time will keep functioning as a mechanism held and used to regulate the flow of workers and mould their subjectivities.

After examining the administration of bodies and time, the next section moves forwards to analyse the administration of space; more specifically, of what things can enter and how, and how infrastructure has been designed and built to serve that purpose.

5.1.3. The management of space

In addition to the suffering discrimination, not having control over their time and paying relatively high fares for a ticket, another source of tension between domestic workers and Nordelta was the lack of a proper bus stop in the area. Until 2007, there was no place where to take shelter, and people had to stand in the open; if it was raining, they took cover under a

big tree in front of the sentry stall. It may be useful to remember the road was paid by Nordelta and other gated communities, so when people complained, they took this issue to them rather than the municipality. Legally, the road is public, but it seems that users think of it as Nordelta's property, and daily practices adjust to that discourse.

The first time I ever talked to Carlos, Mary-Go's executive, was one morning I was sitting at the bus stop and he approached me. Taking a look at the sky, he said out of the blue: "Nice day. We must be thankful it didn't rain. When it rains, people get wet and the ground turns into mud." A domestic worker was sitting next to me and she added "and we all end up sick!". I asked Carlos if they had approached the municipality to solve the problem: "We only went there once, when AVN¹⁵⁶ didn't allow us to use a new road they built, but they weren't of any help so we never went back" [Field Notes, October 16th, 2008]. In 2007, Consorcio Acceso Bancalari¹⁵⁷ finally decided to build a modest green metallic infrastructure, which was an improvement but not enough to cover the large flow of people that uses the area. Under its small roof, up to ten people can take shelter, far less than the up to sixty you can count every morning during rush hour. On the other hand, its particular design, in clear contrast with that of standard of public furniture, contributes to strengthen its image as an exceptional place, not public like the rest but dependant on Nordelta.

Ángel is a businessman who lives in Nordelta. Around 50, he is divorced, and his ex-wife and kids live nearby, in one of the Nordelta's *barrios*. One day we set a meeting at his place, and he came almost an hour late. Sweating, he arrived in a very bad mood, but apologising for making me wait: "I think of myself as an open-minded guy –he said–, and despite that, sometimes I am on this road [pointing towards Nordelta-Bancalari], which should be just for Nordelta because it was PAID by Nordelta, and suddenly I see three very old cars in a row. They are blocking my way, and I say out loud: 'Why the hell are they blocking ME?!'... and I know the road is not *mine*, but sometimes it just comes out. And there are plenty of people who believe that, seriously. To live here makes you think like that, asking all the time: 'is this

¹⁵⁶ Nordelta Neighbours Association [Asociación Vecinal Nordelta], institution in charge of administrating the project.

¹⁵⁷ The private conglomerate that built the road; for more info, see chapter 3.

mine?’ In Buenos Aires that wouldn’t happen. If you have an old car ahead of you, you just go: ‘OK, this is a public space.’” But this one *is* a public road, isn’t it? I asked. “Yeah, legally is public”. But people seem to have a different idea. “Yeah, of course, but it’s the same as before: This place makes your head make up this kind of stuff” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

Carlos, from Mary-Go, thinks a “proper terminal” should be built as soon as possible: “There is a real need for a new terminal here, a place where you could sell coffee, cakes, magazines. Why not? I think *they* should be able to do it.” Who are they? Are you talking about Nordelta or about the municipality? “About Nordelta, of course! What does the municipality have to do with it?”. Local government does not have much credibility and legitimation in the area, at great extent because gated communities are seen as self-administrated and self-regulated. “In Nordelta there is a shopping centre, a huge building, but nobody goes there. They can build an empty shopping centre but not a place where poor people can catch the bus.” What sort of terminal would you like? I asked. “A proper one, around US\$150.000-200.000, with a sidewalk, tiled floor and glassed windows. Something enclosed; a floor, a light, something for people not to be in the open.” The woman sitting next to me added: “And a ticket stall”, to which Nicolás repeated: “And a ticket stall... people always complain because we don’t have change, but we cannot keep notes here” [Field Notes, October 16th, 2008].

I wondered if the food stalls on the side of the train tracks were located there because they were not allowed to be near the bus stop, a thought I confirmed a couple of days later talking to Regina, the shopper I regularly bought things from: “We would really like to be there! In the morning there are lots of people waiting, and we could do great business, but I don’t think they would want us there.” But you know the stop is on public space? I asked. “Really? Well, it’s doesn’t matter. They can do whatever they want because they own everything around here. Go, ask the police”, she replied, with a sarcastic smile [Field Notes, May 25th, 2008]. This question of who *owned* the area had quickly become something to research. Trying to explore this issue, I asked Carlos who should build the new stop, whether Nordelta, Pacheco or Tigre: “We have been demanding an answer to Nordelta –he said–, but according to them the area is not theirs, and so they can’t do anything here. So, this place is *theirs* when it is convenient for them, and it isn’t when it’s not. They tell the people ‘*we have our transportation service*’

but then, if there is any problem, they say: ‘*we have nothing to do with it. It’s them*’” [Field Notes, October 16th, 2008]. A year later, in 2013, the local government and Mary-Go co-financed the construction of a footbridge, to reduce accidents and vehicular traffic of those going to the bus stop. Nordelta did not collaborate.

Perhaps one of the clearest ways to portray the liminal condition of the bus stop lies on its material features. The stop is set on a dirt sidewalk about two meters wide, behind it, a narrow and dried ditch opens, covered with wild grass and scattered with material signs – traces- of the most common act performed there, waiting (Fig. 5.15). Lying on the floor, there are empty bottles, old newspapers, candy wrapping paper, tissues, coffee cups, plastic spoons and cigarette butts; so many, one morning I counted over two hundred. There is just one small trash bin, which almost never gets emptied. Public garbage trucks do not take care of the area because they say it is not their responsibility, and Nordelta’s garbage services are not hired to clean outside the neighbourhood premises.

Summarising, we have two things regarding the material bus stop that raise questions about sovereignty: the first one, that despite domestic workers and private bus companies have asked for a *proper* bus stop. One fitted to their necessities, but Nordelta refused to invest. The second one, that no one makes themselves responsible for maintaining the area. Both things suggest that, when it comes to a function not directly related with identifying and controlling what can potentially access the place, Nordelta abandons any of its claims over the area. But, as we will see, when it comes to taking control of people, objects and/or information that *do* attempt to gain access, their discourses and practices point in a completely different direction.



Fig. 5.15: The bus stop floor, scattered with litter. Photo by the author.

5.1.4. The management of information

Within Nordelta, it is almost impossible to find a place with the traditional features of a public space, such as being open, multi-functional, diverse or with an 'atmosphere of democracy' (Latour, 2005. See also: Sennett, 1977; Low, 1997). Nordelta's common areas have been carefully produced to reject political actions, and to discourage sociability and random encounters. Domestic workers, a traditional actor of urban street life, are probably the ones who suffered this situation the most, as they have seen their social life diminished and pushed to the liminal areas of the neighbourhood. Indeed, it is in buses and bus stops where they can still get in touch with their peers, socialise and put in circulation something quite cherished by *propietarios*: information.

There are three main topics of conversation among domestic workers: personal life, working conditions and employers. Nordelta's residents do not see the first one as a matter of concern, but the other two are taken with a particular concern. Regarding working conditions, domestic workers make an active use of their time at the bench to discuss health

and social insurance, to know who is working *en blanco*,¹⁵⁸ to find out how much the others are getting paid, or if their employers cover transportation costs and pay for extra hours. Without the time or the situation to formally become part of a union, these mobility spaces are the major place where they can compare their jobs, to afterwards demand improvements on their labour conditions afterwards.

Gossip, on the other hand, is a more delicate matter because it involves the slippage of personal information about employers (Dickey, 2000), which domestic workers take from the intimate to introduce it into the public realm; as Das suggests, it is something produced to be disseminated (2007). “You remember the first time we talked?”, Isabel asked me, “I had missed the bus and it was quite late, but my boss had no problem whatsoever”. That’s good... Are they nice? I asked back. “Actually yes, I’m lucky. It is difficult to find a good boss here. I hear so many things at the Mary-Go. Everyone talks about their bosses, and they say things you can only hear there. I don’t talk much to the other girls, but that is the place where to do it” [Field Notes, March 4th, 2009].

On a different occasion, Gisella told me about a network of *propietarios* that, apparently, were caught trafficking child pornography. How in hell did you found out about a thing like that!? I asked with my eyes wide open. “At the private bus [*la transfer*] –she said, laughing–, it is the only thing everybody’s talking about these days. One of them eavesdropped on her bosses and told us. It’s like a chain.” Do you have many friends among *las chicas* [‘girls’, other domestic workers]? “[I meet them) at the bus stop, when we travel. Many of us have the same schedule, and we come together and leave together... while on the road, we all tell things about our employers. Someone tells me something funny or weird, and I tell her about mine.” It is usual to talk about your work? “Yeah, ‘the *señora*¹⁵⁹ this’, ‘the *señora* that’”, she replied smiling [Field Notes, September 20th, 2008].

Proprietarios are aware and concerned about these practices, and many times they discuss

¹⁵⁸ To be legally hired, working under contract and according to law.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Señora’ (Mrs.) is a term that denotes respect, hierarchy and a certain degree of social distance, given by differences in class and/or age.

them among peers: “I always check the bus schedule so I can drop Sonia at the stop just when the bus is there –Julieta confessed–. I just don’t like the idea of them talking and chatting about us” [Field Notes, January 14th, 2008]. Their concern about the stop is connected, again, with the urge to control what gets in and out of the neighbourhood. In this case, not people but information. I evaluate this as a subversive practice for two combined reasons: because it manages to take something out of Nordelta which is not forbidden –probably because it cannot be controlled–, but everybody knows it is not acceptable; and it does it by taking advantage of a disadvantageous situation, such as having to spend endless hours waiting for the bus.

It should be clear by now that just trying to reach Nordelta is not an easy task, the access being controlled from a spatial, symbolic and social point of view. Having almost no personal contacts in Argentina, and Nordelta being a place where almost anything coming from the outside is treated suspiciously, I spent almost eight months for just being able to gain restricted access to the neighbourhood. I was consistently rejected, ignored and even threatened, both by private guards and police, and for a long time I thought these conditions would prevent me from finishing my research. I am not narrating this difficulty out of any other reason than because it helped me comprehend something quite essential: one day, sitting at the bus stop, I realised every problem I had lived, every single one of those difficulties, were not obstacles to my fieldwork: they *were* my fieldwork. I understood that every single one of those difficulties had happened because Nordelta is, precisely, a place where every access is regulated, every body, space and time is placed under control, and every social relation is closely scrutinised to prevent the outside to subvert what has been created. It took me months to realise that “it is often the fieldwork itself that makes us” (Fumanti, 2004); but once I did, it shed light over a wide range of episodes I had not fully comprehended until then, but were central to the ‘Nordelta experience’.

5.2. AT THE GATES

Three main actors cross the gates on a regular basis: *propietarios*, visitors and workers. This section reviews the procedures established to administrate their circulation, normalising or

rejecting them if considered potentially harmful, and the different tactics of resistance they put in operation to subvert and/or avoid such mechanisms. In this setting, access gates operate as spatial buffers where social differences are negotiated, and class performances produced and enacted.

5.2.1. Identification and Examination

Two procedures have been implemented to deal with anyone and anything that attempts to cross through Nordelta's gates (fig. 5.16): identification, focused on people; and examination, focused on things. Both are aimed at keeping a detailed account of the fluxes, and at preventing the entrance or exit of anything unauthorised. Identification comprises several techniques, which are enforced by machines and guards¹⁶⁰ with different intensities according to the kind of subject, whether *propietarios*, visitors or service providers.¹⁶¹ Of them, residents receive the mildest version of the process, as they carry personalised magnetic cards¹⁶² that provide smooth access to the compound. A soft touch into the electronic panel makes the mechanic barrier rise, and a gentle nod to the guards, providing visual confirmation of their identities, grants them a swift crossing. During daytime, this second part of the procedure is not very relevant, and during peak hours it can even be overlooked, but at night its importance increases, becoming almost unavoidable.

Claudia, the architect, told me that if she reaches the gates after dark, she is asked to turn the car's interior light on and make her face visible: "Around 7 pm, guards block the panel with some plastic wrap, so you can't use your card anymore. They say it's to protect the sensor from humidity, but I don't know... I think it's just to let the night guard come nearby and take a quick look." And why is that? I asked. "For safety reasons, probably. To check if someone else is in the car, having a gun pointed at me". So, what if someone wants to smuggle

¹⁶⁰ Guards are in charge of performing these procedures, as stated in the formal regulation published by AVN: "2.3. The reception of visitors and/or service providers will be carried out with the best disposition and with the main purpose of identifying people". (AVN, 2006a).

¹⁶¹ In page 4 of the document regulating accesses, point b.1 states: "Every pedestrian or vehicular movement must be registered in the Guard's database." (AVN, 2006c).

¹⁶² They are administrated by AVN and have to be renewed every six months.

something? “Like a lover? Well, they know everything. You can’t hide anything from them,” she replied smiling [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].



Fig. 5.16: Northern gate.
Photo by the author.

Proprietarios tend to agree it is hard to keep anything from the guards, at least regarding their schedule and the people they move with, but no one complains much about it. The docility with which they accepted the surveillance of their private lives caught me by surprise, especially taking into account their social class and how highly they seem to value their freedom. I asked Werner about this issue and he replied: “Well, they are necessary to have people under control. There’s a check point outside, and a second one in each neighbourhood; without them, this place would not be safe” [Field Notes, June 21st, 2009]. Claudia shared his view: “It is because of *these things* that we can go out, and our children can play outside. It may be annoying to have guards knowing every step you take, to be forced to lower your windows and show your face every time you get in, but it is the reason we are safe.” We may say, then, these set of surveillance practices are constitutive of gated communities, and as such, they have produced this certain subjectivity. For the people who live in Nordelta, these procedures are what define normality, being the very foundations over

which their *normal lives* can be built.

Besides *propietarios*, everyone else has to make a full stop at the access point, state their name, show a photo ID document, sign a form and wait for clearance from the resident who invited them, who is promptly called by the guards. For frequent visitors, such as acquaintances or service providers¹⁶³, residents can ask AVN for a personal code [*el código*, a five digits number], which identifies them and speeds up the process: the visitor states their code, guards put it into the system, they check if the face matches the photo on the screen, and grant –or not– the access. In any case, despite having a code or not, a digital log is created with the data, recording information about the three actors involved: visitor, guard and the resident who authorised the visit. When access is granted, guards give visitors an identification card, which they must return on their way out. Lola narrates the process as this:

Lola: I went directly to the gate. He took me there, my *patrón*, so they could take my personal data, my photo, and register my signature. They make you fill a paper where you state your schedule, at what time you go in and out, to which neighbourhood and plot are you going to, and so on.

Ricardo: And once you do that, they don't ask for it anymore?

Lola: No, they give you a code. When you get to the gates, some guards ask your name and others the code, and your data jumps into the screen. I'm... well, I'm "booked" –she laughs–, like in prison.

Ricardo: Prison! Why do you say that?

Lola: Well, ok, not "booked" but registered. That sounds better: registered, because if you don't have the code you can enter anyway. They call your employer and they can authorise you.

[Field Notes, January 28th, 2008].

Being part of the same universe, guests coming from other gated communities are used to these procedures, and do not make much fuss about them. Those who do not, however, have a hard time accepting them. As Claudia explained: "we have chosen this way of life, but our family and our friends haven't. They are not used to these things as we are, so it's quite a shock to them" [Field Notes, May 5th, 2009]. María, whose cousin lives in Nordelta, says she

¹⁶³ Service providers, with the exception of domestic workers, can access Nordelta only Monday to Friday.

likes to pay her a visit from time to time but two things discourage her: the long trip from Buenos Aires, and how the guards treat her. “I have lived in the city all my life and I love my freedom. I would never get used to how things work around here. The things guards do when you enter? They are a transgression to my rights and privacy” [Field Notes, December 18th, 2010].

For people coming from the city, it is a violent thing to be suddenly required to identify themselves, something even police do not do in Buenos Aires. Even more, guests usually share the same socio-economical background of the residents,¹⁶⁴ a life of privileges and VIP rooms, unaccustomed to closed doors, so it is quite odd for them to feel, in a way, contaminated, or to see themselves as threatening subjects. “All my friends are bothered by these procedures”, Sofía says, while stopping at the gate, “they make a fuss every time they visit.” Why, are guards rude to them? Do they say inappropriate things, perhaps? “No, never, but to be asked so many questions bothers those who like their freedom¹⁶⁵” [Field Notes, June 14th, 2009].

The identification process clearly aligns with the logic of governmentality, having the purpose of rationalising and administrating the productive network of people, objects and vehicles that give life to the social body of the neighbourhood; a power “organised around the management of life” (Foucault, 1978, p. 147). For the administration, it is vital to keep tight records and statistical reports of human and vehicular movements, including, for example, the number of passengers arriving in private buses, the amount of trucks and workers coming in each day, and the number of children from other gated communities attending school in Nordelta. This information is regularly reviewed and used to evaluate their policy, and at the end is shared with the community through their official website. To improve this function, every now and then security companies –in agreement with Nordelta’s administration AVN– try to implement new technologies. In 2013, for example, they

¹⁶⁴ One of my main concerns during the research was to find, even as an exception, someone of a lower social class who regularly access Nordelta as friend or guest, not as worker. In two years, I could not identify a single case.

¹⁶⁵ Once again, the idea of freedom appears as a key value in their lives. This issue, and particularly the ongoing tension between personal agenda and the needs of the whole, will be thoroughly reviewed in chapter 6.

attempted to enrich the information collected by asking extra questions at the gates, but some *propietarios*, visitors and workers opposed. Gallaretas published a letter in which one of the residents said: “While it is understandable to ask for workers’ names and IDs, it is not appropriate to ask for their home addresses, phone numbers, spouse’s names, mobile numbers and if they have or don’t have children. Besides being against the Law of Data Protection, why is this necessary? The AVN is clearly exceeding its attributions.” (“Controles al personal doméstico,” 2013). The measure was swiftly withdrawn.

After being identified, the second part of the process is examination, which usually begins while one of the guards is calling the host. If the visitor is traveling by car, a second guard approaches the vehicle and ask the driver to open the trunk (fig. 5.17). How exhaustive the check is depends, again, on how *legitimate* the car, the driver and the passengers look: if they are informally evaluated as respectable, they receive a softer and faster check than if not. Respectability, in this case, strongly relates with class and race, and so it is usual for gardeners or taxi drivers be asked, additionally, to reveal the content of the glove compartment, get out of the car and answer extra questions. On the other hand, if any service provider tries to cross the northern gate by foot, they are asked to open their purses or bags, so to make sure they are not bringing anything dangerous nor taking anything ‘not of their own.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ It is not rare for *propietarios* to be constantly aware of the objects that populate their homes; domestic workers, gardeners and other ‘temporary accepted other’ posing a looming threat over them.



Fig. 5.17: Guard examining a car's trunk. Photo by the author.

During examination, anything identified as *unusual* that is carried by a worker, like a closed box, furniture, food, anything big or expensive, is treated with suspicion. If the object is identified while accessing Nordelta, guards would ask what the object is and why it is being carried; if it is expensive, also a record is created. When leaving the compound, however, things get more complicated, as they have to bring a written permission from the *propietarios*, granting permission to take anything out, even if it is something of their own: "When I give something to my gardener or to the *señora* [her domestic worker, older than most], I write a note saying: 'this person, named x, is leaving with such and such things'", Claudia clarified. Matilde, the domestic worker who lives nearby, told me that the guards: "have never treated me badly... except when the *patrona* has given me something. They check me thoroughly, and if they find anything, and I mean *anything*, they would call her to see if it is all right. If she is not at home or doesn't answer, I am required to leave it there" [Field Notes, May 18th, 2008]. According to Consuelo, a *propietaria*, workers "may go out with a handful of rice, but there's no way they could get out with... I don't know... a TV or something"

[Field Notes, August 2nd, 2009].

Examination bothers everyone, workers, guests and residents alike. Trinidad, for example, a young Nordelta resident, once called a carpenter to have a chair fixed. After having a look, he attempted to take it to his workshop but left without an authorisation note, so he was stopped at the gate “and I had to go all the way there to convince them it was OK.” I don’t get it, I replied, I have been here many times and never been checked with such dedication. “Of course not, because you don’t look like a worker. Things like that only happen to those who work here, not to *us*. *Propietarios* don’t have to stop, and our friends just get their trunks checked, but the rest don’t... It’s just for our own safety, you know?” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009]. Consuelo also thinks there are discriminative discourses of class and race embedded in Nordelta’s barriers: “It is a thing that *happens* to workers: nannies, gardeners, painters.” And if, for example, you give something to a friend of yours, what happens then? “Nothing. They don’t have to go through that. It just doesn’t happen”. Are you sure? “Yeah, of course, completely sure” [Field Notes, August 2nd, 2009]. As with the identification process, examination is harder on workers and milder on guests.

In any case, examination is not perfect, and things get smuggled from time to time, with or without intention, and with or without resident’s knowledge. According to Claudia: “Sometimes I give something to them but forget to write a note, and nothing happens. It also happens that my gardener leaves with a big shelf on the pick-up and nobody asks him anything. But other times I can give them a folder or a pen, and guards make a fuss... In any case, I prefer this situation rather than having a fully armed person over there” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009]. Procedures are also relaxed as people get to know each other. Frequent visitors and workers eventually get to know guards, they begin to trust each other, and examination slowly becomes less methodical. Sofia has seen this happen many times: “I know all gardeners around here. They usually work in more than just one house, so they’re here every day. They [guards] also know them, know their cars and tools, and don’t have much problems. I think this thing for checking everything is more for occasional visitors; if you call someone they don’t know” [Field Notes, June 14th, 2009]. Aware of how this mechanism is being applied, the administration published a note stating they will amend every fault and

will be “rotating guards more frequently, to prevent them from becoming too familiar with certain people (AVN, 2008).

Taking things further, in 2013 the security company in charge of the main gate installed a new control system. Every worker had to press a button upon entry, and if a red light was turned on, they were taken to a small room where a female guard frisked them. The new procedure did not hold, as some employers felt a line was crossed and demanded its termination: “If someone steals from me, let them steal, but I will not authorise such a thing. I mean, they are people, after all!”, wrote Claudia to me in an email, attaching the complaint letter she sent to AVN. *Nordelteños* do not have a unique voice, some being more prone or more resistant to recognise that workers “are people too”, thus subjects of basic human rights such as equality under the law, worker’s rights, access to food or the right of public assembly. Residents like Claudia acknowledge that workers possess at least a *bare life*, which grants them basic rights. The red button was perceived by her and others as threatening to their dignity. Even more, procedures such as the red light are prone to fail because they miss one of the central premises of the project: the illusion of an exclusive and comfortable utopia, but “never of a prison”, as Claudia stated a few years before: “Nordelta has a relaxed security system, and from time to time someone gets robbed, but that’s part of life” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Crossing through Nordelta’s gates grants access to the project’s common areas, where the lake, the church, the administration building, the schools and the club are located. If one would like to access one of the inner *barrios*, would have to go through a second round of control. Each *barrio* has minimal differences in their internal regulations, and to let visitors aware of that, guards provide handouts at the entrance with the area’s map and its main rules, such as the maximum speed, and places to park. Fig. 5.18 presents the instructions handed out at Castores’ entrance.

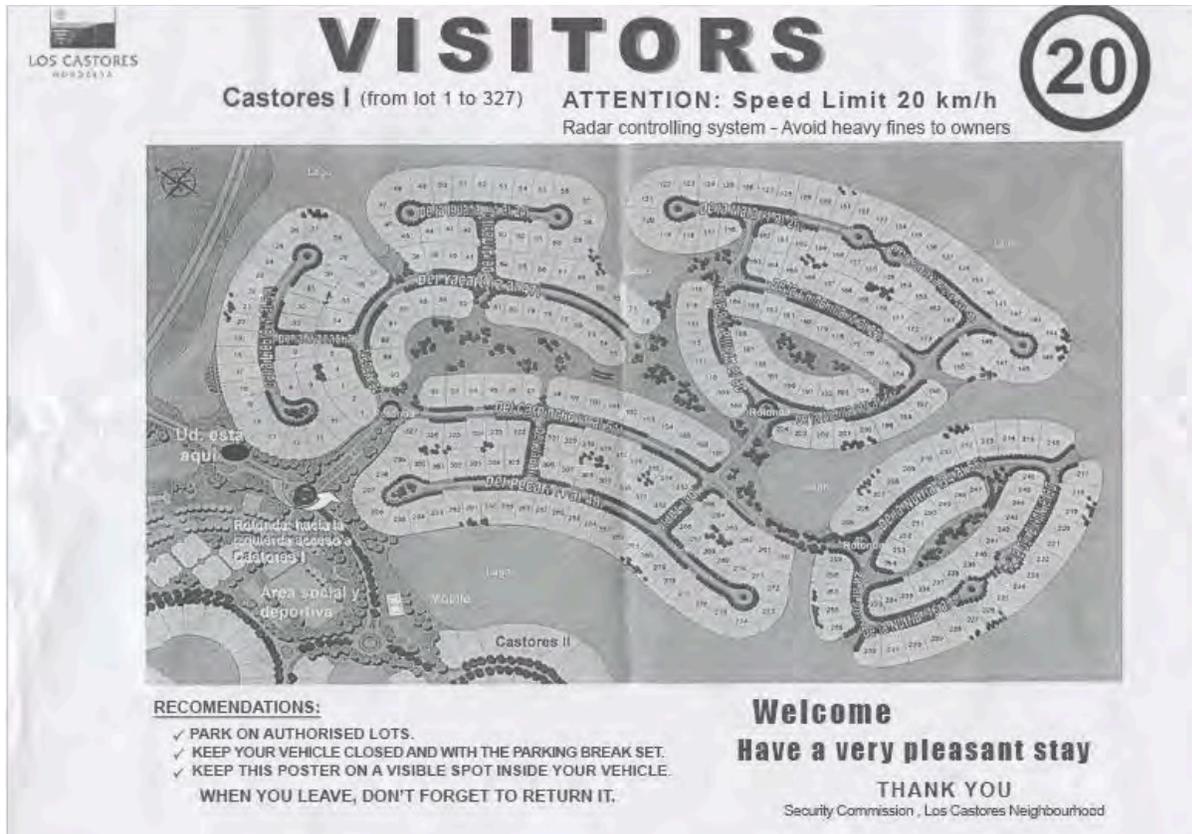


Fig. 5.18. Instructions for visitors.
Document translated by the author.

We can ask now what the relevance of this particular technology on the general scheme is. As Foucault stresses: “in every mechanism of discipline, the examination is highly ritualised: the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of the truth.” (2002, p. 171). In Nordelta, population is counted at least three times in three different instances: one, at the bus stop, where guards make regular surveys of passengers; two, at the entrance, where everyone has to leave a record of their movements, and third, in the annual pedestrian and vehicular census, widely promoted by the administration. In their words, censuses are necessary “to give Nordelta a new structure of access and vigilance that will provide us a better and safer life”.¹⁶⁷

Counting can be thought of as a way in which power is enforced, and a certain subjectivity is produced. Through identifying and examining, Nordelta administrators are forcing a careful

¹⁶⁷ On their website www.ndnet.com.ar, published on December 30th 2012.

description of visitors, making them accept a state of domination while receiving, as a status, their own individuality. They are, in a way, being produced as *conditional others* in Nordelta's world. Moreover, having a strict inventory of these outsiders also functions as a way by which they can make *propietarios* responsible of their workers. José, for instance, was telling me the details of his job as a painter in Nordelta when Matilde, his wife, interrupted: "Wasn't that the day you jumped the fence?". "Yeah, right –he remembered– I didn't want to go all the way around, so I just jumped the fence between two lanes! The problem was that they found out". Did they tell you anything? I asked. "They did, but not to me. They called the owner of the house I was working in. She is the one accountable for the people she hires" [Field Notes, May 18th, 2008].

Finally, on a different level and scale, gathering data about the population can also be useful to "mobilised against the State and demand justification, explanation or provision" (Legg, 2005, p. 143). In a previous chapter we widely reviewed how the number of people Nordelta would employ, and the revenues their population would produce, was directly used as an argument to negotiate benefits from public institutions. Among them, tax exemptions, a modification of the Regulating Plan and the possibility to enclose and administrate the main road.

5.2.2. Following, strengthening and avoiding the rules

So far, this chapter has reviewed a range of power/knowledge mechanisms devised to classify things upon entry or exit, and to normalise or reject those qualified as *potentially harmful*. There is no formal way to enter Nordelta without fulfilling the mentioned steps, but there are plenty of informal ways to do it. This final section in the chapter will describe such techniques, following De Certeau's theory of power and resistance.

One of De Certeau's main concerns when studying social life was to look for an alternative model to explain power relations. Taking from Foucault, he moved forward to ask what micro-practices, minuscule and quotidian, are devised by society to resist the grid of discipline. He recognised that individuals, although embedded in fields of power, can find

creative ways of transforming and appropriating the dominant system, producing practices of resistance inside a “not of their own” system (1996, p. xii). As aforementioned, this section concentrates on different resistance mechanisms deployed by actors against such procedures, mainly devised under the tactic of camouflage. That is, of presenting oneself as somebody else. Residents and the administration are aware of these practices, as this note published in Gallaretas reveals:

“A considerable amount of emails has passed among propietarios questioning how secured the gates of Ciudad-Pueblo are. One Nordelteño has written the following on one of the forums: ‘I was walking around when a 60-year-old male running in sport clothes approached me. Quite cheeky, he tells me he didn’t live in Nordelta, and so he asked an employer of the petrol station how to get in. She told him to walk just through the gate waving his arm and smiling.’ Another neighbour replied to this story saying: ‘another way to pass through is pushing a baby pram. Many times, I have left my car at the supermarket’s parking lot and crossed the gate walking with my baby. Guards kindly ran to open the gates, without even asking who we were or where we were heading to’. A third neighbour added: ‘put a helmet, brand sport clothes, and ride a good bicycle; say hello to the guards as if nothing has happened, and you can go anywhere (you will look like a neighbour; guards will not know who you are but they would say ‘surely, it is someone from this neighbourhood)’” (“Ahora hay más controles,” 2008).

As the note reveals, people from nearby areas and other gated communities occasionally present themselves as *Nordelteños*, mainly on the northern gate, which is the one *propietarios* frequently cross by foot or bike to get to the shopping area. On their return, they usually just wave the guards while crossing the fence and pass through without a problem. *Proprietarios* complain about this issue but through their actions they contribute to make it possible. Constanza, for example, lives in Nordelta and explains that “sometimes they let you in for your attitude, you know what I mean?” Not exactly, what? “There are times I’m too lazy to look for my card, so I just say ‘*propietario*’ with a strong voice, and they let me in. They see a *propietario* face on me” [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008]. Mónica, on the other hand, does not only bend the rules but has taken the transgression further: “Nordelta is too big, and the larger it is, the unsafer it gets”, she told me while having coffee in Buenos Aires. “There is no control, and I’m telling you this because, for example, I have a friend who lives in Santa María de

Tigre,¹⁶⁸ and I got her a card because she wanted to go to the supermarket, so she got in and out without a problem. Even more, she lends the card to a friend, you see? And if I do it, anyone can” [Field Notes, May 22th, 2009].

Another letter sent to *Gallaretas* denounced a different tactic to gain improper access: “To walk in with a full supermarket bag is a safe ‘access card’” (“Ahora hay más controles,” 2008). It is important to remember that one of the key reasons people moved to this neighbourhood is because it promises to recreate a kind of communitarian small town feeling the city and modernity have apparently destroyed. To be recognised as a resident is, for them, a thing they would like to maintain. The negative effect of this reluctance to identify themselves is, of course, a gap in the security system which makes it easy for unauthorised people to gain access.

More invisible but indeed present are the camouflage tactics used by workers at the Benavídez Gate. “*There are ways to get in*”, told me Jorge, the painter, when I asked him if there was a way to enter Nordelta without being authorised. Such as? I asked back. “Well, in the morning, there are so many people getting in, that if you squeeze yourself among the crowd you don’t get noticed. Many workers, who have their insurances expired, do it that way. And the rest covers for them, of course”. The rest? “Yeah, *we do*, so they can work... it is not easy, but feasible” [Field Notes, May 18th, 2008].

My own experience is similar, as the main way I finally found to access Nordelta –when I did not have any interviews scheduled, or before I met anyone– was to take to private bus. Once at the gate, I told the guards I was heading to any particular *barrio* in Nordelta and they would let me in. I was not allowed to access any of them but could spend hours at the common areas without a problem. The difference between Jorge’s strategy and mine is that I did not try to get confused with a worker, but with a visitor. When your skin is pale rather than dark, speak like a well-educated person, dress with branded clothes, and behave like a *normal* inhabitant of the neighbourhood, identification processes tend to relax.

¹⁶⁸ A nearby gated community.

AVN is well-aware of these tactics and has devised different mechanisms to minimise them. In August 2008, they published a press release on their website informing the installation of “new longer barriers, so bikers will have to stop to identify themselves. We also have installed a new wired fence near the southern access, to prevent unidentified pedestrian to access” (AVN, 2008). They also declare that, from then on, they were going to reinforce control mechanisms and proceed to identify every passenger on buses, ending the press release by asking *propietarios* to cooperate by always identifying themselves and respecting formal procedures. This was not an unjustified request, as residents do not hesitate to avoid rules when they feel affected by them. Lola, the Paraguayan domestic worker, was telling me about her first trip to Nordelta:

“The first time I came here I forgot my I.D. card. Guards asked me where I was heading to, and my employers’ name is so odd I didn’t know how to pronounce it. It’s ‘Gustavo Schwartz’, but it was my first time, so I said Shuarz, Suarz or something even worse. I had to wait there for over two hours, and when he finally came to get me, he said to the guard I was his friend, or a friend of his wife, so they let me in without much fuzz. I didn’t understand why he lied and thought it was weird they let me in without a document, but they did” [Field Notes, 26th January, 2008].

Despite rules not being strongly applied to them, *propietarios* regularly ask Nordelta to make them stricter for the rest. Furthermore, many of them have become active agents at service of the institution, constantly monitoring the security measures and denouncing any gap they can find in the system. Claudia told me that when the bridge connecting Route 27 with Bahia Grande was opened, she called AVN to let them know of a new way it was now possible to enter Nordelta without being checked. A few weeks later, AVN put a guard on the stop. A good example of Foucault’s theoretical framework, in which power is “diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them” (Gaventa, 2003, p. 1). Power does not destroy as much as creates, as Claudia’s case clearly states.

5.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Tracing a concentric path, this dissertation has been moving from the larger scale to the smallest, taking the analysis from the country to the region, then to Nordelta's surroundings and, in here, to its borders. This chapter has provided an understanding of the different logics of power present at Nordelta's gates, and of the various mechanisms set to secure the project's safety, whether rejecting or normalising foreign elements. As we have seen, liminal places such as bus stops and access gates raise challenges to the highly naturalised and extended hegemonic discourses of purity and secludedness among Nordelteños. They operate as buffers where social differences are negotiated, and class performances produced and enacted.

Furthermore, the regulations and technologies described are not simply *followed* by residents and workers but *carried* by them, thus reinforcing the subjective distinctions between *us* and *others*. Procedures of identification and examination have been analysed, along with the set of strategies devised to put under control the time, bodies, spaces and sociability of anyone who attempts to cross the compound's borders, particularly workers. After discussing a wide range of cases, typologies and examples, I suggest that these mechanisms and technologies have contributed to stabilise unequal power relations, and to consolidate a racial-based state of domination. Taking from there, and following the aforementioned scaled trajectory, the next chapter will direct its attention to Nordelta's inner space, examining a variety of mechanisms through which the residents' subjectivity is being sheltered and produced.

CHAPTER 6

MANUFACTURING NORDELTEÑOS: FORMAL MECHANISMS

*Although often assumed to be innocent,
the geography of the world is not a product of nature
but a product of histories of struggle between
competing authorities over the power to organise,
occupy and administer space.
It is the ability to impose order and meaning upon space
-O'Tuathail, 1996, p.1*

Sitting in the backseat of her mother's car, Lucía leans her head against the window and stares outside, where a green scenery of trees, bushes, and the perfume of recently cut lawn flies by. A few cars can be seen from time to time, and at the distance the main gates of the neighbourhood get closer by the minute. As the car slows down, her mother Carla reaches for a magnetic card she keeps in the ashtray, lowering her window and stopping for a moment just long enough to push the card against a grey electronic panel, opening the barrier to the outside world. Once the car passes through the gates, Lucía opens her mouth for the first time and makes a poppysmic sound with her lips: "pbah", and giggles. I turned back at her, smiling, and before I could ask anything, she explains: "it's the sound of the bubble, popping!". Carla turns back to her as well, but with a somewhat reproachful look on her face. With a severe voice she reprimands her daughter: "stop that nonsense!", says, and I am not completely sure if she is teasing or not. Looking back at me, Carla states with contempt: "She *always* does that thing. Every time. It's *stupid*". After crossing the gates, Lucía's gaze gets caught again on the window, her reflection glancing back at her with smiling eyes. If Nordelta was a first envelope, the car is a second one; a window between a secured environment and the vast void [Field Notes, May 9th 2009].

It is a common thing among Nordelteños to use the image of a bubble to represent their neighbourhood, highlighting two attributes of that geometrical shape: enclosure, and homogeneity. In the first case, the bubble has been discursively chosen by residents because, as gated communities, it is a figure of containment. For Nordelteños, their neighbourhood is a sphere warding the outside off, while offering a secure habitat to those inside; a sort of

immunological 'womb', in the words of Sloterdijk, which founds a novel space of coexistence, safe but fragile at the same time. As Van Houtum places it, borders are constructed to "produce and protect the comfort that we desire for ourselves" (2010, p. 43).

This idea comes to remark the obvious: that the perimeter fence is first and foremost a social product, not merely a line traced in space but "a social process on continuous re-imagination" (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002, p. 132). Nordelta's border comes to separate an *outside*, perceived as a threatening place inhabited by savages, from an *inside*, perceived as a unique and comfortable environment; a sort of oasis where they can enjoy a full life. When I asked Carla what she liked the most about the place after moving in, she answered, without hesitation: "Well, I didn't expect to have *everything* here. I thought I'd have to go out more often, but no, you really have everything here, *everything*. If your kid is having bad grades, you can hire a private teacher; if you need a bank, there's one here; supermarkets, restaurants, nature, yoga, sports, everything. It's like the perfect bubble" [Field Notes, December 17th, 2008].

Perhaps the boldest statement I heard about this issue was one day that Ángel invited me for tea. He was talking about how much Nordelta fitted the ideal figure of the bubble when he started comparing it with Nazi Germany. I remember my blood ran cold when I started hearing what he was saying, and I honestly could not believe the raw honesty of his statement:

"Everybody wants, no, *needs* to create its own bubble, where to feel safe. Nordelta may seem different because here you *see* the bubble, it is physically drawn... I told you, we were just in Berlin, and when you see the Nazis... the guy, he created this amazing bubble, everything was so tied up! Everyone had a job, they knew how much to charge for everything, there was no inflation by decree, weirdos were left out, and inside there was room for anyone who was equal. If you were at this side of the line, nothing would happen to you: be careful, do not to move! But as long as you stay here, you will live fantastically, with cars, leaders, parents, hierarchies, and no strangers... that is the maximum model of what a society can be... I mean, the anxiety goes down, because human beings get very anxious about what isn't clear. This is

not Nazi Germany, but certain aspects of anxiety are very low here, just as they were there. It is that fantasy: that if you build a wall, everything that is bad, and I don't mean just security, is kept outside. It may be just a fantasy, but it works" [Field Notes, August 25th 2009].

In the United States, where to excel as an individual is probably the primary ethical discourse, the main critique towards suburbanites is that they have chosen to live a plain and simple life.¹⁶⁹ In Argentina, on the other hand, a country that has been forged with a strong discourse of Catholic solidarity, proprietarios have been strongly criticised for attempting to create an isolated island, indifferent to other's realities. To take one popular example, in 2005 Claudia Piñeiro published *Las viudas de los jueves* ("Thursday's widows"), a thriller about a murder set in a gated community during the 2001 national crisis. The book portrays the residents of suburban gated communities as narcissistic and privileged people whose lives revolve on consumerism and petty passions, while *outside* the country was in turmoil. The book turned out to be an immediate hit, selling over 500,000 copies, collecting a number of prestigious prizes, staying on top of the lists for 58 weeks, and having a successful feature film made based on it.

As said before, gated communities did not fully initiate a novel way of life, but their practices were anchored in previous behaviours, technologies and patterns. When confronted with these critiques of seclusion and disconnection, Nordelteños used that idea as a counter-argument: "People who do not live here have many prejudices against us, but this is not a ghetto", Alicia said to me, "and what's all the fuss about anyway, if things in Capital are the same: you are locked down, with no idea of who lives next to you." Others shared her view; like Claudia, who commented: "I can understand that, as a social project, this is a hard one to swallow, because it has to do with space fragmentation, segregation and so, but Recoleta or Palermo¹⁷⁰ are segregated all the same" [Field Notes, May 5th, 2009]. Rodrigo lives in Castores, one of the oldest *barrios*, and is a respected member of the community. When we

¹⁶⁹ In fiction, see for example: "Edward Scissorhands" (Burton, 1990); "Pleasantville" (Ross, 1998); "American Beauty" (Mendes, 2000).

¹⁷⁰ Two of the most exclusive neighbourhoods of the central city.

discussed this issue, his opinion followed the same line of thought:

“In Buenos Aires you have no idea who the others are; it’s ‘good day’, ‘good day’ and that’s it. I used to live in a flat, and it’s not like I had much contact with people of... of... of a different level... So I really don’t get what sociology wants, as there is no more sociability in the city than here! What does it want from me? To French kiss a negro? I am not like the *negros*, and never will be... I’m a big advocator of the poor, I had 600 workers in my factory, but I’ve always known that I am not like them, and they know it as well” [Field Notes, July 17th, 2008].

The figure of the bubble is frequently used by neighbours as a simile that represents two different things: seclusion and homogeneity. Indeed, a large number of authors have used the figure of the bubble as an example of gated communities’ homogeneity (“the secession of the successful”, in McKenzie’s words, 1994). As Thuillier writes:

“Changing places means changing social interactions. Maybe more valuable than nature, gated communities’ residents will make new relationships there. They can be sure that their neighbours will be from the same socio-economic level as them. Their desire of social homogeneity is probably, alongside security and lust for nature, one of gated communities’ strongest magnets” (2005a).

Thuillier and others (Rojas, 2007, Vidal-Koppman, 2000) have talked about gated communities as socially homogeneous territories. Knippenberg, on the other hand, argues that a territory “hardly ever covers a homogeneous population, yet it claims to represent and image one” (2002, p. 192). Nordelteños would probably agree with the latter, as they fiercely dislike it when people criticise or make fun of them for being ‘all too similar’, a comment they frequently hear. Moreover, they tend to react with the utmost disgust whenever someone mentions a *familia tipo*, the stereotypical family that circulates as a cliché, composed of a young male in his mid-thirties/forties, fit, handsome, and successful; a beautiful wife, thin, and *rubia operada* [a blonde who has gone through more than a few plastic surgeries]; a pair of beautiful children; a dog; and a suburban car. Although the figure is present in discourses and images (fig. 6.1), Nordelteños find the stereotype too blunt, and with no relation to the transcendent experience they live every day: “I don’t see myself in the ‘country woman’ profile. I see the posters or the notes on the press and I say to myself: ‘if I end up like her, I’ll shoot myself’” [Field Notes, December 17th, 2008].



Fig. 6.1. Chevrolet ad installed in Nordelta's Shopping Centre. The text reads: "They are a typical family too". Photo by the author.

Within their walls, residents argue a varied population lives, not like *The Truman Show*, a movie Nordelteños frequently mentioned. The film portrays the life of a man who lives inside a television set without knowing it; his life was purchased by a large corporation, and every step of everybody around him is orchestrated and performed by beautiful and cheerful actors. Talking about the film, Sergio argued it does not fit Nordelta at all, as all kinds of people live there: "we have suffering people, depressed ones, people who are getting divorced, and some whose lives have not been easy, just like anywhere else" [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009]. And he is right –within reason. Nordelteños present a wide variety of occupations, ages, family structures and skin colours, overall painting a scenario strikingly different from the one portrayed in advertising.¹⁷¹ In two aspects, however, he is wrong: first, not every difference is accepted within Nordelta, an issue I will discuss later on; and secondly, they do share one thing: to be acknowledged as citizens.

¹⁷¹ A more in-depth discussion on this issue can be found in Girola 2008: p. 154.

You may have olive skin and be a citizen; you may be a foreigner, have a hard time with money, or be a single parent, and you could still be a citizen; you could be a woman or a child, and still be a citizen. Formal citizenship is granted by living in the compound (being a *propietario*), and social recognition is granted when you start behaving like one. Thus, in Nordelta, properness is defined by a set of practices that, in sum, conform a particular way-of-living. If we take a look at Nordelta's population under the scope of traditional social class theories, trying to classify them under the common social markers of income, occupation, education, or aristocracy, we would have a problem. If, on the other hand, we place Nordelta under the scope of the new trends in class analysis –which propose that class is not so much reflected but produced in daily life and practices (Devine *et al.*, 2005; Bourdieu, 1990; Ariztía, 2009)–, things would start to become more clear. Indeed, Nordelta is inhabited by a diverse population, but they share certain patterns of behaviour, *making life* in similar ways. Race, thus, refers in this context less to a phenotype than to a cultural identification, that of White European Argentine, which is partially hereditary but, at the same time, not fixed or permanent (Wade, 2002, p. 7). One may find in this explanation the reason why residents react with such outrage to the stereotypes circulating about them, and why whenever I asked them to describe how Nordelteños are, they tend to make focus not in visible traits, like income, skin colour or family structure, but on their culture. In Sofía's words: “*normal people go out every weekend with their neighbours; we go to those restaurants by the shopping centre; husbands play tennis together, sometimes football, and then we all gather for a barbecue at someone's place. That's the typical Nordelteño life*” [Field Notes, June 14th 2009].

Life in gated communities has not been overlooked, having drawn attention for decades. From novels to songs, press notes to feature films, books to documentaries, people have fantasied about how life is inside what appears to be, just as Lucía mockingly states, a bubble. In Argentina, many scholars have researched gated communities, and reflected on who these people are, what things do they cherish, and where do they come from (Svampa, 2001 and 2002; Arizaga, 2000a; Ballent, 1998, and 2003; Girola, 2008; Thuillier, 2005a; and Vidal-Koppman, 2000 and 2007). Without a doubt, a dedicated literature review may successfully reveal the main traits of such life. Walking in a slightly different direction, though, this thesis' final two chapters are dedicated to analyse how such features are actually being produced

and reproduced; to describe which power mechanisms are placed in motion to do so, and which are the most common ways residents have devised to resist and subvert them. While Chapter 7 will pay attention to a series of informal mechanisms that produce their particular subjectivity –most of them of disciplinary nature–, this chapter will focus on the formal ones, primarily of punitive and regulatory order. They are Nordelta’s community’s written rules, designed to regulate internal social life, and the spatial identity of the neighbourhoods; that is, the way the different *barrios* have been planned in order to balance homogeneity with a calculated diversity.

6.2. THE BOOK OF RULES

Having dinner at Tomás’ place, sharing table with his wife Valentina and a couple of their friends, I asked them about the neighbourhood’s rules. Upon hearing the question, they all excitedly wanted to contribute:

Marcos: They [AVN] are obsessively concerned over EVERYTHING. From the kind of trees you are allowed to plant, to the colour you paint your house.

Constanza: And it’s not just the trees, they also warn you that you have to keep the front yard in perfect condition, and your grass short.

Marcos: That’s true... and you can’t walk your dog without using a leash and a muzzle.

Tomás: I think the muzzle is just for a couple of breeds, the most violent ones.

Marcos: Oh, yeah, that’s right.

Tomás: And you have to carry a bag and pick up your dog’s poop.

Constanza: Yuk, that’s disgusting!

Marcos: Another thing is that they have a lot of radars, and they fine you if you run over the speed limit.

Silvia: And the garbage! AVN gives every house some green bags with their logo on, and you have to keep glass, paper and plastics separated.

[Field Notes, September 29th, 2008]

The list continued for some time, adding regulations related to different aspects of social life and its material conditions, such as the location of swimming pools, the use of chemical products while washing cars, the aesthetic and constructive characteristic of houses, the managing of pets, the expected behaviour of domestic workers, fishing and hunting practices, the use of clothing lines, the correct use of the flag, and so on. As such, in this aspect one may

say with some security that Nordelta does not fall far from the rest of gated communities, because their regulations are usually “much more restrictive than anything that zoning or public regulation would ever presume to [be]” (Danielsen and Lang, 1997, p. 884). Talking about this issue with Sofia, she told me that when she had her house built, she had to submit a project which had to comply with 125 items, “which at first I thought they were only about construction stuff, but no. The architect started explaining everything to me, and they messed with weird things, like how to design the stairs, or if the bathroom is connected to the kitchen. And those are *my* problems, it’s my house” [Field Notes, September 10th, 2009]. Most *propietarios* I talked to described Nordelta as a highly regulated place, but in general terms they tend to accept that such strictness is necessary: “The rules are to keep us safe, giving you what the State is not. Why did I move here? Why I am paying so much to live here?” Pablo asked me, “Because here I have a life I couldn’t live anywhere else. And that has a cost. Everything we are discussing now, the speeding limit, the dogs, the parking restrictions, are what allow me to live this life” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Residents do not show much resistance to AVN’s authority, nor have they produced a strong counter-discourse challenging their justification for leading the neighbourhood’s legal administration. If any, I would have to say that these rules are institutionalised versions of the daily practices they are aching for, and as such, people do their best to comply. To provide one example, a common rule people mentioned whenever I asked about them was the one regarding noise: “any loud music must be stopped at 3 A.M. I mean, if you are having a party you can still have people in your house, go outside, and have your lights on, but you have to keep it *low*”, explained Nina, a woman who avoids organising parties at her place because her dog gets scared, but being in her early twenties she frequently attends other people’s gatherings. And what happen if you don’t? “Surely guards will come and ask you to stop, but it’s not necessary, as it never happens.” Nina is twice right: first, because if any resident complains of loud noises, guards do have to show up,¹⁷² and secondly, because they rarely

¹⁷² There is a procedure in case a neighbour complains about loud noises. It establishes that a guard has to ask the house owner to keep it down. If s/he complies, no offence is written down, but if s/he doesn’t, the guard has to pick up a sound level meter and take a measure. If sound is 8 decibels over the background noise, the guard must fill an infraction act, and ask the neighbour to sign it. If he refuses it, the guard would have to call assistance from the “public force (police)” (AVN, 2007b).

have to. According to Ángel: “There are rules about noises, but you know what? There is no need, no one abuses them. Maybe sometimes you hear a noise, but it’s not like there’s someone pointing their speakers outside. People respect each other”. Trinidad, Nina’s sister, added a comparison: “We used to live in Vicente López,¹⁷³ and our front neighbours often organised parties. More than once police officers had to show up and shut things down, but here it’s very different. It’s regulated, and at 3 am it’s over” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Chapter 4 analysed Nordelta’s legal apparatus, discussing how it manages to operate parallel to that of the Nation. This section returns to such institution, but this time taking a closer look at the series of punitive and disciplinary mechanisms devised to deal with resident’s behaviour. By exploring them I intend to clarify what the norm is, and how it works separating normal and abnormal conducts, thus playing a role in producing the subjectivity of a “proper Nordelteaño”. I intend to analyse the compound’s written regulations, which codify behaviour into opposite forces, creating and enforcing sanctions over conducts that threaten order; and the surveillance mechanisms devised to straighten up conducts and normalise citizens.

In general terms, as discussed before, Nordelta’s general economy of power is one of juridico/legal nature. Regulations are generally written in the form of prohibitions, which means that there is a list of things not allowed in the compound, and a paired list of punishments that may be applied in case such rules are transgressed: “When you move in, they hand you over a pile of papers with tons of rules”, Tomás explained me one night over dinner, and then added a phrase which exemplifies the success of such strategy: “There’s no way you could learn them all at once, but sooner rather than later you would have all these things in your head” [Field Notes, August 29th, 2008]. Ángel, as others, agreed with Tomás’ opinion. Once I asked him to give me a tour of the area, and as he was driving me around we passed by a trash bin: “See how every house has the same bin? And the trash has to be *in* a bag and inside the bin, otherwise they won’t collect it. For a culture like the Argentine that is unique, but people learn quick... if an American comes here, in two weeks you would see him

¹⁷³ A wealthy non-gated neighbourhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires.

doing dirty business and so on, but if an Argentine goes to the States, in a week he would be the perfect American. Common social rules are what drives society, not people. People always adjust” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

In Nordelta, one may distinguish a hierarchy of laws which could be sorted out in four levels: at the higher one lies the ‘external’ Argentine law, which at the same time could be divided into six different hierarchies¹⁷⁴; at the second level lies what could be addressed as the ‘Nordelta Constitution’, which is the *Reglamento del Estatuto de la Asociación Civil Nordelta S.A*, written by Nordelta S.A. Ranking in third place lies the set of laws promulgated by AVN, which set major and minor regulations of Nordelta’s daily life and maintenance, and have to be followed by every actor within the compound. Finally, at the lower level lies the set of rules promulgated by each *barrio*, which must not enter in conflict with the above hierarchies, and have to be followed only by those who make use of the *barrio*, being residents, workers or visitors.

Nordelta is administratively divided into 24 *Barrios*, each one constituted as a *Sociedad Anónima Sin Fines de Lucro* [Non-Profit, Private companies limited by shares]. Each one has their own juridical person, and a Director’s board elected by an assembly of shareholders. As these societies were created before any plot was sold, they were constituted by Nordelta S.A. beforehand, being the company the sole creator of this set of rules that later will regulate daily life. This is a phenomenon that also can be found in other gated communities. As McKenzie (1996) found, the origins of the regulations and the restrictions often precede the residents, and people have to live with rules they did not produced.

For Nordelta S.A., it is paramount to keep the place under control as long as possible, hopefully until selling the last plot, as is the common practice worldwide (Glasze, 2005; McCabe, 2011). To do so, they have devised a two-step system, in which the first one is to keep the executive and legal systems under their administration for the first eight years by a decree called Special Transitory Clause, which reads: “The first Administration Council is

¹⁷⁴ Being: i. National Constitution; ii. National Laws; iii. Federal Constitution; iv. Federal Laws; v. Municipal Organic Chart; vi. Municipal laws.

named by Nordelta S.A., and it is irrevocable for eight years. It is for the greater interest of the Consorcio –the *barrio*–, and its members, to maintain the foundational criteria which governs the project during the period needed to consolidate the occupation of this and other Consorcios’ plots” (in *Reglamento de Copropiedad y Administración, Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago - Portezuelo*, see Appendix 1).

To keep control of these institutions after those first years, a second mechanism enters in operation: when a neighbourhood is constituted, a limited number of two different kinds of shares are issued: Shares “A” are assigned one per sold plot, and each grants a single vote on the Shareholders Assembly. “B” shares, on the other hand, are kept under Nordelta’s S.A. control, and each one grants five votes. So let us take Portezuelo, for example: when it was constituted, 1,000 shares were issued: 800 class “A”, and 200 class “B”; hence, Nordelta S.A. started with 1,000 votes (200 times five), and every time a *propietario* buys a plot, the neighbours get a single vote. As Portezuelo has been designed with 800 plots, even when all of them are sold, residents would not have enough votes to go against the developer. A similar strategy found in a Taiwanese gated community:

“Developers who divest their property interest in a development when all units are sold, have no material interest in creating a HOA even though they are the most able to do so. With no title to the property after the last unit is sold, they have no residual claim on the resources that stand to be enhanced by a HOA. However, during the period of marketing and sales they have an incentive to bequeath an organisation that promises to maintain and enhance asset value” (2005, p. 217).

This particular way of handling sovereignty and jurisdiction has provoked more than a few tensions with *propietarios*. Attending to them, AVN has slowly been opening space for participation. For example, the Association is controlled by a board of seven members, which until 2004 was entirely composed by Nordelta S.A.’s representatives, but from then onwards, due to the neighbours’ complaints, it is composed by four representatives with Nordelta S.A, two of the *propietarios*, and one of the non-residential actors (schools, medical centre and commercial area). The final call on every decision, if one does the math, still lies on Nordelta S.A. AVN’s constitutive document openly manifests this subordinate position, stating that:

“AVN assumes as its own, the vision of the New Urban Nucleus that Nordelta S.A. has pushed through the Masterplan” (*Reglamento de Copropiedad y Administración Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago – Portezuelo*). Nordelta’s progress moves forward without taking much into consideration anyone’s interests but the developer’s.

In chapter 4 I mentioned that while the more encompassing rules of Nordelta are solely dictated by Nordelta S.A., each *barrio* has relative autonomy regarding their procedures, being able to elect their own administrator and constituting their own Administration Councils and Disciplinary Courts. While there is a general set of practices that most Nordelteños perceive as comfortable, and thus are performed and defended by them, there are issues in which they tend to disagree, creating tension and distress. Portezuelo is the cheapest *barrio* around, with four buildings at its centre, and 200 small houses scattered around. It holds a heterogeneous population, but in broad terms one could say two demographic groups predominate: young couples with children, and retired seniors. Let us remember that a common reason to move into Nordelta was to live in a place that offers the same kind of ‘neighbourly life’ the city –they say– used to have; and one of the key features of that life is that children could safely play on the streets without parents having to worry about them. However, as in most *barrios* political participation is low,¹⁷⁵ and many of the people who attend the *Consejo* are retired people, a quasi-paradoxical thing has occurred: in Portezuelo and La Alameda, elders have organised and voted to forbid children to play outside, complaining they make too much noise and disturb their naps. The initiative stirred things up in both *barrios*, challenging the very essence of the place: “How can they do that? The streets are public place after all!”, said Paula with a confused voice [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

Besides discussing the virtues of specific norms at the *Consejo*, counter-conducts are a much more common way in which *propietarios* refuse to follow them. Subversion is an action that manifests the rejection of being made to behave in a particular way, and is especially relevant for this research because I agree that:

¹⁷⁵ A common phenomenon. See Blakely and Snyder, 1997, p. 35.

“We cannot understand [...] pollution unless we enter the sphere which lies between that behaviour which an individual approves for himself and what he approves for others; between what he approves as a matter of principle and what he vehemently desires for himself here and now in contradiction of the principle; between what he approves in the long term and what he approves in the short term. In all, this there is scope for discrepancy” (Douglas, 2002, p. 131).

Counter-conducts are prone to happen in gated communities as they are highly regulated places inhabited by privileged people. This research found that Nordelteños are quite strict regarding rules when they are applied to others, including their peers, but feel above the law when they are on the spot. The first time I went to Angel’s place I was a bit late because I forgot my documents and was not allowed in; when I told him, he went mad: “This is *my* house”, he said in a loud voice, “It is private property, and I invite whoever I want” [Field Notes, April 9th 2009]. Some months later, though, he was talking about a robbery that happened in Castores, and made harsh remarks about guards: “They are not doing their job. I have seen how sometimes they don’t check enough who gets in and out. It is *their* job, you see? That is why we have these rules! To prevent these things!” [Field Notes, August 25th, 2009].

Ángel’s attitude towards rules, placing himself in a place of exception, appeared as well in Miguel. He lives in La Isla, Nordelta’s most prestigious *barrio*, along with his wife Macarena, their three children, and their live-in domestic worker. We were chatting in his front yard one day when he told me the following story:

“A couple of months ago we painted the house, and I didn’t like how my facade looked with the trash bin placed in front of the garage, and I moved it. Next day, I woke up and it was back in its original place, so I moved it again. The day after that, the same thing; and the day after that, I moved it back for a third time, and around 7pm the Intendente showed up and told me that this was my final warning: the trash bin had to stay in that position because it was a norm destined to keep the *barrio*’s harmony and increase real estate value, and that I’d be fined if I moved it again” [Field Notes, 28th October 2009].

What happened? I asked. “Well, I moved it back, got fined, and refused to pay. For two weeks I moved the damn bin, but eventually got tired and left it there. Every morning I see it, and grind my teeth, but don’t have the energy to fight for this sort of thing.” Pablo lives in Castores and experienced a similar episode. He was living in Buenos Aires and bought a plot in Nordelta for his new house. When he signed the deal, got the same pack of regulations Tomás’ mentioned and did not pay them much attention. A couple of weeks after that, he received an email asking him to cut the grass, to which he paid no attention either. Two days later he got a second notice, which he also discarded, and at the end of that month, when he received the *expensas* [monthly fees], saw that the administrator had hired a gardener –“the most expensive of all”, in Pablo’s words– to cut the grass, and charged it to his bill. “I understood that I had to follow certain rules if I wanted to live here, and so I did”, he said [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Perhaps the most common offenders are pre-teens and teenagers, who frequently resist norms and refuse to be under supervision: “the problematic ones are kids who are trying to find their place in the world”, Rubén tried to explain, “They got bored here, and started doing the same things you and I did in the city. The thing is that here we don’t have much fuss, we don’t have the chaos the city has, so a small movement creates a big wave.” Like what? “I don’t know. If someone breaks a window, or throws an egg at someone’s house, can you imagine a thing like that would raise an eyebrow in the city? Not a chance! But here is a scandal, a real scandal!” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

For its liminal nature, the commercial area is one of the most common places where teenagers transgress norms. Having not many places in Nordelta where to party, they use the shopping centre as their own private stage. On weekends, from 8 pm to 1 am, the place fills up with about a hundred from ten to sixteen year-old kids. Almost all of them come from Nordelta, and a few others from nearby gated communities; older kids gather at the McDonald’s, where they have an ice cream and a chat, while the youngest loiter the commercial area under the strict supervision of guards and security cars.

Despite being under surveillance, young teenagers constantly attempt and succeed to do

unapproved things, such as putting objects on car's tailpipes, climbing trees and breaking their branches, throwing stones at each other. They also get into forbidden areas, such as the second floor or the administration offices. Just as Muga and Erkip (2009), and Stillerman and Salcedo (2011) found in other shopping malls, guards followed them at close range but do not really attempt to stop them. On the same article, Salcedo and Stillerman argued teenagers 'transpose' socio-spatial practices from traditional public spaces to the shopping mall. In this case, however, the commercial area is one of the few places where they attempt to perform actions they would not dare to do in plain daylight anywhere, much less inside Nordelta. The liminal status of the area, of being and not being Nordelta at the same time, allows them to temporarily become *abnormals* without being expelled or normalised. By performing a forbidden behaviour, they manage to resist and protest against the disciplinary mechanisms under which they are demanded to live their ordinary lives.

I previously discussed the role that private guards play in the development, though I reserved the discussion of their part as an organised force designed to keep the population under surveillance for this section, thus operating more as a normalisation technology rather than a juridico/legal one. Guards, in fact, are the most present members of the security apparatus. Their expressed purpose is to prevent improper others to access the compound, and to perform general surveillance, which are tasks particularly relevant in gated communities because, as Jacobs explains, their streets lack the natural vigilance provided by a rich urban life, and their emptiness can only be solved by the surveillance of artificially paid observers (1992). Much more than catching offenders, thus, their role is to prevent certain actions from happening. Guards are a dissuasive force, whose (in)visible presence prevents threatening behaviours from happening. In the case of teenagers, that does not work much because they perform illegal and/or forbidden practices of resistance whether guards are there or not, acting the same way as Ortiz (1994), Lewis (1989) and Matthews et. al. (2000) found in other latitudes. For them, then, a punitive strategy continues to be the more effective, and the most demanded. Is there anything being done to prevent these things [teenagers do]? I asked Rubén. "AVN is taking measures, police measures, which is what people is asking for. I can't get it, I mean, they are their own kids! People tend to become fascists here at the first chance" [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

Besides teenagers, however, the invisible presence of guards tends to be quite effective on other residents, like Claudia. How is your relationship with guards? I asked her: “They are quite friendly, but I always keep my distance, treat them formally. Every day they come and say: ‘hi, how are you, miss Paula?’. They remember everything, who are you, your name, your last name, who your mother is, or what you had for lunch. The other day a guard stopped my car and asked me if I felt any better, how did he know I was sick?! I swear that I have found myself, inside my own house, thinking that I should behave nicely because someone may be watching” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

As any bubble, one of Nordelta’s feature appears to be its inner transparency: “Our houses are like showcases, and guards can see every move”, said Werner without a worried note in his voice, confirming Paula’s opinion: “We moved in when our sons were independent, and they were very critical of having them [the guards] lurking around, but I know that if they moved here, they’d get used to them in a heartbeat.” His wife Patricia thinks alike: “guards are people we *know*, that we see every day. When you move in, it may feel a bit weird to have this guy seeing everything, but then... I don’t know, it’s the same thing that happens with the lady who comes to clean. You just have to get used to it, that’s how I see it” [Field Notes, June 21st, 2009]. Carla concurs: “This place gives me the impression of those Barbie’s houses, right? Those that you open, and you can see everything, and people don’t mind” [Field Notes, May 9th, 2009].

Summing up the different narratives, mechanisms, and technologies which compose Nordelta’s legal system, it is appropriate to say that the neighbourhood does not have, at least not at the moment, the “series of adjacent, detective, medical, and psychological techniques” usual in domains of surveillance, diagnosis, and possible transformation of individuals; at least not as a dominant force. Its legal apparatus has more a juridico/legal nature, which operates dividing behaviour into those contributing to order, and those that do not, and concentrating on sanctioning transgressions rather than on transforming people. The judicial system, though, composed of people and technologies in charge of finding and punishing such transgressions, does operate in a more disciplinary way, although is less effective, and less developed than the former. In 2009, the local newspaper Gallaretas made

a poll to know if neighbours approved or rejected fines being publicly published, and the first option won with 75% of the preferences. One of the many comments received said the following: “Without rules there is no society. The most developed countries are those with the strongest and more rigid control systems. They don’t follow rules because they are morally superior, but because they are heavily sanctioned if they don’t. We have to sanction offences, and the most effective sanction is the social one.”

6.3. SPATIAL DESIGN: A CALCULATED DISSYMMETRY

After a couple of months uselessly trying to access Nordelta, I asked my friends and relatives back in Chile if they had any contact living in Nordelta, finding out that my spouse’s sister-in-law’s aunt had an Argentine nephew called Tomás living there. Although this may sound like a meaningless tongue-twister, in both Chile and Argentina it meant that we were relatives, obliged to attend each other. I have talked about Tomás previously, but I have not mentioned how we finally met, which is important to the point I now need to discuss.

In March 2008, two months after arriving in Argentina, I called Tomás to introduce myself, and he regretted not receiving my call sooner. We chatted for a while and I asked for his help: “I don’t know if I’m the best guy you can call”, he replied, “we moved here not long ago, and our whole life happens in the outside; we live an isolated life here.” They were building a house in Santa Bárbara at that time, the nearest gated community, and they planned to leave Nordelta in about ten months. I don’t know anybody else there, I replied, and it’d be really helpful if you could show me around and, introduce me to some people. “No problem, come and see me” he replied, and so I did.

The day we met I went there by bus and had to wait for him at Nordelta’s main gate. He arrived driving his “modest” Honda Civic, as he described it, which immediately surprised me because it challenged my prejudices regarding Nordelta’s luxury. When I met his aunt back in Chile, she told me quite proudly that he ran a large leather factory, so I was expecting a different set of status symbols. I got in his car, he shook my hand strongly, and asked if I wanted to have a look around. Of course, what do you want to show me? “I have to be

somewhere at eight, so that gives us like... 30 minutes or so. Let's drive around, and you can tell me when to stop." We took the main road, *La Troncal*, and he gave me a tour, which mainly consisted in seeing the entrances of every single one of Nordelta's *barrios*: "Look over there, that's La Isla, the most expensive *barrio* around. The best houses are there, two or three million dollars each", he said, stopping for a minute. We moved along, and on the second stop he showed me a large and rough terrain (fig. 6.2). It had no sign of artificial infrastructure, except from some recently asphalted cul-de-sacs and a line of lamp posts: "They are making a new *barrio* over there. Each plot is worth \$250,000, \$300,000 dollars. That's just the empty plot, about 1,000 m²" [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008].



Fig. 6.2. A new *barrio* under construction. Photo by the author.

For the next half hour, our trip continued with brief stops, and scattered information regarding the quantity and value of plots in each *barrio*. Is there something every *barrio* has? "They all have a couple of small squares with playgrounds for children, and a social club, which *propietarios* can book a date to throw parties, organise birthdays, or so". And how they differentiate from each other? I asked back, learning that some *barrios* had access to the internal lakes, while others had access to the main river; some had a common swimming pool, while others had tennis courts, soccer fields, or a golf course; some had docks, while

others had shared barbecue places; some were composed by detached single-unit houses, while others had apartment buildings. Fig. 6.3 presents a sample of how different *barrios* are presented in advertising, and of the different features they have. Overall, the sum of these factors contribute to pair each *barrio* with a particular lifestyle, which at the same time is paired with a certain monetary value and prestige: “Nordelta offers you different things”, explained Claudia, “you have very expensive and cheaper *barrios*, and they sell them to you as if they have different features, like ‘this one is for people who like water sports’, and ‘this one is for seniors’” [Field Notes, May 5th, 2009].



Tipas

Tipas has average plots of 500m², and its own lake to enjoy a constant contact with nature. It also has a *club house* with tennis courts, swimming pool and barbecue area. Its located next to Northfield School and nearby Nordelta's access through Benavidez. It was recently put into the market, and it will be consolidated soon: half its plots are already being built.

Leer más

La Isla

La Isla is one of the most exclusive barrios within Nordelta, with plots from 1,000 to 5,000 m². It is located over the Central Lake, with clear views upon it. It has a club house with tennis courts, swimming pool and playground squares. It is located meters away from Michael Ham School, Northlands and Cardenal Pironio.

Leer más

Islas del Canal

Islas del Canal is the first gated neighbourhood composed of condominiums, and surrounded by the biggest of Lujan River's channels. It constitutes an unique proposal within Nordelta, for being a medium density gated neighbourhood with direct access to Luján River. It has an excelent location, foot distance from Bahía Grande's gastronomic area, and metres away from Nordelta Shopping Centre and Nordelta Medical Centre.

Leer más

Los Castores

Los Castores was one of the first barrios launched within Nordelta. Its plots are of an average of 1,100 m², and most of them have a shore over Central Lake, with breathtaking views. Its propietarios every day enjoy practising motorless water sports (windsurf, kayak, botas, paddling) y sport fishing from the garden of their houses. Castores also has an important sports infrastructure, with eight tennis courts, a sports beach, a football pitch, a swimming pool overlooking the Central Lake, barbecue area, main club house, secondary club house and playground squares.

Leer más

Las Caletas

Las Caletas is a nautical barrio with shore over the Main Channel of Luján River. Many plots have private docks, and for those who doesn't, propietarios can rent one on the club house to sail away. Its plots have an average size of 1,000m², and the whole barrio is consolidating, with houses built on over 90% of its plots.

Leer más

Fig. 6.3. *Barrios*. Taken from Nordelta's website at www.nordelta.com, on December 2015. Translated by the author.

Each of these 24 *barrios* (see again fig. 1.2.) possesses its own *sabor* (“flavour”) or *gusto* (“taste”), as developers like to declare. Trying to appeal different niches, Nordelta’s Masterplan has given each one particular spatial feature that makes them different from each other, such as the size of the plots, whether they have access to shore, or exclusive services like a golf course. In a way, one could sort them all –as *propietarios* usually do– according to their monetary value and prestige. At the same time, the ranking of most exclusive *barrios* is paired with a set of nicknames *propietarios* have given them. At the upper part of the list we find La Isla, informally called *El Beverly Hills*, “where very important people live” [Werner, Field Notes, September 10th, 2009], and at the lowest, Portezuelo, known as *El Bronx*: “And this one is Portezuelo”, showed me Tomás, finishing his tour, “the *barrio* for scums like me. There are a thousand flats here, and they want to build a thousand more. Did you see the rabbit hutches, those yellow houses? That’s where I live” [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008] His feeling of living at the lowest end of the internal food chain was shared by everyone I met at Portezuelo: “We are ‘the pariahs’, the low-lives” complained Werner, to which his wife Patricia added: “For the people in Nordelta, we are the *negros*, they think like that. They have categories, that always happens, in every society” [Field Notes, June 7th, 2009]. Silvia puts a note of sanity about these comments –but at the same time stresses their power– when she states that: “what worries me is that Nordelta’s kids may grow believing that poor people are people who live in Portezuelo” [Field Notes, September 29th, 2008].

Portezuelo is also known for being the ‘divorcees quarter’. Because it is the cheapest one, a number of divorced males chose to move there to be close to their families after they got a divorce, which is not well received by everybody: “Too many single men in a place with bored women having nothing to do all day... It creates ugly situations, if you know what I mean”, Alicia warned me [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009]. Months later, Patricia was talking to me about the different *barrios*, and when she got to Portezuelo she repeated a similar thing: “There’s a general mood of partying, like people visiting each other from one flat to the other” [Field Notes, September 10th, 2009].

Between La Isla and Portezuelo there are other *barrios*, like Barrancas del Lago, the only one built with prefabricated houses. The place was entirely sold by Nordelta S.A. to the American

company Pulte in a time of need, and the company opted to serialise the construction. Valentina lives there, and she told me that because every house looks very much alike, residents of other *barrios* make fun of them by calling it 'FONAVI', the name of the National Fund for Public Housing. Answering a question I did not ask, she added: "You come to terms with it when you know that each house had an architect who customised many things, so in a way it's not like they say" [Field Notes, 24th March, 2008].

Besides their face value, *barrios'* prestige depends on how old they are. Within Nordelteños, indigenous perception establishes a difference between those who were founded during the first decade, and the newer ones, a distinction carried out to families and individuals as well, between early residents and late buyers, who did not take any risks, and arrived when plots were expensive and everything was ready to be inhabited. Besides their foundational status, older *barrios* are praised because they have older trees, consolidated constructions, and more recognised identities; particularly, La Isla, Alameda, Castores, and Barrancas del Lago, and Portezuelo.

In any case, the strategy of dividing, developing, and selling space is not new to gated communities, being usually used for a double purpose: On the one hand, because there is not enough demand from upper class families to fill up large projects such as Nordelta, and so in a first stage, the most expensive or bigger lots are sold, and once the market is saturated, the cheaper and smaller ones go into sale. On the other hand, this strategy allows developers to easily divide areas by niche markets. In Nordelta's case, there are neighbourhoods for the retired, for large families, for rich(er) people, for those who like to go on sailing, and even for divorced parents, as mentioned, who are usually not in a position to afford two houses but want to live close to their children.¹⁷⁶

Like some divorced parents, not everybody lives in the *barrio* of their preference. Capitalism

¹⁷⁶ While promoting these differences, Nordelta's developers are also working to maintain the unity of the project. They regularly organise events such as sports tournaments, charity dinners and anniversary parties; they print a bi-monthly magazine and constantly inform the residents about new projects and developments in the area, creating a sense of belonging and royalty to the company (Girola, 2007).

does not work in such a way. When Tomás told me he did not like the social mix of his *barrio* Portezuelo, I asked what would he liked, which is a more or less mixed *barrio*, “less, of course, but I didn’t have the money to buy what I wanted. I would have chosen Castores, for its status, the houses, the lake, and the vibe. It’s one of the oldest and the best ones around. Houses can get as high as a million dollars! With huge plots, and one of the best views to the lake” [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008]. Territorial ascriptions are not necessarily engraved in stone, and the urbanisation shows a fluent mobility, enhanced by real estate speculation. Talking about future plans, many families told me that they bought their houses because it was good business, and their idea was to sell them once the price rose to a level that would allow them to move into a better *barrio* within Nordelta. This logic reveals not only the extent of spatial heterogeneity but also of social mobility. Tomás narrated one of these cases:

“My friend’s girlfriend, who you’ll meet now, lived for a couple of years in La Alameda and afterwards they built in La Isla. They bought their first house quite cheap, probably around \$160,000 dollars, and now it’s worth \$700,000, so they moved to a better neighbourhood. That’s how many people do things around here” [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008].

Outside Nordelta, the place is imagined as a single unit, but internally it is composed of multiplicities, which take shape in different *barrios*, each owner of a particular ‘flavour’. With their differences, a hierarchy is set, and social positions are located: “From the gates out, it all looks the same, but it’s not. If you have some class identity, if you move around, you’d know it’s not the same to live in La Isla (fig. 6.4) or Portezuelo. Prestige is known inside”, said Rubén. These social markers are not empty labels but power mechanisms that have the task to produce, as Pablo says, “a general line of behaviour” within each *barrio* [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009]. To display very expensive gadgets is not judged in La Isla, but it would raise some eyebrows in Barrancas del Lago; and to organise loud parties may be *normal* in Portezuelo, but not in Barrancas. Sometimes there may be some discrepancies about how the *barrio* has been defined, and on the set of practices it is supposed to house, like with the case of the seniors from Alameda who made a complaint because children made too much noise while playing on the outside.



Fig. 6.4. A house in La Isla, taken from La Troncal. Photo by the author.

It is a common strategy of disciplinary power to address the problem of space, the “hierarchical and functional distribution of elements” (Foucault, 2007, p. 35), and in general terms, internal regulations and how the barrios have been presented in the market have efficiently operated not just attracting a certain kind of population, but producing them as well. In Shein’s words, spatial distribution “can be understood as a mechanism of control, of discipline”, that provides effective, economic control over his inhabitants (2004, p. 11). As seen, there is an axis of symmetry uniting Nordelteños, but it is framed by, and functions thanks to these well-calculated dissymmetries.

6.4. Concluding Remarks

Gated communities are productive apparatuses that foster, protect and enhance a white race subjectivity among its population. Such discourse is being implemented (and resisted, at the same time) in the social body through relations of power, along with a series of mechanisms and technologies. One of them is a very restrictive code of conduct that regulates behaviours

within the community. The code is paired with proportional sanctions, and organised alongside a juridical body in charge of monitoring and sanctioning transgressions. Even though the system is perceived as very strict by the residents, they accepted it because it seems necessary to keep the place running. Most of the rules, in any case, are not that hard to follow, being just institutionalised versions of daily practices already dominant in the neighbourhood. They have been penned down not to persecute 'normal citizens', but to sanction 'abnormals'; that is, those who do not fit the norm.

A second strategy to normalise conducts is the organisation of space. Nordelta has devised a plan of partitioning and distributing its plots, dividing the area in 24 *barríos*, each with its own 'flavour' in relation to variables such as plot size, amenities, density, diversity and lifestyle, the latter established through marketing. The built environment functions as a form of regulation, constraining the behaviour of residents, and shaping their daily experience and social identity. In Nordelta, the particular combination of enclosure and openness perfectly aligns with the objectives of allowing a certain degree of freedom and diversity, while maintaining the 'foundation criteria' of the project.

CHAPTER 7

MANUFACTURING NORDELTEÑOS: INFORMAL MECHANISMS

*To speak of the invention of the self is not to suggest that we are,
in some way, the victims of a collective fiction or delusion.
That which is invented is not an illusion;
it constitutes our truth.*
– Nikolas Rose, 1996, p.4

Julieta and Daniel lived their whole life in downtown Buenos Aires, until she got pregnant and thought it was time to leave the city: “We started thinking about our baby, about the kind of life we were about to give him, and realised we wanted something different... something cleaner and healthier”, she recalls one afternoon over tea in her garden. I visited them a couple of times at their place, and I recalled that day was particularly pleasing, probably the most relaxing I spent with any *propietario* during fieldwork. I arrived at noon, and after chatting for a while she invited me for lunch. Daniel was working in Buenos Aires, but their children Amalia and Rafael joined us in a delicious meal cooked by Sonia, their Paraguayan live-in domestic worker.¹⁷⁷ Julieta narrated with great detail her first years in Nordelta, and after finishing dessert, she wanted to work on her garden; I offered some help, which she gladly accepted. Not being my area of expertise, my task was limited to watering the plants whilst she pruned around with a pair of shiny shears. I asked her how she *felt* when she moved to Nordelta, and even though she did not hesitate to qualify their decision as a “sound call”, she recognised the first months were far more harsh than expected: “Probably you see me now, with this big smile and living in this amazing place, and think ‘oh, she has a wonderful life’ ... and well, today I *really* do, but when we moved here I cried for over a year. I was so sad I almost couldn’t take it” [Field Notes, January 14th, 2008].

To excel in household management is Julieta’s main life goal, as she tends to repeat, and she gladly spends her days looking after her children, keeping the house running, and making small improvements here and there, “just to make life more pleasing for everyone”. After

¹⁷⁷ It is common in Argentina that domestic workers eat alone in the kitchen, after owners have finished and the table has been cleaned up. This was such a case.

many encounters, it seemed to me that she was, as she said herself, one of the most pleased people within Nordelta, satisfied with her life and family, and comfortable with how things had turned out to be. For those reasons, her comment about crying during the first months caught me off guard. Why it was so hard for you? I asked. “Well, I just *didn’t want* to live here. I was very independent before, and that completely changed when I came here. I lost touch with my friends, and there were so many things I had to coordinate just to move around that I almost went mad.” Was there anything in particular you were afflicted by? “I had all this huge space, green and beautiful, but I felt locked up, like in a cage” [Field Notes, June 1st, 2008].

Julieta’s experience is not unique. For many newcomers, their first period in Nordelta is rather grim, moving in demands a constant reassessment in their priorities and expectations, a re-distribution of their time, and the rewiring of their social networks. The sisters Nina and Trinidad, both in her twenties, had a similar experience. In Nina’s words: “We arrived almost four years ago, on our last year of school, and it was really hard for us.” Trinidad added: “It was hard for us, but for others it was worse. Two of our friends –and we don’t have that many–, left because they couldn’t handle it” [Field Notes, October 29th 2009]. Werner, in his early seventies, has seen this happen as well. One day we were walking around Portezuelo, when he suddenly pointed at one of the buildings: “Do you see that flat?” He asked. “People from Buenos Aires bought it around three months ago, but they haven’t integrated. They are about to go back now”. Does that happen often? “Yes, it’s a sad thing; for them, at least. One gets used to it” [Field Notes, September 10th, 2009].

Antonia is one of those who had a maladaptive mismatch with the Nordelta experience and decide to leave. She lived there for over a year but felt trapped and alone: “everything looks beautiful there. If you pay a visit you may think it’s paradise, but for me it was hell. I got really depressed, and was lucky to have a husband who saw it and got me out in time” [Field Notes, December 10th, 2010]. During fieldwork, I heard many different stories about those first months. It was a period people were always coming back to, and sooner than later I realised the importance it had in the whole narrative of their lives. With exceptions, recollections could be easily arranged in two groups: first, those which proudly remembered the grand

epic of the conquest, praising the people who participate in it for their courage and good instinct; and secondly, those which described the period as a sort of test, designed to prove if you *had it*, like Julieta, Nina and Werner did, or not, like Antonia: “If you manage to stay for a year”, Julieta says, “then you are gonna stay here forever”. In her experience, a year was the *golden threshold* of endurance, a hard period after which those who resisted finally got used to Nordelta, and started enjoying its unique way of life [Field Notes, March 24th, 2008].

For a long time, the second set of answers fascinated me, as they presented a question that may seem paradoxical: Why do people tend to suffer so much after moving into a place they have so dearly desired? The answer, I believe, is that in most cases Nordelta does not offer its residents a radically different lifestyle from the one they had before. Furthermore, it gives them the chance to continue, or even more, to increase practices they already had incorporated into their lives, or at least had looked forward to; particularly, those associated with a healthy and family-oriented way of life, like attending yoga classes, playing sports, having weekend barbecues, or spending “quality time” with their kids. The kind of lifestyle they were looking for in Buenos Aires, and thought the city could no longer provide. As such, the maladaptive mismatch many residents have with their new environments may occur because those elements they value so dearly begin to colonise the whole spectrum of their daily lives. Only then, after moving in, people realise how much they also cherish those other things they took for granted, like walking around through back streets, meeting friends in cafes, blending into a tumultuous crowd and, overall, being part of a dense rich urban life. So, while it may be right to say that newcomers have taken a vow towards a particular way of life, and that most of them have accepted its founding discourse as truth, it may also be right to say that there is a gap between the set of practices they were expecting to have, and the ones through which they finally end up conducting their lives. The foundations of their current life were indeed present in their former lives, but gated communities expanded and radicalised its possibilities.

To further understand this hypothesis, I must clarify that all along this thesis I have been trying to analyse a series of procedures, negotiations, technologies, and power mechanisms through which a purified environment is being produced. At the same time, I have traced the

genealogy of gated communities describing them as the most novel part of a long chain of power apparatuses. Until now, however, I have not said much about why they were constituted as such. In other words, what elements came together to give rise to this new domain. In this chapter, I would like to discuss such an issue by proposing that there is a particular discourse of truth lying at the core of these compounds, which is the ethic of comfort. A way of conducting oneself that seeks to avoid stressful and harmful experiences, like interclass interactions, while promoting positive practices related to well-being, such as living in a healthy natural environment, within a tight nuclear family, and in/with/through physically fit bodies. These practices began to appear during the nineties in the Argentine society, and slowly managed to appropriate and colonise part of the middle and upper classes' daily life. Real estate developers recognised this tendency, and have been shaping gated communities since then to foster such kind of life.

I would like to take a brief look at Greek classic philosophy, for which the ethical questions about well-being was of great importance. I have been consciously trying to avoid the cliché of referring to the Hellenic cultures to frame a theoretical discussion, particularly since I write from and about Latin America. However, there are questions and approaches firstly coined and discussed there which I believe are helpful to understand contemporary urban life in Argentina. Hedonism, and particularly Epicureanism, is the school of thought most commonly associated with it. For Epicurus, pleasure and pain are two connected experiences, as the former can only be achieved in the absence of the latter. There is an undeniable truth behind the fact, he argued, that every living being avoids pain since birth. Knowledge, power, wealth, righteousness, glory or freedom are objectives we pursue because –and as long– as they give us pleasure. Thus, it is essentially pleasure (*hêdoné*) the thing we seek for its own right, and not for the sake of anything further. In consequence, it is the uppermost natural virtue.

While most hedonists would agree life should be conducted through a calculated evasion of pain, cultivating *aponia* (freedom from physical pain) and *ataraxia* (freedom from mental

anxiety),¹⁷⁸ they would not agree on how to deal with pleasure in order to achieve fulfilment (Aristotle's *eudaimonia*). Cyrenaicism, for instance, proposed one should actively seek pleasant experiences¹⁷⁹, particularly those enjoyable by and through the body. Humans should be educated in techniques that would create opportunities for enjoyment, as for being individuals capable of savouring life. A hundred years later, Epicurus came up with a much milder version of this proposal. He placed more emphasis on the reduction of pain than on the maximisation of pleasure. Furthermore, he discriminated between different kinds of pleasures, making a call to avoid those which do not entail pain when not gratified, and those which would provide immediate satisfaction but pain in the long-term.¹⁸⁰ Democritus made a similar call to moderation, but not because prudence was virtuous but because it led to true well-being: "Pleasure and absence of pleasure are the criteria of what is profitable and what is not –he wrote. Accept no pleasure unless it is beneficial. Moderation multiplies pleasure, and increases pleasure. If one oversteps the due measure, the most pleasurable things become most unpleasant" (in Freeman, 1948, p. 88).

For Scitovsky, this moderated version of pleasure is what we call 'comfort', which is different because pleasure has to do with changes in arousal levels, while comfort is our motivation to maintain an optimal level of arousal regarding our environment (1992). Pleasure has no measure nor a limit,¹⁸¹ which is why its ephemeral, whilst comfort seeks a stabilised level of bodily and mental satisfaction, lowering arousal when it is too high, and raising it when boredom takes over. Germans talk about *gemütlichkeit* to indicate a similar cosy feeling of well-being, and in China the term *yǎngshēng* was coined centuries before the Hellenic culture

¹⁷⁸ A different diagram connecting these concepts proposes that pain and pleasure are inextricably connected, and no pleasure could ever be without pain (and vice versa). Schopenhauer and Nietzsche set their camps on this ground, claiming that people should try to maximise their well-being but acknowledging the role of pain.

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche praised hedonism in his first works, but after Darwin he shifted his point of view. From *The Morals* onwards, he stated that pleasure and pain should not be understood as goals, but states of being; symptoms or epiphenomena of a real true ethical principle behind them: the will to power. He would reject directing oneself towards hedonism, although pleasure, as a feeling of power, is not a feeling one should avoid.

¹⁸⁰ Cicero made a strong critique on Epicurus, stressing the ambiguity of his key concepts, especially pleasure. See: Cicero (1914) *On the Ends of Good and Evil*. London: Loeb Classical.

¹⁸¹ To a contemporary account of this idea, see Deleuze and Guattari notion of desire, through which they challenged both Freud's and Lacan's definitions, the former because he places it as a fact of human nature, the latter because he explains it as a lack caused by the separation from the m(Other). For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is, instead, "the result of a process of continuous social codification: society is a 'desire-machine'" (Houtum and Strüver, 2002).

to talk about a certain ‘cultivation of life’, which can be attained through mastering a set of what can be broadly understood as ‘health arts’: nutrition, exercise, crafts, and hobbies like calligraphy or music (Farquhar and Zhang, 2005). These three concepts, *gemütlichkeit*, *yǎngshēng* and *comfort* point at a similar *telos*: one must seek a pleasant life, but not indulging into the perils of intense passion. Putting aside shades and exceptions, which are unavoidable, this, I believe, is the central discourse of truth which guides Nordelteños’ way of life, providing the frame of reference that configures their ethical guidance: to avoid negative experiences, and to produce a comfortable life.

Going further, and following Agamben’s proposal, if a sovereign state needs to create *states of exception* to guarantee modern rule (1995), one could say regulatory power has produced gated communities as a new kind of exceptional space, which contrary to concentration and refugee camps,¹⁸² operate as protected reservations of *proper* and *healthy* citizens, not stripped down to bare life but set to live a fully qualified life: wealthy, beautiful, healthy, civilised, safe, and clean; a sort of a deluxe Noah’s ark for biopolitical and unequal times.

We may ask ourselves now what happened to Julieta, who, as other residents, cried her eyes out during her first months in Nordelta, but two years later appears to be pleased with her life? What internal and external processes managed to transform her in such radical way, reducing the gap between expectations and reality? These are some of the questions that guide this chapter. It is divided into six sections, each dedicated to a different mechanism through which residents’ subjectivity is produced. The first one sets the bar for the following by discussing what the norm is; that is, the parameter of the ‘proper Nordelteño’ by which people are measured. Against that backdrop, the second section analyses the role peer pressure plays in normalising residents, a process through which newcomers’ liminal position is dissolved. Third section looks at how identity has been artificially manufactured by Nordelta and some of its residents, and at the ways it has contributed to produce a certain subjectivity. Finally, I will analyse how peers deal with residents who do not fit the norm, such as nouveau riches, TV stars, and football players. They pose an internal threat to the

¹⁸² Which I am not taking here as the paradigm of modern biopolitics.

compound, and their 'pollution' is tackled through different strategies. Throughout this analysis, I intend to illustrate how homogeneity and comfort are being produced, and the proper citizen's subjectivity manufactured.

7.1. IDENTITY BUILDING

The first time I got into Nordelta I was not expecting to find a pristine paradise, but neither a place so filled up with bulldozers, construction workers, banging sounds, and bare-root trees ready to be planted. The neighbourhood was everywhere sprinkled with ceaseless construction sites and machines raising walls and fences, lakes and ponds, restaurants and golf courses here and there. At the same time, like a subterranean current running below the material one, a second city was being built, that of social identity. Cities are not composed only of material components but they have, as Sennett phrased it, 'flesh and stones'; and in Nordelta, just as bricks and planks were being placed, a social virtual reality was being produced by a wide series of practices performed by AVN and newcomers alike. The former institution has indeed taken as its own the task of assembling and guarding such identity, the latter, the neighbours, are a diverse group of people who have accepted, challenged, subverted, and transformed the aforementioned identity through arts and strategies deployed over social and urban space.

Most of Nordelta's first residents left Buenos Aires once 2001 crisis struck, and although they found there most of the things they were looking for there, such as safety and social homogeneity, they missed the strong personality the city had. In Buenos Aires, each *barrio* has a strong and defined history, with a rich and varied cultural life. Rubén, a journalist and *propietario* of the Castores *barrio*, presented this comparison in the following words:

"When you move to Belgrano or Palermo,¹⁸³ you have to learn the codes; how to move, how to talk, where to buy your bread, and to which club you'd cheer for; you enter a community. In here, everybody is new, and no one has codes, so there's a lot of effort to build a feeling. For me that is a problem, because it ends up raising walls. That necessity we have here to cut this place off from the rest of the

¹⁸³ Belgrano and Palermo are two Buenos Aires upper middle class neighbourhoods.

world has to do with this issue: that people need it to be able to identify themselves. We are lost, we don't know who we are, and every gesture is exacerbated here, to mark our belonging" [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

About the same comparison, Thuillier wrote that "one can take a walk [in Buenos Aires], cover ten or twenty blocks, and never find the same thing, while here is not possible to even take a walk. Nobody 'takes a walk' in the *country*" (2005a). A thing that certainly did not help Nordelta was its large scale, which demanded time to have people walking on the streets, mature trees, and enough buildings to appear less as the countryside and more as a town. So although the core values were clear, they lacked depth and shades, "we have many things here", Sofía said, "but it lacks character, it lacks personality, it lacks identity, they didn't build up an identity for it!" [Field Notes, September 10th, 2009]. José Abadi, a resident of the exclusive *barrio* La Isla, thinks alike. In *Revista Nordelta* he wrote: "Like August did in Ancient Rome, will Eduardo Costantini call a Virgil to write a plot for us, why not? There has to be some spirit, we need to create a Nordelta culture" (in Girola, 2008, p. 264).

Identity is an ever-changing activity, produced by the ways through which a 'we' is defined and drawn against an 'other'; and as such, it is always a process, always in motion. In traditional territories, such as neighbourhoods or countries, identity is forged through history, with different stories, places, and actors struggling to dominate the official narrative. Nordelta, though, was founded from scratch, and one of the tasks the developing company had was to imagine an identity. Before any stone was put in place, Nordelta existed in the mind of real estate moguls –Astolfoni and Costantini– and their staff of professionals and technocrats who helped them imagining the place. A few values were chosen, and the place was marketed on the one hand with focus on nature, health, sports and family life, which can be summed up in the concept of 'well-being'. Additionally, Nordelta was highlighted by its exclusiveness; not as a sumptuous or palatial place, but one reserved for a few selected people.

The art of living

Macarena wakes up every day at 5:45 AM, goes downstairs to her living room, opens the

curtains to admire the view, and starts her routine, composed by 20 minutes of breathing exercises, and another 20 minutes of yoga. After that, she prepares breakfast and wakes her family up. On Saturdays, she repeats the exercises but starting at 8 AM, and Sunday is her day off: "I need that time in the mornings to myself, to be in balance, and to have enough energy and peace for the day." On Thursdays, Macarena attends a meditation session at a neighbour's house, with other eight *propietarias*. I found out about these practices because our first meeting was on a Thursday, and after an hour or so chatting I was asked to leave because she needed to get her things ready: "I didn't know anything about meditation before, but I did do yoga back in Recoleta. I found it relaxing, and it helped me connect with my spiritual side. Here is different, though: you do it while looking at the trees, breathing pure air, and you don't hear a single noise except for the chirping of the birds. It's paradise" [Field Notes, November 12th, 2009]. Macarena lives in La Isla, a *barrio* that was marketed with these words in a 2002 brochure:

"An avenue surrounded by palms. Great green areas and parks. Lime trees, spruces, willow-trees and magnolias. A vast and silent water surface. Everything design and comfort could lead to live a better life. A place like this exists. And it is not at the end of the world. It is exactly in the geographical centre of Nordelta. Its name is 'The Island'."

Take *Revista Nordelta*, the development's official magazine. On its 12th edition, published in August 2005, they described Nordelteños as this:

"In its essence, a Nordelteño is a healthy, sociable, cheerful, and positive human being. Someone who trusts in a project, and rejoices in hearing the chirping of the birds, enjoying the purity of the lakes, and the adventure of sailing; who cultivates the election of an environment which prioritised *verde* [green, nature], well-being and exercise to achieve a full life, living in the same nature where he has decided to build his own house" ("Editorial," 2005).¹⁸⁴

I asked Ángel how he defined 'a good life' and he replied in a similar fashion: "Sports, green, pure air. It is that image we all have of a family going out on their bikes, all together". Alicia, his partner, added: "yeah, something like that. It's going out and enjoying a beautiful scenario, with birds and trees, no cars or people around; a good, healthy life, you know?"

¹⁸⁴ Original Spanish text has an unusual grammatical structure, which I have tried to respect in translation.

[Field Notes, April 9th, 2009]. Perhaps during its first decade Nordelta did not have a clear and profound identity, but now it does. Nordelta is today an immersive environment, with a strong narrative of itself, its own history, myths, symbols and rituals, presented and lived as the perfect environment where to live a 'good life', defined in terms of health, familiar life, and close contact to nature. It is quite relevant to notice that in most of my interviews, well-being was circumscribed to the experience of comfort, no reference being made to the production of knowledge, power, or even wealth, just the *pure enjoyment* of a 'very good life', as Nordelta's motto states (Fig. 7.1). In Costantini's words:

“the city has been designed seeking a balance between green spaces, water and urban areas; urban landscapes, the location of streets, schools, neighbourhoods, universities, shopping centres... the environment provided is marked by its urban and aesthetic harmony” (in Pírez, 2006, p. 41).

Residents in gated communities in general, and Nordelteños in particular, feel privileged to live “in close touch with nature”, as they like to say. Ample spaces, strong trees, beautiful animals, crystal clear lagoons, and deep blue skies are central features of every piece of advertisement produced by Nordelta or their associated real estate companies (fig. 7.2). The brochure advertising Cabos del Lago¹⁸⁵ includes the following images and phrases:

- *“An ideal place to enjoy unique sunrises and sunsets”*
- *“144 plots –with an average size of 937 m2– merge with the shore’s landscape, getting you close to Nature”*
- *“Discover that unique sensation of living with full comfort, enjoying a permanent contact with Nature”*



The logo for Nordelta features the word "NORDELTA" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below it, the motto "Es vivir muy bien" is written in a smaller, lighter blue, sans-serif font.

Fig. 7.1. Nordelta's logo and motto: "Nordelta: it's living a very good life".
Source: Nordelta's website, accessed on May 19th 2016.

¹⁸⁵ One of Nordelta's inner gated communities.



Fig. 7.2. Stills from Nordelta's Institutional Video, displayed on its web page. Collage by the author.

Mónica, Consuelo's oldest daughter, lives in Buenos Aires and visits her parents every weekend. We met for coffee in downtown Buenos Aires, and I asked her if it was on her plans to eventually move into Nordelta. "Yes, maybe, I don't know... probably" she replied, hesitating. What do you like about it? "The *green*, I think. Fresh air, tranquillity, those sorts of things. Every time I go there my *chip* changes. In the city I don't sleep well, but over there, it's like I'm a baby again" [Field Notes, May 22nd, 2009]. Nordelteños are proud to live in such a privileged environment. Going for a walk with Nina, she suddenly grabbed my arm and hushed. "Look", she said, pointing at the distance, "can you see that hare?" Oh, yeah. It's beautiful... do you see them often, or was I just very lucky? "No, there are lots of hares here! And they *love* to run. There are plenty of *caranchos*¹⁸⁶ and owls, as well." That sounds nice. Life must be nice here. "I love it here! with all this *green, water*... Sometimes I come home from the city, after travelling like an hour, and when I finally get out of the car I feel in complete peace" [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009]. Her feeling recalls that already mentioned by Claudia, who felt relieved after entering Nordelta, and that of Alicia, who confessed a

¹⁸⁶ A kind of vulture.

similar thing: “once you enter here, even the aroma changes. I always open the window to enjoy it, as soon as I cross [the gates]” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

Wildlife is particularly valued. Like Nina, Julieta cherishes having all sorts of animals on her daily life: “There are lots of birds here, different kinds. We also have beavers, and for some time I had a family of otters living below my pier” [Field Notes, January 14th, 2008], something mentioned by Tomás, as well: “Wildlife is amazing here. I bet I’ll walk you out later and we will see a hare running around. And if you see the lagoon at sunrise, oh, what a show! You can see beavers swimming by, ducks and swans, things you cannot put a price on” [Field Notes, May 8th, 2008]. Both the city and the countryside –the environment, with different shades–, are perceived as engulfing landscapes where human experience is embedded. In the city, senses are saturated and stressed out; within gated communities, they flourish, receiving pleasant stimulus.

Nordelta’s flag is a good example of this issue (fig. 7.3). It was designed by the developer and is currently in use everywhere: in streets signs, trash bins, paperwork, and waving at the entrance of every *barrio*, right next to the Argentine one.¹⁸⁷ On the one hand, to have a flag of their own reinforce their shared sense of starting something unique and anew, like pioneers of the 21st Century. On the other hand, it stresses the importance of nature, presenting a sun on its upper part, while the lower has a big ‘N’ with three colours: yellow for the sun, green for the trees and lawn, and blue for the sky.

¹⁸⁷ To offer a contrast, we should take Goddard’s descriptions of Buenos Aires’ streets during the 2001 crisis: “the only flag allowed was the Argentine flag; the only symbols were national symbols” (2006, p. 276).



Fig. 7.3. Nordelta's Flag.

For Nordelteños, to live a comfortable life is in part being able to enjoy the sensual pleasures of nature, to feel immersed in a place where simplicity and purity are the norm. Attending this, one may place nature as a primary value for residents, but my position is slightly different. Nature plays a vital role in a new discourse of truth, but the core value of such discourse is not nature nor purity, but comfort. Nature serves its purpose as long as it contributes to live a good comfortable life. It is, thus, a calculated ensemble of complex elements, put together by Nordelta through its different actors.

Overall, only the specific features of nature which respond to aesthetic values, or that could be lead in that direction, are cherished and protected. There is a discourse of a romanticised, pristine landscape, embedded within the heavy use of technologies and practices; of a land that has been manufactured by economic forces. A brochure published by Supercemento, Astolfoni's construction company, gives astonishing numbers: to build Nordelta's base line required moving over 23 million square meters of land, paving 81 kilometres of roads, installing 124 km. of gas and electricity networks, and another 74 km. of potable, irrigation, and waste water network (Supercemento, 2013). In the *propietarios'* discourse, though, the artificiality of nature is not put into question: "When I moved in, there was nothing in my

back yard, nothing” said Julieta, “it was just an empty plot, not a single plant around. And in *just* seven years, it is finally *a garden*”, she added smiling. Nothing is left out here, huh? “Everything is perfectly calculated, like Paradise. At the Troncal, there was an open call or something like that, and a landscape artist won. Andrea, I think her name was. They are always moving things around, creating, modifying the place to make it greener. Whatever doesn’t function is taken out, and that is why everything works beautifully, beau-ti-fu-lly!” What do you mean by ‘green’, I thought you mentioned there was nothing here before you moved: “Yeah, *nothing*, just wild grass and a few very weak trees, little things. Remember the big palm trees we passed by? Those were the first one they brought!” [Field Notes, January 14th, 2008]. There is, as it can be seen, a distinction between a proper nature, and one that does not fit the norm.

In line with this, the neighbourhood has been planned to hide things that may appear to be ‘too urban’ and ‘too distressing’, using natural elements to disguise them. One example are water barriers like ponds, streams and lakes (fig. 7.4) and green fences (fig. 7.5), devices commonly used to separate a *barrio* from the common area, the first one saving the need to use a metallic fence, and the latter to hide it under a green wall: “every barrio is gated, but to hide the fences, which are ugly and make you feel like trapped, they use those little pines and low bushes”, explained Claudia to me [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].



Fig. 7.4. Inside Nordelta: lake and house. Photo by the author.



Fig. 7.5. Inside Nordelta: internal road. Photo by the author.

I could write a list of all the ‘natural’ things that have been modified, manufactured, and are constantly in supervision within Nordelta, but it would be endless. In the natural domain is where I detected the clearest approach and use of a governmental power, in charge of keeping everything in balance. In Nordelta, almost every detail has been planned, executed and supervised, and the obsession AVN has with maintaining and improving its paradisiacal features aligns, as said, with the logic of biopolitical power like no other. News about nature, animals, plagues and pests, and other related issues dominate AVN’s website and social networks, and there is constant information on different issues, from wild life to grass, from bacteria in water to the amount of soap people may use when washing their cars, from the close scrutiny of every tree to the surgeries many dogs have to go through in order to lower the frequency of their barks. AVN even has a Chief of Environment, responsible for “every issue regarding lakes and green area management, including pest controls and cleaning Las Tunas Creek.” Among technical things, he is also in charge of “disseminating results and actions among Nordelteños, to increase their awareness of the environment they live in.” Of course I do not intend to criticise Nordelteños for living in an artificial environment, because to do so is an unescapable feature of human life, or of even form human whatsoever. As Ingold stresses, there is no environment less ‘natural’ than another (2005). What interests me is that Nordelteños do not want to fuse themselves with nature; they want to live a civilised and superior life, in which an improved, rationalised nature becomes an overall sign of prestige and guarantee of well-being.

This green narrative colonises everyday life, delineating a standard of normality to which people can look up and measure against.¹⁸⁸ The urge to return to nature is part of a milieu which claims for the individual salvation, to get in touch with what is pure and real, which in Nordelta is complemented with mechanisms designed to improve the government of the self, making themselves “the subjects, objects, targets of a truthful knowledge” (Rose, 1999). Indeed, self-realisation is a common concern for Nordelteños, the need to re-learn the arts of living in order to excel and transcend. Previously, I proposed Nordelta is part of a new era

¹⁸⁸ Every barrio has been named following references from nature or sport, such as *Los Sauces* (“Willow trees”), *Barrancas del lago* (“Lake gullies”), *La Isla* (“The Island”), *Castores* (“Beavers”), *Nordelta Golf*, *Los Lagos* (“The lakes”) and *El Yacht*, among others.

in Argentine history, where the overarching *ethos* has been challenged by one which poses individual comfort as a key value. It is a radically new scenario, and Nordelta in particular, and gated communities in general, are highly representative of the epoch. On one occasion, Ángel was talking about the idea of the bubble and he stressed that it was just a fantasy; something people created to feel protected: “from everything bad, like crime, poverty, beggars, disease; it’s what’s in your head, and what you want to leave out”. A couple of months later, we were talking about sports and I recalled the previous conversation: the other day you told me that disease was left out, what were you talking about? “Of course: take a look: here you don’t see sick people, no one on the street pushing a wheelchair or so... it’s a healthy place, and you can see how much people cares about having a healthy life” [Field Notes, August 25th, 2009].

The importance of self-examination and self-realisation are grounded on the spread of New Age confessions in a social class already concerned with the purification of the mind and soul through psychoanalytic examination, which opened a whole field of knowledge that moved morality from the political sphere to that of the household and the self. Indeed, Argentina is the country with most psychologists in the world, and a leading force of the psychoanalytic community worldwide (Garabetyan, 2015). Let us remember that Argentina was forged as a nation over opposing distinctions between savage and civilised, Indian and white, American and European, religious and secular. Among upper classes, the sacred has been associated with premodern and primitive structures. In the past decades, though, the government of the self and the soul has been shifting from the domain of the rational modern structures of psychology to a holistic set of creeds and practices. Viotti has written about this phenomenon, analysing how middle and upper middle classes have embraced a ‘new spirituality’, which believes in a sacred interiority that can be reached and improved by different exercises, readings, travels, and habits (2015; Vargas and Viotti, 2013; Semán and Viotti, 2015). Perhaps a tipping point in this trend is the arrival of Mauricio Macri to the Presidency, someone who is a well-known sympathiser of *The Art of Life*, and has incorporated its premises into his life, discourses and government, for example naming a Minister of Happiness.

A review on Nordelta’s magazines, online forums, and daily conversations confirms that a common topic of discussion among *propietarios* are practices like meditation, yoga, Ayurveda, clean eating, beauty tips, health advices, ontological coaching, and EMDR (fig. 7.6), which promise to help them in a wide arrange of issues such as to prevent stress, find balance, prevent cancer, better sleep, and to find love, balance, and salvation, among others things. It takes no effort to realise the wide variety of these activities, and the fact that they have been imported from all over the world, particularly from Asia. Soffa’s older son, Felipe, is about to finish school, and she does not want him to study or work right away: “He’s just a boy, so I told him to spend a year in India. I hope he may find there those things that are essential in life.” Are you religious? I asked. “Every religion belongs to me”. Jewish, Catholic, Buddhism? “Absolutely, every one of them! They fascinate me. I don’t participate of any in particular, I am beyond religions... or perhaps before them, you see? I believe in one big world, connected, but not ideologically, in practice” [Field Notes, June 16th, 2009].



Fig. 7.6. Well-being ads. Collage by the author over images shared in different Nordelta’s social networks.

Asian mysticism is quite present in Nordelta, and people are drawn to it for its simplified image of purity, and spirituality (Said, 1978). Tomás and Constanza's house, for example, has a corner and an inner patio packed with oriental objects, like cranes, and buddhas. Why do you have these things, did you go there? "No, but I made this space because sometimes I come from work with my head spinning, and this place gives me tranquillity." I find your backyard quite pleasing! "Yeah, me as well, but this is different, is more like an internal peace, you know?" [Field Notes, May 9th, 2008].

Exercising mind and soul is accompanied by different activities destined to produce a healthy body, sports being the central one. Every *barrio* has football fields and tennis courts; and in every major feast or Nordelta's anniversary, different sport events are organised: marathons, yoga sessions, massive aerobics encounters, taekwondo exhibitions, cycling and kayak races, tennis tournaments and football championships. There are residents who enjoy these events, and others like Claudia who do not like them much but attend anyway: "Every weekend there are sport events, and it is not really something I care about much, but if I don't go I feel like I'm gonna miss things, that I'd be left out" [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

If we understand identity as a form of subjugation, and "a way of exercising power over people and preventing them from moving outside fixed boundaries" (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 140), sports and spiritual practices have a way to oblige people to become part, to perform: "There are more expensive and exclusive *countries* than this one. Other places have larger houses and richer people, but marketing exposed Nordelta like no other, and they chose to market the name as synonymous with self-realisation. It is something you constantly have in your head, like 'should I be doing something to be happier?'" [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. As a power technology with a spatial expression, I believe that Nordelta's main purpose is to produce itself as a place that would allow proper people to enjoy themselves in the look for comfort, where you can live 'a very good life'.

7.2. PEER PRESSURE

Asking why people come to smoke marijuana if it is usually unpleasant at first, Becker said the redefinition from unpleasant to pleasurable typically occurs “in interaction with more experienced users, who in a number of ways, teach the novice to find pleasure in this experience, which is at first so frightening” (1953, p. 240). He recalls the description of an experienced user: “You have to reassure them, explain to them that they're not really flipping or anything, that they're gonna be all right. You just have to talk them out of being afraid. And to come out with your own story, you know: ‘The same thing happened to me. You'll get to like that after a while.’ Pretty soon you would make them feel good and safe” (1953, p. 240).

This chapter began with Julieta, who had a hard time adapting to Nordelta, not finding herself comfortable with her new setting. One place she found solace in, though, was with her new friends. She told me she managed to stay in Nordelta and to cherish her new life, at great extent, because of the people she met, who guided her as Virgil through the circles of hell: “I was lucky to make good friends, who gave me enough courage to survive. They kept telling me it was just a phase, that they went through it as well, and that it goes away after a while. Good thing I listen! Because today I wouldn't leave Nordelta for anything in the world” [Field Notes, January 14th, 2008].

Today Julieta does not only enjoy her life in Nordelta, but she has become a wheel of the same machine that welcomed her a few years ago. In her words: “whenever someone new moves in, I gather everyone, introduce them, show them around, and try to make things as easier for them as possible” [Field Notes, June 1st, 2009]. Her efforts to make newcomers feel at home are ways to educate them in how to live and enjoy a proper life, which cannot but happen in daily life: “Aristotle is explicit: the virtues that are the dispositional ground of ethical action do not reside in human beings by nature, but can and must be cultivated only in and through practice” (Faubion, 2011, p. 23). In a similar line, Bourdieu wrote that everyday life is the space where the social is produced, which is done through embodied practices that escape rational calculation (1990).

Streets are one of the first places where people socialise after moving in. While talking a stroll, or walking the dog, they see each other, greet each other, and engage in small talk in which they look for affinities and common acquaintances. Claudia, the architect who lives in Portezuelo, thinks *boca a boca* (“face to face”) instances are essential for a good life:

“People spend lots of time on the streets; kids here are never alone, there are always grown-ups walking around and having a look, so you pass by and say ‘hi’, you tell them something, even domestic petty things, or neighbourhood’s issues. A neighbour may say: ‘a rat appeared in my back yard’, ‘yuk, how terrible! If you call the *Intendente* he will send someone to take care of it’, and things like that, you see?” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

Claudia’s MA thesis in architecture was about social life within gated communities. During the entire extent of her research, she felt the subject was ill-received by her peers and advisors at the university: “they were too ideologized, and never gave my hypothesis any chance, which was that we are not the individualistic sort of people everybody says we are.” What sorts of things did you find out, specifically? “That we support each other in three ways: instrumentally, emotionally, and informatively. For example: I was on sick leave and had to stay in bed for a while, and during that time I *knew* I could count on my neighbours. Even those with whom I did not relate much. I knew that if I had an emergency, they would have been there for me.” Running as a current underneath the friendly chats, daily conversations help to measure one another; to confess, compare, criticise, learn, imitate, and impose. “if you miss an *asamblea*” Claudia explains, “someone would come by and let you know what happened” [Field Notes, May 5th, 2009]. Daily conversations put pressure on the individuals considered as lagging behind, or not behaving as they should.

Normalisation judgement operates within Nordelta, including on the streets, as Julián’s story of how he learnt to ‘drive like a Nordelteño’ reveals:

“I remember the first months I used to drive in the same way as in Capital: like a madman, always in a hurry, stressed... I drove so fast the car flew when I passed over speed bumps. I don’t think I ever went over the speed limit, but I was *careless*. And then one day, I was driving as usual when I overtook a car with a reckless move; a couple of meters later, we both had to stop at a

crosswalk, and I saw the other driver looking at me with such angry eyes that I felt like shit. I realised where I was, in this amazing, quiet place I had been looking for, and that I was destroying it" [Field Notes, December 17th, 2008].

The streets are part of a network of spaces where power is enforced, and subjectivity modelled.

Gossip also works as a normalising sanction, punishing those who deviate from the norm; not to repress, but to correct them: Silvia states its presence is inescapable: "Everybody knows each other here, at least by sight. That's how gossip starts." And where do you hear things? "Everywhere! That 'so-and-so met so-and-so', all those things... you have to be very careful" [Field Notes, September 29th, 2008]. Macarena lives in La Isla, Nordelta's most exclusive neighbourhood, with her husband Miguel and their two sons in a 1,000 m² Mediterranean style house, a construction supervised down to the smallest detail. The first time we met she showed me around, and when we got into the back yard, she pointed at the swimming pool and remembered the following: "this is the only part of the house we hadn't planned at first. We preferred a larger *patio* than a swimming pool, but then every time someone came, the questioned popped: 'why don't you have a swimming pool?!' 'How do you survive summer?', 'So, it was true you don't have one!' In the end we built one, as you can see" [Field Notes, October 28th, 2009]. Claudia, who cherished her neighbour's kindness, also acknowledges the power their words have: "If I miss an *asamblea*, drop chorus practice, or leave the Green Areas Commission, I would feel very bad; I would feel bad if a neighbour asks me why, and I'd start justifying myself, like 'yeah, I'm sorry, it's just that...'. I am well aware that *I have to participate*" [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Friends' company is key upon arrival, especially for women, but relationships tend to weaken in time. According to Alicia: "we made friends out of need, but then you start realising that with this guy you have your differences, and with that one you have another one, and this lady, well, she's not as cool as you used to think. You socialised with them because you had to, not because *you chose* them; and you socialise until you don't need them anymore" [Field Notes, June 9th, 2009]. In broad terms, these relationships serve an instrumental purpose

rather than the fulfilment of a desire: for old residents, they are a way of preventing deviant behaviour, while for newcomers, a way to fit in. Neither have the need, nor the urge, to create a community: “I don’t like bumping into people, I don’t like it at all” complained Tomás, “I like to live an independent life, that’s why I don’t mingle here. I just come and go.” Rodrigo blames two factors for this social apathy: “richness destroys solidarity because you don’t need anything from anybody, and the other thing is geography. We are all scattered here, separated by lakes, roads and green fences, there’s too much distance between people” [Field Notes, July 17th, 2008]. For Carla, as for others, such thing is not necessarily a negative trait but something they actively looked for: “We wanted a house with a large back yard, where we could make our life outdoors, to the back. We wanted privacy, to be just us and not see anyone else”. You were not looking to have a more social life? “No! *Juntos pero no revueltos* [“side by side, but not eye to eye”]” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

Ángel thinks the formula for a healthy social life is to keep “a basic politeness. I think almost no one comes here to make friends. A neighbour will never knock on your door inviting you to play cards or whatever” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009]. Even Claudia, the great advocator of gated communities’ social life, confessed she did not have friends in Nordelta: “if you ask me about *friends*, no. Not really. I believe that, well, it’s something I’m trying to... a subject I’m currently studying... people my age work a lot, they don’t have much free time. A decisive thing is that I only have a baby, and what creates a multiplicity of social relationships are schools. Those women have lots of friends, you see them greeting in each other at the supermarket, or talking on the streets” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009]. The explanation she provides might be true. According to Rubén, most *propietarios* are young couples with young kids, “there are not that many elders or singles here, and 70%, 80% of the families have their kids at school” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010].

Schools, indeed, were by far the place most *propietarios* mentioned whenever I asked them where they interact with others. Some mentioned the streets, club houses, online forums, sport fields, and gyms, but schools were, without a doubt, acknowledged as the central hub of Nordelta’s social life:

Silvia: I made a lot of friends at the school. You share lots of time with them.

Alicia: Of course, if you have kids, you have no choice but to get involved. Some moms host tea parties, you have meetings to organise a show...

Silvia: Or a benefit event

Alicia: Or buying a present when is someone's birthday.

Silvia: And you constantly in touch with others, because they invite your kid to their place, or you want to invite them to yours...

[Field Notes, September 29th, 2008]

While the named things may be common practices in most Argentine schools, there are some particularities about those in Nordelta: "parents get involved in a way they would never do in Buenos Aires" said Ángel. What makes you say that? In what things do you see such a different attitude? "If my son gets a bad grade, or if there's an exercise he did wrong, parents will show up and try to talk to the teacher." That doesn't sound very different from Buenos Aires, does it? "But it is! Parents are *always* going to the school, for anything! The school has asked them to step back but is useless. As they all live together here, they organise and gather strength; they get together and march *tun-tun-tun* to school when they dislike something." Alicia contributed: "The school informed us the kids are having a student's trip to Cordoba, by plane, and in a minute everybody was like 'in which air line?' 'is it safe?' 'what about taking a bus?' and what about alcohol?' Next day, they were all together trying to decide what would happen. This is real, and it does not happen in other schools. Whether you go, or you don't, but you don't have the power to decide" [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

In Nordelta people are usually more involved with their children's education than in Buenos Aires, family life being a primary mark of the suburban discourse (Svampa, 2001; Ballent, 1998). According to Alicia, this scenario has produced a new educational dynamic: "Schools are trying to put limits on parents now. For example, they aren't allowed in, not without an appointment. There are security guards at the gates, and parents are at war against this situation, but the school is doing it as a way of preserve itself against parents." Carla had a friend who taught at Michael Ham's School before this rule was applied: "She left, couldn't handle it. Moms were there every day, with their nannies, their husbands, their mothers-in-law, driving her crazy" [Field Notes, May 9th, 2009]. Putting this situation in perspective, Ángel proposed to me what he called 'a wild hypothesis': "I believe that in Buenos Aires your

bubble was limited to your house, and when you moved here, you expanded it. Now all this territory, including the school, is part of your bubble, so there are no limits. People want to control it the same way they decide where to put a sofa or a table” [Field Notes, July 8th, 2009].

Schools are highly ritualised institutions, focused in disciplining both body and mind, and in maintaining an ideal code of conduct. In gated communities, the relationship between parents, schools, and students gets re-written, not only because parents get more involved, and show a more clientelist approach, but schools, as well, demand from them things they would not in the open city. Silvia, Constanza’s friend, compares her own education with the one their sons are getting: “I’m short-sighted, and when I was a kid, for years I had to stand up and walk to the drawing board, to copy what was written there. Nobody cared. Now the school forces me to take my kids to the eye doctor, to the dentist, to the psychiatrist, everything!” [Field Notes, September 29th, 2008].

All five Nordelta’s schools are branches of very prestigious Buenos Aires’ private ones: “They are traditional schools, very well-known; they are not just *any* school”, Ángel commented, to which Alicia added: “Máxima¹⁸⁹ went to Northland, and she married a Dutch Prince! A very strict school, for the elite. People move in knowing these schools are here, this kind of houses are here, and this kind of people live here” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009]. They add prestige to the neighbourhood, and people trust they can educate their children in a proper way of living: “I liked the education I had, but I prefer the one my kids are getting. They do plenty of exercise, get to spend time outdoor, and receive an education centred on values” [Carla, Field Notes, December 17th, 2008]. Of all the people I met in Nordelta, Ángel was one of the two residents who moved his kids to a school outside the compound: “I didn’t like the Northland’s ambience. It doesn’t have any diversity. They are fine schools, but they all look the same, dress the same, and act the same way, and I wanted something different for my kids”. Alicia added: “You have different families, different incomes, and even different religions, but they have similar habits.” What kind of school did you look for, instead? I asked Ángel: “They go to an American school, have you seen that in each city there’s an American school, where the sons

¹⁸⁹ Máxima Zorreguieta, Netherlands’ Queen.

of diplomats go? They are an example of anti-homogeneity, with Koreans, Chinese, Canadians... all sorts of people" [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

Homogeneity was a recurrent topic among residents, particularly when they discussed schools, an institution organised around discipline, where comparison is a norm with which people have to be measure with. In Ángel's words:

"There is a group of people, I don't know how many, but they are quite visible, who like to show off, and you see it at schools. Once I bought a Honda, and two of my daughter's little friends where chatting about which car was better, and things like that, which really bothered me. I have the car I want, and I don't look at my neighbour's, neither I am judging them. But there's a lot of that" [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

I would like to finish this section by commenting one other place where people measure, compare, and normalise each other, which are online forums. While *asambleas* are the institutional space where *propietarios* gather to discuss and decide courses of action, informally most things have been previously settled in online forums. They are organised by *barríos* and have a more frequent and intense use than *asambleas*. Many residents avoid forums as they "bring out the worst in people", in the words of Trinidad. She thinks they are useless because "there is too much gossip on the forums, and too much information, silly stuff, about how to water your plants, or what brand of paint kills fewer bees. And they fight! For the most ridiculous things." Her sister Nina agreed: "Sometimes the forum is a whorehouse. It's like people here can't solve anything between them, so if someone has a problem with someone, s/he sends an email to the forum, to denounce them in front of everybody. They love doing that" [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

One way to understand online forums as normalising mechanisms is framing them as confession technologies. Researching how educational systems of different European countries are standardised through confessional logics, one study states that:

"The efficiency of the confession relies on a form of peer pressure and naming, blaming and shaming (...). It appears shaming not to comply with objectives that have been mutually agreed upon. Most member states will probably seek to

comply with the guidelines in order to avoid negative criticism in peer reviews and recommendations. Most countries prefer not to appear on lists of poor performers. Thus, the stocktaking process as a surveillance technology of the self and others through confession puts pressure on member states to comply with mutually defined goals” (Olsson, Petterson and Krejsler, 2015, p. 102-103)

Pablo (male, around 65) lives with his family in one of the biggest houses I accessed in Nordelta, in the prestigious *barrio* of Castores, and thinks alike. Friend of Trinidad and Nina’s parents, he agreed to see me on one of my last days in Argentina. We had a glass of water in his living room and chatted for over two hours about our views on the neighbourhood. He thought Argentina suffered regular crises because they, as a nation, were reluctant to see themselves with honest and open eyes: “We crash into reality every now and then, because we have not tried yet to evolve as human beings.” Language, for him, was the only way to “de-stabilise what we have created, and achieve constructive harmonies”. And what about Nordelta? Is it possible to produce here that sort of communication? “In Castores, we have a[n online] forum –he replied–, where we discuss problems, and people tell what they think, sharing different opinions and points of views. And it is very clear to me how the whole system tends to moderate things. Participants tend to moderate themselves, and others help in that process by saying things like: ‘listen, you shouldn’t say things that way, it’s aggressive, say it in this way’, ‘that’s true, my apologies’, that sort of things, and like that, a sort of balanced water is produced.” And that’s unique to Nordelta, or is it a thing you can usually find in Argentina? “Here you can find a common factor of *will*. You come from the conflict, tensions, and tiredness of the city, and here it’s like ‘bang!’ You may explode, but there are others who will say: ‘stop, take it easy’” [Field Notes, October 29th, 2009].

As confession, online forums may be operating as self-monitoring institutions, where people constantly assess, evaluate, and compare each other. In La Alameda forum at yahoo, a post signed by a Daniel says that Nordelta streets are feeling much like those of Buenos Aires lately, “not because of the landscape, which here continues to be beautiful, but for the dog shit, which is more frequent every day. Why do so many proprietarios take their dogs out and leave their necessities lying there?”. The post had two replies, one backing up his opinion, and the second one by someone who wrote: “I am ashamed to say that I am, or was, one of

those who didn't pick them up. I love Nordelta, it's pure air, openness, and all that *green*. I'll take better care of it, I think we all need to." The comment was unsigned ("Cuidando nuestras calles," 2012).

There are many different ways of being a Nordelteño, one just cannot fit them all into a single voice. But through daily conversations, gossip, and comparisons, a certain kind of behaviour is being modelled among residents. These operations are constantly occurring in different places, such as the streets, schools, and online forums, which install systems of supervision and control, of prevention and correction. These procedures are not necessarily external to individuals but lived and embodied by them as a mode of existence. Academic literature has historically tended to place its eyes on the restrictive and rather negative dimensions of gated communities: in how they fragmented space, segregated population, or contributed to increase social inequalities. Inverting the analysis, but without disregarding such claims, this research has been making focus on their productive role. In particular, this section has attempted to discuss a set of power mechanisms applied by people over their peers, through which the proper citizen's subjectivity is produced. From that starting point, the next section will analyse what happens when peer pressure is not enough, and unwelcome residents refuse being normalised.

7.3. OF STOWAWAYS

In many Argentine gated communities, when someone wants to buy a house, they have to pass through a series of tests designed to prove their worthiness. The first stage usually includes an interview with the directive board, and the filling of an extensive form which asks professional and personal questions such as family composition, hobbies, sporting practices, and even income and creed. Afterwards the gathered information is sent to the neighbours and posted at the club house, and a secret ballot called called *bolilla negra* [blackballing] is taken among neighbours, who vote whether they accept or reject newcomers. A single vote is enough to reject the applicants.

Nordelta is one gated community among many where *bolilla negra* is forbidden: "If there's a

thing that distinguishes us”, explained Rubén, “from other large developments, it is that we don’t do it. Each of our *barrios* is a *Sociedad Anónima*,¹⁹⁰ so you just need to buy a share to get in. We are not a traditional *country*, like Tortuguitas; we don’t have patrician surnames, or a fixation with class and lineage. People who live here, we are just professionals, executives, and *PYME* [SME] owners” [Field Notes, December 21st, 2010]. Without a strict discrimination process, composed of just a handful of documents and background checks, anyone with enough money may buy a place. This is perceived by many as a mismanaged source of contamination. Ángel, for example, feels that “80% of the people here is open-minded, educated, intellectuals, but then you have... well, *others*, who economically grew up very fast and like to show themselves as something they are not” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

The problem with *nouveau riches* is not their origin, but their improper ways of behaving; in other words, they may have the sufficient economical capital to belong, but not the cultural one, and so their practices are not completely adjusted to the norm. For example, as a general characteristic, *Nordelteños* –when they can– like to show off their wealth in ostentatious fashion, and spend it on luxurious goods, like expensive cars, tech devices, and frequent trips abroad. Such practices are not ill judged, nor thought of as defining traits: “I like to say this is a *socialist* neighbourhood”, Ángel explains, “because, well, it’s not cheap, but every house cost about the same, so you can’t really use it to differentiate yourself. We are all upper middle class, or however you’d like to put it. Some may have a larger swimming pool, and others may have three or four fine cars, but in the end we all are equals, you see?” [Field Notes, April 9th, 2009].

There is, however, a limit to how much you can flaunt at others, and moments and places where and when it is improper to do so. Such a fuzzy line is commonly drawn by the very residents through their critiques to *nouveaux riches*, who, they think, tend to overdo it: “It’s funny to see at Disco¹⁹¹ these women dressed up like they are going to a gala, with their best rags and jewels on, and we are walking through the aisles with our leggings!”, Valentina told

¹⁹⁰ Non-Profit, Private companies limited by shares.

¹⁹¹ The local supermarket, located at Nordelta’s Shopping Centre.

me [Field Notes, March 24th, 2008]. One evening I found Werner quite upset because his neighbour just bought a huge Hummer SUV, which was noisy and occupied too much space on the sidewalk: “With these things you realise it’s not wealth, but *nivel* [status]”, he said, “There are plenty of people with money around, but some don’t have enough status to live here” [Field Notes, June 7th, 2009]. To be wealthy is not the question, probably because people need to have a comfortable situation just to buy a plot; the question is, according to Werner, whether “you have it or not”. According to Valentina, the reason for these class performances is that “unlike other places, Argentina has always had a large middle class. After 2001, though, things started to polarise and part of that middle class became impoverished, while the rest succeeded... and now they feel the need to exhibit their wealth, it’s like a victory trophy for them” [Field Notes, March 24th, 2008].

Walking through the neighbourhood with Julieta, in my first visit to Nordelta, she pointed at a large house and start complaining: “You see that *gold*? Now it has worn down a bit, but it was very intense, like electric, horrible! All houses here have colour, but colours that do not hurt the eyes. When Nico [a famous singer] bought the house and painted it like that, we didn’t say anything, although we commented among ourselves: ‘why are they allowed to use any colour they want?!’” [Field Notes, January 14th, 2008]. This ‘judgment of taste’, in the words of Bourdieu (1984), operates as a marker of class; in this case, of a proper citizenship, which is defined first and foremost by the living of a comfortable life.

Football players occupy an ambiguous position in Nordelta. On the one hand, they are admired by many residents, who do not hesitate to ask them for a photo and are delighted when they have the chance of watching them play *baby fútbol* [Five-a-side football] on a Saturday morning. On the other hand, there are *propietarios* who complain of their properness, like Héctor, for who “the importance sports have in this country, and in Nordelta as well, is disproportionate. I think *culture* is the biggest failure of this place. To live here, you are not asked to take any exam; not a single cultural, ethical or moral test, just to hand out a bag of cash.” But I imagine that one thing is to get in, and a different one is to be accepted, I replied. “It’s all in how you behave. If you are bad, and do things different from us, you’d be in trouble. I made myself a promise, you know? To chase them, no matter what. In the forums

I'm ruthless. I treat them as *villeros con plata* [rich squatters], and tell them things. I have a cultural level above the rest, and people respect me" [Field Notes, July 17th, 2008].

It is relevant to notice the key position Héctor assigns to everyday practices, as he assumes a definition of belonging not fixed to wealth or occupation, but to a lived and embodied way-of-being. It is a cultural and moral way of framing class that combines Pierre Bourdieu's embodied rationality, Michel Foucault's theory of power, and Mary Douglas' ideas on risk and contamination. In other words, class and belonging are the outcome of social practices, which are afterwards institutionalised and used as a moral compass to measure people's values.

Several football stars live in Nordelta, like Simeone, Traverso, and Almeida, who was one of the first buyers at Castores, and brought many of his friends to the *barrio*. So many, in fact, that the place is still today informally known as *Castores Fútbol* ["Castores Football"]. Another well-known player is Sergio Agüero, who plays for Manchester City, and is a recurrent figure of the national team. For years he was married to Gianinna Maradona, Diego's daughter, and they both were a common subject of jokes and comments among other residents. The following is one of many tweets that make fun of them:



Fig. 7.7. The tweet reads: "My dad went to Kun's house for a job, in Nordelta, and he told me he had a big mansion but they were all *negros*, haha."

It would be foolish to say that occupation or wealth has nothing to do with how they are valued. In Argentina, professional football players rarely come from the upper classes, hence their sole presence as such raises flags which do not discard them but make it harder for them to be acknowledged. To prove their worthiness is to conduct their lives in a moral way.

Diego Maradona's daughter lives in Nordelta, and so does Rocío Oliva, his former girlfriend. On a number of occasions, his visits ended up with domestic disturbances and with neighbours calling the guards. In 2014, the fights among the couple escalated, and the scandal hit national newspaper, stirring hundreds of comments like this one:



Fig. 7.8. The tweet reads: “Maradona and Oliva yelling each other in Nordelta. They only need a police precinct to complete the picture of *negros*.”

I may not be able to properly answer why do football players move to Nordelta, or what are they looking for, as I was unable to engage with them as much as I tried. Alicia attempted an answer, though: “I think they feel protected. They can go to the shopping centre, or run by the lakes, and perhaps someone will ask for their autograph, but it would be a few, and done in a good way. They can have a quiet life here” [Field Notes, August 25th, 2009]. Football players are an interesting case because they may not be looking to belong, to maximise their capital, or to improve their position in the cultural field. They may be looking for other things, and as such they become threats, because they disrupt the coherence between proper residents' disposition and the world that surrounds them. Without a *bolilla negra*, Nordelta is open to whomever has enough resources to buy a plot, and no mechanism besides gossip and peer pressure has been devised yet to increase control over those who do not properly belong.

7.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The expulsion from Paradise is an engraving made by William Turner in 1835¹⁹² (fig. 7.9). It portrays one of the most famous tales of human history: that of Adam and Eve leaving the

¹⁹² The engraving was actually made by Edward Goodall, based upon a drawing by Turner.

Garden of Eden after being banished by God. Turner spent most of his childhood in the countryside, after which he moved to downtown London. For the rest of his life, he suffered and enjoyed the city's hectic life and vivid changes. During that century, London had a sevenfold increase in its population, becoming what Disraeli called, not in good way, 'a modern Babylon' (1847). Confronted with this sight, Turner dedicated his work to exalt what Schopenhauer called 'the full feeling of sublime', which is the pleasure experienced when confronted with something that appears to be, at the same time, both magnificent and horrific, a "delightful horror" in John Dennis' words. Nature was the absolute, that which transcends our limits; an environ where we belong to but at the same time one from which we have detached ourselves. Kant confronted this experience and proposed that mankind could triumph over nature by the use of reason; but for Schopenhauer and others, the result of such a battle turned out to be the opposite: the solitude of modernity.

On Turner's engraving, Adam and Eve are being expelled from the Garden of Eden, seen in the background as a pristine natural valley, preserved and protected by artificial walls and gates. Angels are holding the gates –from which we may assume they usually remain closed– and with a big flaming sword in his right hand, an archangel is casting the first humans out of paradise. It is tradition that archangel Jophiel was the one performing that duty, which raises a question: Why not Michael, the warrior and advocator; Gabriel, the messenger; or Raphael, the healer? Jophiel means 'beauty of God', and his main role is to teach humanity how to produce and enjoy beauty: to see and cherish what is valuable, pure and pleasing. The Garden of Eden was the supreme domain of such things, and the experience of living there was one of fullness. Of the many paintings, engravings, sculptures and tales about this myth, Turner's may be the only one in which Jophiel is not expelling humans with the utmost strength, or with forceful and harsh manners. On the contrary, as he holds his sword in one hand, making it clear how final was the decision –not his–, he places the other hand on Adam's shoulder, comforting him while he cries. Heavenly compassion is unique in Turner's work, as saying: 'I am sending you to a world where there is no god, no beauty or goodness. My pity is with you.'

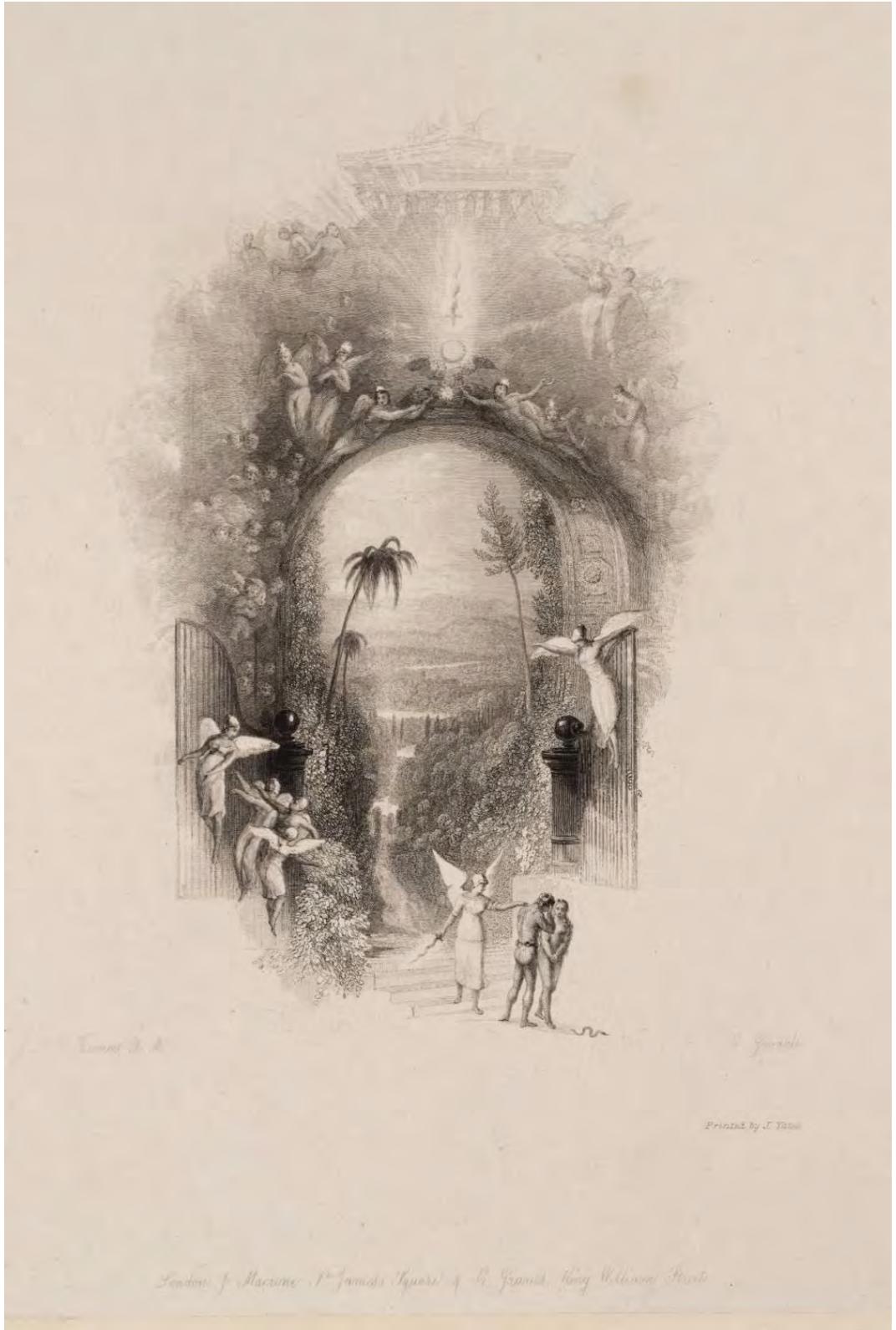


Fig. 7.9. *The expulsion from Paradise*, by William Turner (1835).

In *The expulsion from Paradise*, both human figures, Adam and Eve, are standing still outside the gates, ashamed and afraid, while under their feet a snake is seen running away. The gates, angels and figures are engulfed by a great white void, which creates the unsettling feeling of modernity. Taking a second look at the engraving, one cannot help but notice the resemblance of the gate and its upper pearly crown with an open vulva and clitoris, perhaps stressing the parallel between paradise and uterine comfort on the one hand, and of the double expulsion of heaven and womb on the other.

For Nordelteños, leaving their place is like leaving their own paradise. Remembering her first years in Nordelta, Carla reveals how fear of the outside world is day-to-day encouraged within the neighbourhood: “At the beginning I used to leave Nordelta like this” she said to me, putting her hands on an imaginary handle and ducking her head: “I wanted to die. Whenever I approached the main gate, I used to take a deep breath *aaaaahp*... and talking to my friends, they said they did the same: ‘see how you breathe when you enter Nordelta?’”. What scared you? “Well, people here scared you a lot. When I got here, people used to call me and say things like: ‘be careful when you go out, and the purse, and do not wear any rings, and keep these things here, and be safe when you stop on a light’. Nothing ever happened to me, I was lucky” [Field Notes, May 9th, 2009].

Besides Carla’s, two similar bodily experiences traverse this chapter: that of Julieta’s feeling out of place after moving in, and Lucia’s doing a poppysmic sound with her mouth whilst leaving the main gates. How to live in Nordelta is something people have to learn. It is based in a series of practices related to comfort and well-being most of them had already nursed and cherished, or at least wished upon, but in this new setting they find them to be hegemonic, and many have a hard time adjusting to such a way of life. Over, in, and through them, a series of mechanisms start operating, modelling their behaviour and subjectivity. To understand them has been the purpose of this chapter.

I have specifically placed my efforts in moving away from the most common route followed by scholars when they have analysed this phenomenon, which is the detection, analysis and systematisation of the particular features that distinguish life in gated communities. Reasons

to do so are, first of all, because that list has been thoroughly produced several times before (see: Ballent, 1998; Arizaga, 2000; Svampa, 2001; Girola, 2005; Rojas, 2007), and this research's findings do not really provided substantial novelty to justify such endeavour. Secondly, because by identifying cultural traits we may easily fall under the tempting threat of substantialising identity, and Nordelta is large and heterogeneous enough to make such task useless. More importantly so, rather than presenting these elements as disconnected, I have distinguished a common discourse of truth which encompasses the different practices through which Nordelta and Nordelteños are being produced: the discourse of comfort.

CONCLUSIONS

THE WILL TO ENJOY: A NEW ETHIC OF COMFORT

*If one wishes to understand the interest that was directed
in these elites to personal ethics, to the morality of everyday conduct, private life and pleasure,
it is not that pertinent to speak of decadence, frustration and sullen retreat.
Instead, one should see in this interest the search for a new way of conceiving
the relationship that one ought to have with one's status,
one's functions, one's activities, and one's obligations
-Foucault, 1986, p. 84*

Throughout these pages, this thesis has tried to develop three ideas that come to offer new perspectives on the discussions about gated communities, and secondarily, to the ones about race, citizenship, elites and territorial identities. My purpose has not been to refute previous answers but, as Nietzsche wrote, “to replace the improbable with the more probable, possibly one error with another” (1989 [1887], p. 18).

The first proposal questions the idea that gated communities are isolated ‘islands of wealth in seas of poverty’, as many authors have suggested. Two statements, apparently in contradiction, were thoroughly examined. First, that seclusion, self-determination and the quest for purity have played a key role in gated communities; and second, that despite their efforts, their borders are day-to-day crossed by a thousand different elements.

Regarding the former, we have reviewed a number of processes through which Nordelta has attempted to produce, as much as possible, a self-governed territory, with its own legal system, shadow state, citizens, private services, environment, rituals, symbols, and identity. In these matters, the control and regulation of its domains –the issue of sovereignty– appears to be paramount, both in material and discursive terms. Data has been presented regarding the physical and symbolical construction of its frontiers, the closure of its perimeter, and the privatisation of its roads and transportation services. Further, in different chapters I have discussed a wide arrange of mechanisms and technologies placed by Nordelta to monitor, reject and/or transform whatever attempts to cross the gates, whether be people, objects,

institutions, diseases or information. Foreign elements are usually perceived as menaces to the project's survival.

Regarding the latter, this thesis has proposed that despite all its efforts, Nordelta's borders are not fixed or impenetrable but blurred, creative and productive. Following what Derrida called *limitrophy*, I took a closer look at "what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit" (2008: 47), following the lives of the numerous elements that everyday reached the gates, triggering processes of transgression, resistance, transformation and/or re-classification. The ways permeability is administrated, monitored and eluded appear to be more eloquent of the gated communities' relationship with their surroundings than the sterility of the isolation discourse.

The second proposal moved forward by this thesis is that gated communities cannot be comprehended solely as novel entities caused by late-capitalist and neoliberalism. Rather, they have to be understood as a new technology inscribed in a long genealogy of racist power mechanisms set to produce Argentine 'proper citizens', while offering them a 'proper place' to dwell. This position does not minimise the role that neoliberal policies had in creating the conditions for these particular forms of urbanisations to flourish, such as privatisation, deregulation and social inequality, but offers a new way to frame them as part of a long genealogy of white subjectivity in Argentina.

Taking that "nothing can function as a mechanism of power if it is not deployed according to procedures, instruments, means, and objectives which can be validated in more or less coherent systems of knowledge" (Foucault, 1997, p. 52), the third statement concentrates on the system of knowledge that validates these particular techniques, mechanisms and procedures; that is to say, the specific discourse of truth under which they are articulated. My aim has been to show that this is one that places comfort as the uppermost *telos* towards which the lives within gated communities are conducted to.

This claim's starting point is to assume that most people want to live a 'good life' in the best way possible. Nevertheless, what that good life entails is culturally embedded, depending on

particular and non-universal moral codes: “Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth”, wrote Thoreau in *Walden* (2004, p. 321), stating his preference for one value over the rest. Anthropology has largely tackled this question by making visible how people’s ethical, moral and legal standards substantially vary between cultures¹⁹³. For the Argentine case, one can identify that during the 19th and part of the 20th century, a prevalent discourse among ‘proper citizens’ was to give meaning to their existence by living a life of political activity. For them, the ‘good life’ was one exercised in the public sphere, amassing wealth, and gaining dignity by working for the greatness of the country.¹⁹⁴ Of course there were other values towards which they would model their behaviour, but for a long time, having an honourable public life predominated as the highest human principle.

Starting in the seventies (Fridman, 2008), but burgeoning during the nineties, this governing *ethos* –understood as the way in which they think, feel, and behave towards the improvement of themselves–, began to change. The conditions of possibility supporting this transformation were multiple: first, corruption of public life with the invasion of ‘improper others’, who came to claim a place in the city, eroding the relation of the privileged with the *polis*; secondly, the new concerns of an ecological era, which re-positioned nature as the domain where one should turn to in the quest for goodness and solace; and thirdly, the spread of New Age confessions on a social class already concerned with the purification of mind and soul through psychoanalytic examination. These operations gradually opened and validated a whole new field of knowledge that moved morality from the political sphere to that of the household and of the self; that is, from *polis* to *oikos*¹⁹⁵.

It is hard to deny that gated communities came to reshape middle and upper classes’ residential pattern, but at the same time it is hard not to acknowledge that they were built upon a wide set of practices and discourses regarding self-government which were already present among part of the Argentine elite. As Ophir and Azoulay wrote: “it is not the wall that

¹⁹³ Although, as Faubion states: “Less ambiguously timely is my effort to clarify the parameters of the ethical domain at a period when I am far from alone in observing that talk of ethics is not often very clear but very often in the air, within anthropology and, as I have already noted, just as much outside of it.” (2011: 13).

¹⁹⁴ Or at least their provinces, if one takes into consideration the tensions of federalism.

¹⁹⁵ A political *oikos*, one must clarify, as thoroughly analysed by Agamben (1995).

has created the camp, but rather the strategy and reality of encampment which has led to the construction of the wall” (2005, p. 22). Gated communities became a reality *because* a series of practices had been continuously exercised and stabilised, and not the other way around. Practices like avoiding inter-class encounters, recycling, spending quality family time, and attending yoga lessons (Vargas and Viotti, 2013), that contributed to dismantle the traditional pairing between a proper life and a particular territory; and between a good life and the public sphere. For many privileged Argentine families, cities such as Buenos Aires ceased to be their natural *locus*, a pinnacle of virtue and refinement, while the *interior*, traditionally imagined as a place of ravaging barbarism, became a scenario suitable to shelter a proper way of life. Thus, in overall terms, one could say the nineties saw the intensification of practices and discourses among part of the elite that re-qualified their ideas of body and soul, nature, the nation and the state. Through these, new subjects were constituted, carrying a re-definition of what ‘good life’ was, comfort moving from the background to the foreground of the elite’s social compass, and becoming the new axis around which they would attempt to reflect, analyse, calculate, and conduct themselves.¹⁹⁶

This new order of things finally came together in the figure of the Argentine gated communities, which rose during the nineties by assimilating, appropriating, and gradually maximising the possibilities of the ethic of comfort. Finding in neoliberal policy the perfect conditions to thrive, gated communities were born and spread as sanctuaries where proper citizens could take these new practices and make them flourish. To say it differently, Nordelteños did not completely replaced one way of life –urban, cosmopolitan, pedestrian– with the opposite. By moving to the suburbs, they chose to continue and, even more, to radicalise a set of practices regarding personal comfort already present in their lives; practices which had slowly been moving from the periphery of their routines to the core of their system of thought¹⁹⁷; ecological practices, one may say, as the ones that tend to appear in societies –or groups of people– who have solved their way of survival (Inglehart, 1998).

¹⁹⁶ I have mentioned it several times, but it may be necessary to do it once again: this analysis is not that much about the people’s intentions but about how subjects, and subjectivities, are constituted through power mechanisms.

¹⁹⁷ In the same way, gated communities did not completely erase the earlier dominant *ethos*, which continue to exist as a system of knowledge and in particular practices and institutions.

We may be able to see now that the rise of this 'new' subjectivity within the shifting networks of power relations that assembled and deployed it connects this thesis' three main ideas: permeability, continuity and comfort. Nordelteños believe that the improvement of oneself can only be achieved throughout a combination of spiritual harmony, purity, and nature, and this discourse has become the kernel from which their subjectivity is being constituted. If the dominant motto of Greek's ethics was 'to know oneself', of Christian faith was 'to renounce oneself' and of modernity 'to invent oneself', what appears to be dominant feature of gated communities is the order 'to comfort oneself'.

I have tried showing how these urban artefacts can be understood as the territorial institutionalisation of ways-of-being already present in the Argentine society, and that they provide new answer to old questions regarding citizenry, ethics, race, and identity. I hope these ideas contribute to a better understanding of these latest urban processes, and the way power and violence are entangled within them.

APPENDIX 1

Nordelta's legal documents

A. AVN Major Regulations

1. *Reglamento del Estatuto de la Asociación Civil Nordelta S.A.*
2. *Reglamento del Consejo Vecinal de la Asociación Civil Nordelta S.A.*

B. AVN Guidelines for neighbours and administrators

3. *Barrios: Consignas Generales y Particulares*
4. *Resiembra invernal*
5. *Uso adecuado del agua de riego*
6. *Regulación de sistemas de riego*
7. *Plantación de árboles*
8. *Procedimiento para la entrega de la declaración jurada de un propietario respecto al alquiler / venta de su propiedad*
9. *Manual para auto-inspección voluntaria (ingreso de aguas lluvia al sistema cloacal)*
10. *Seguridad vial: luces del automóvil*
11. *Manejo nocturno*
12. *El arbolado urbano*
13. *Plan MIP: Manejo Integrado de Plagas*
14. *Uso de las Bolsas para Residuos Reciclados*
15. *Uso del cinturón de seguridad*

C. AVN Minor Regulations (for residents)

16. *Reglamento de Pesca*
17. *Grupos electrógenos y generadores. Reglamento provisorio*
18. *Reglamento del Maratón Nordelta*

C. AVN regulations (for workers)

19. *Especificaciones técnicas Forestación*
20. *Especificaciones técnicas césped*
21. *Especificaciones técnicas desratización*
22. *Especificaciones para el barrido y limpieza de las avenidas de Nordelta*
23. *Reglamento de aplicación del servicio de perros en los Barrios de Nordelta Ciudad-Pueblo*
24. *Mantenimiento del alumbrado público*
25. *Reglamento vigente para trabajos de jardinería*
26. *Reglamento de edificación y normas de convivencia de los Barrios de Nordelta*
27. *El uso correcto de los agroquímicos y sus envases*
28. *Tareas de seguridad e Intendencia con los encargados de barrios relacionadas con obras*

particulares

D. AVN regulations and guidelines (for security guards)

29. *Accesos Principales a Nordelta Ciudad-Pueblo*
30. *Procedimiento del Puesto Acceso de Camiones*
31. *Control de Ingreso de Ciclistas en los Accesos de Nordelta*
32. *Acceso de Embarcaciones al Canal Mayor por Puesto Río Luján (por agua)*
33. *Control de Ingreso Personal de Obras y Servicios, Acceso Obras del Puesto 1 - Benavídez*
34. *Control Ingreso de Personas en los Accesos de Nordelta*
35. *Niños - Menores de Edad. Medidas de Control.*
36. *Accidentes de Tránsito - Medidas*
37. *Acciones a tomar ante un derrame de sustancias líquidas en la vía pública*
38. *Procedimientos a realizar en caso de recibir una llamada de emergencia por principios de incendio o salvataje*
39. *Procedimientos a realizar en caso de recibir una llamada de emergencia por undimiento (sic) de embarcación o caída al agua de personas*
40. *Procedimientos para actuar en caso de encontrar niños extraviados en el Barrio*
41. *Medidas a implementar ante la realización de eventos especiales en Nordelta*
42. *Procedimientos a realizar en caso de recibir una llamada de un vecino sobre la ocurrencia de ruidos molestos en proximidad de su vivienda*
43. *Procedimiento del Sistema de alarma, pulsador de pánico*
44. *Procedimiento a realizar por parte de la central de operaciones ante un hecho de intrusión a Nordelta*
45. *Procedimientos para la ejecución de patrullas en embarcaciones en el área de La Bahía, hasta el Río Luján*
46. *Reloj de rondas - Procedimiento de registro y control*
47. *Portación y uso de armas, Nordelta Ciudad-Pueblo*
48. *Procedimientos para la patrulla en la Troncal. Tareas a controlar.*
49. *Procedimientos que rigen las acciones de control, monitoreo y reacción de los operadores*

E. *Barrios'* major regulations and guidelines

Taking as an example Casas del Lago, a Consortium of apartment buildings located in Portezuelo, these are the list of regulations which procure to “maintain the residential character of the venture; its ecological care; the keeping of afforestation, green areas and common infrastructure; the respect and good neighbourhood among people; and the safety of our goods” (in *Reglamento de Copropiedad y Administración, Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago - Portezuelo*):

50. *Reglamento de Copropiedad y Administración Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago - Portezuelo*

51. *Reglamento Interno del Consorcio de Propietarios Casas del Lago- Portezuelo*
52. *Reglamento de la Urbanización de la Asociación Civil Portezuelo S.A.*
53. *Reglamento de la Prestación de Servicios Comunes de la Asociación Civil Portezuelo S.A.*
54. *Reglamento del Estatuto de la Sociedad Asociación Civil Portezuelo S.A.*
55. *Reglamento del Uso de Salón Múltiples SUM*
56. *Reglamento de Edificación, Parquización y Modificación de Parcelas*

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