

# Alongside Route 3, “The Glorious Double P”: An Approach to “Peronist Faggots” (“Putos Peronistas”) of La Matanza<sup>1</sup>

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*This article describes the production and the analysis of two oral sources: the oral narratives of Pablo Ayala and of “La Iara.” Both are militants and founders of the group “Putos Peronistas” of La Matanza (Buenos Aires, Argentina), one of the few working class gay organizations within Peronism. The article explores their life stories. In their narrative they interweave working class elements of Greater Buenos Aires, with the impact of the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s on family and neighbourhood. It also suggests a series of motivations for a group of gay activists to organize within a traditionally homophobic political movement. These motivations arose in a context of extreme poverty, and gave rise of a political commitment that has earned an ever increasing visibility in the media. In addition, the piece explores the construction of a specific, and contradictory, identity as a Puto Peronista fighting for the right to sexual diversity.*

## Introduction

### I

“Rags of polyester and a virgin sanctity...”<sup>2</sup>

“Marita does it for dough with the firemen of the town. Her neighborhood is harsh and her “comparsa” [Note ed.: *a carnival band that plays a conga drum*] is always cruel. She dreams that her thing becomes soft romantic movies.” The lyrics of “La murga de la virgencita” are almost an analogy to the story of “Iara,” a young, transvestite sexual worker who spends her days alongside Route 3, in the La Matanza district in suburban Buenos Aires. “Cars come and go / and her illusion / powders her nose / bites her lip over and over / to stop the retching with

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Rodolfo Sergio for his critical reading (militant of the “Peronist Faggots National Aggrupation”). Parts of his critique are included in the present work. We would like to thank the Putos Peronistas for trusting us not to betray their story, and to Pablo Pozzi and Liliana Garulli for opening the doors of Oral History for us.

<sup>2</sup> “La murga de la virgencia,” Lyrics: (Beilinson - Solari), Music: (Solari - Beilinson – Aramberri) from the Album “*Momo Sampler*,” Patricio Rey y Los Redonditos de Ricota, Patricio Rey Discos, 2000.

taste of peppermint.”<sup>3</sup> Iara spends the nights side by side with other young transvestites and “the mothers of the route,” among the random march of cars that pull over, the haze of the Matanza River, and the smoke of grilled meat in improvised diners which feed tired, ghost-like workmen with backpacks on their shoulders, rushing to drink that last drop of wine and then disappear into the streets of towns along “the route.” Since the beginning of his activism, Pablo Ayala (36 years old) has been well acquainted with these unpaved streets and hovels made of metal sheet from the slums around Gonzalez Catán township. Yesterday some kind of local rock star, today a janitor in a public school from La Matanza district. Since adolescence, urged by his personal history, Pablo volunteered in communitarian canteens, unselfishly aiding neighbours in need. Paraphrasing the song “Tuyu” by the Argentine rock band Bersuit Vergarabat,<sup>4</sup> he considers himself a part of the Peronist Left, as a “militant of the blackout” who is being politically active without being paid for it.

After long talks in the street, on park benches in González Catán (“you gathered in the park and ‘made Peronism’”), and getting together to discuss “problems,” “La Iara” and Pablo decided to become active. In 2007, they, among others from González Catán’s sexually diverse population, decided to participate, on November 17, in the 60<sup>th</sup> LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transvestite) Pride Parade, which also commemorated General Juan Domingo Perón’s return to Argentina after an 18-year exile. That day, holding a banner that read “Peronist Faggots of La Matanza,” the group made its formal presentation to society.

## II

This article is part of a broader research project called “Peronism: Oral Accounts and Peronist Identity,” housed at the Oral History Program of the Universidad de Buenos Aires.<sup>5</sup> Our main concern is to delve into the “Agrupación Nacional Putos Peronistas” (“National Organization of Peronist Faggots”), presenting some initial conclusions derived from this research. This piece is based on the testimonies of two of the founding members of the Organization, Iara and Pablo Ayala, whose interviews “model the identity and trajectories of lives.”<sup>6</sup>

Based on these interviews and the stories they tell, in this article we attempt to interpret the experiences of being a “Faggot” and a Peronist, individually and collectively, as they are linked to social class, gender, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Tuyu”, Letra y Música: (Gustavo Cordera – Bersuit Vergarabat) perteneciente al Álbum *Y punto*, Distribuidora Belgrano Norte SRL 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Program directed by Pablo Pozzi and project directed by Liliana Garulli,

<sup>6</sup> André Gattaz, “La búsqueda de la identidad en las historias de vida,” *Secuencias* 43 (January-April 1999): 67.

moral oppression of homosexuality as discussed by Michel Foucault.<sup>7</sup> In Argentine society, to be a Peronist and gay implies an oppressive social stigma combining poverty and what is considered to be an aberrant sexual orientation.

The question of “being a Peronist Faggot” must be considered as both an individual and a collective identity. This “otherness,” symbolized by “puto peronista,” far from being stagnant and hermetic, is built up in opposition to the construction of “normality” as defined by heterosexuals.<sup>8</sup> The determination of “the other” according to the “putez peronista”<sup>9</sup> is derived from a relational sense, that is, from visions of the world and its contracts that set limits with the otherness. The “others” refers to the upper-middle classes, who look down upon the lower classes (members of the social diversity and heterosexuals alike).

In this construction the “others,” the sexual diversity associations with a ghetto spirit and the non-governmental organizations (N.G.O.’s) centered in the vindication of the individuals are felt as an “it isn’t us.” The “otherness” within the sexual diversity is glimpsed under the guise of an apothegm; the “Putos Peronistas” will say: “*El puto es peronista, el gay es gorila*” [To be a faggot is to be Peronist, to be gay is to be a gorilla, meaning to be a supporter of military coup d’états]. In the roots of this syllogism is perceived a tension. Here we have a social cultural (as well as an economic) confrontation between the everyday “putez”<sup>10</sup> of the suburbs and the Gay World of the well-to-do sectors of the country. In other words, it is not the same to be a “puto” who lives in a poor suburban area, an illegal immigrant who buys clothes in “La Salada,”<sup>11</sup> who works as a bus driver (as is the case of Cuca, a well-known transvestite from the township of Gregorio de Laferrere) than being a middle class gay with who lives in the wealthy Buenos Aires neighborhood of Puerto Madero. Here, in the suburbs, being a “Puto Peronista” carries a double stigma: that of being “puto” and also poor.

To focalize a portion of the sexual diversity around the “Putos Peronistas” leads us to navigate through the characteristics, emotions, experience, struggles, and daily life of the “putez peronista” as narrated in the interviews: some sort of sexual diversity of the peripheral “negrada” [dark skinned underclass] as opposed to the sexual diversity built by the N.G.O.’s of the “gay friendly” diversity.

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *La voluntad del saber* (México: Siglo XXI, 1990), 96

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introducción: ¿Quién necesita una identidad?” in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds., *Cuestiones de identidad cultural* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2003), 18

<sup>9</sup> The condition of being gay and Peronist, from the Spanish, puto peronista [T.N.].

<sup>10</sup> We use the term “putez” to denote sexual diversity. The same is used by the interviewees to refer to this notion.

<sup>11</sup> A market of cheap merchandise, particularly fake copies of brand names, accessed by poor segments of society. It is the largest in South America [T.N.].

Lastly, we would like to highlight two points worthy of mention. Firstly, this article is about Peronism and identity that does not use “queer”<sup>12</sup> theory. Although throughout these pages there are some hints of notions linked to this field, it is our main objective to describe and narrate the experience of this organization, not to theorize. Secondly, that this is possible thanks to Rodolfo Serio (a.k.a. “Juan de los Palotes”), an activist of the “Agrupación Nacional Putos Peronistas” who officiated as nexus with the “Putos Peronistas” from La Matanza and the activities of this local organization.

### Two stories from alongside Route 3

“La Iara,” who is scarcely 25 years old, carries a past of poverty, exclusion, and daily struggle. She defines herself as belonging to “the 35,”<sup>13</sup> that is, a person who lives on the 35<sup>th</sup> kilometer of Route 3 in the township of Gonzalez Catán, “because I lived here all my life.” From the moment we started, without any leading questions, her narration centered on “*feeling as a woman.*” According to her, this feeling began in childhood, as a constant desire, and as framework in which her life is embedded. Being the offspring of migrants from the Argentine provinces, she had a childhood where poverty and social rejection were deeply felt. With her friend, and now sister-in-law, they were used to begging in the streets and train stations of Buenos Aires. There, she came to know the perversity of a society indifferent to the state of neglect of the helpless. Her anecdotes are circumscribed to begging on trains and to the strategies used to procure “*a coin,*” to opening cars door [for tips], to watching people pass by, and to the fights with other boys “*of the streets.*” A pilgrimage through childhood, marked by encounters with adults in train stations’ bathrooms, whose description is unnecessary. Today she recalls: “*and suddenly you get to think of those kids in the streets nowadays. Poor kids, ‘cause one went through that. You know. . . And human mind is so shitty, so miserable.*”

The necessity of “*feeling and knowing herself a woman*” (a process of change dating from childhood) gathers force in early adolescence, opening a long

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<sup>12</sup> The word queer “has been used derogatorily in relation with sexuality, showing the lack of decorum and abnormality of lesbians and homosexual orientations.” Queer theory “endeavors to give back voices to these identities, those that were silenced by androcentrism, homophobia, racism and science classism.” One of the principal contributions, regarding this theory, was made by Judith Butler, “who considers identity as representative and imitative, where gender roles are no more than a theatrical representation where each sex assume the part previously created for it, emulating and repeating it continuously.” Carlos Fonseca Hernández and María Luisa Quintero Soto, “La Teoría Queer: la de- construcción de las sexualidades periféricas,” *Sociológica* 24/69 (Jan.-April 2009): 43-60, here 43. Online: <http://www.revistasociologica.com.mx/pdf/6903.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> From here on, italics indicates the interview with Iara Ibarra, 25 years old, a militant of the Organization of La Matanza Peronist Faggots. Interview by Gerardo Médica, Néstor Ré y Viviana Villegas, Oro Verde, La Matanza, March 8, 2011.

and cumbersome road to transvestism, “to have the urge of constituting yourself into another being.”<sup>14</sup> From the discovery of her divergent sexuality, centered in an “identity founding secret,”<sup>15</sup> Iara explored new ways of feminization (wearing makeup, growing long hair, hiding her male genitalia).

Throughout her narrative, she transmitted her feelings at the time: “I felt different and was going to be different” (a prospective projection, a construction of a future). She does so with an intonation filled with nostalgia which sets a tension born from the changing process as the basis of the narrative. At this point, school makes its entrance as a disciplinary institution which censured her and her “weird behavior.” During the seventh grade of primary school, teachers and school counselors had several talks with her about her “feminine” behavior:

*And then the school counselors said to me, those teachers who are there, they say “we just say you may touch a breast to one of your girl mates, or kiss her, so the other boys may see you and tease you no more [...] They said so to you... see... And then one begins to think, how can I touch one of my close friend’s ‘butt’ or ‘a tit’... With my girl mates I play the Chinese jumping rope with! It’s all right, all pretty, but no! And well..., like so. They do that to control you, the teachers, they persecute you. I felt like in a dictatorship [...] And, well, like so. They control you, the teachers, they persecute you. I felt. And, the next week they called you again.*

Many of her anecdotes reveal the oppressive demands to conform to heterosexual norms in society. This is reinforced by the stories of discrimination, teasing, and threats on the part of her schoolmates. At the same time, her testimony brings into focus the lack of institutional strategies to integrate sexual diversity, reminiscent of the “hygienist” policies of the 1930s. All of this is remembered as a time of stress and tension between her possibility of a sexual realization and social discrimination. This is highlighted when she recalls that she had to repeat the seventh grade due to missing classes due to the pressure exercised by school, especially during physical education classes “because there were all the boys” with sexist content. In opposition to the school’s attempt at enforcing conformity, we see the affirmation of her sexuality and “the search of being another.” But this feeling of “wanting to be another” and of “wanting to be a woman,” must not lead us to think that the transformation is centered on

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<sup>14</sup> Claudia Espinoza Carramiañana, “Forjarse mariposa... o La construcción de lo travesti”. *Última Década*, May 1999, Nr. 10, Viña del Mar Chile, 2.

<sup>15</sup> “Homosexuality constitutes an identity founding secret and, also, a founding secret of the relations of the homosexual individuals.” Marito Pecheny, “Identidades discretas” in Leonor Arfuch, ed., *Identidades, Sujetos y subjetividades* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005), 131.

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becoming a woman and developing female genitalia. Transvestism (male transvestism in this case) must be pondered as a “process of an identity construction and self-recognition” as well as of intervention upon the body “to reach the acknowledgment of the feminine image.”<sup>16</sup>

Iara’s identity, under the shadow of the standardizing and disciplinary outlook of society, questions “the imposed continuity between biological sex and cultural gender as well as the strict segmentation of what is male or female”; it is also a challenge to what is dictated by heterosexual domination, where “sex, gender and desire must coincide.”<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that Iara’s process of “wanting to be another” is not an endeavor to become a female or establish a copy of a “previous and actual gender.”<sup>18</sup> We may think that a transvestite “reproduces women’s stereotypes and reinforces traditional femininity” (i.e. posture of feminism), but under a closer look, it would determine that “it recurses to norms and emblems linked to hegemonic femininity” in which redefinitions operate.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that due to the rejection and pressures suffered, Iara decided to switch to a night school for adults. We can see that this stigmatization by the educational system did not deter her; it was instead the trigger which allowed her “to come out of the closet” and reinforce her determination of becoming a transvestite.<sup>20</sup>

While attending night school, during the day, Iara works “*cleaning other people’s dirt.*” Among the houses she cleans we find one of a local [right-wing Peronist Eduardo] Duhalde’s “puntera.”<sup>21</sup> By this time, her family begins to note her transformations, but far from the expected rejection, she finds acceptance of her search and feelings. Today’s activist, referring to her family’s reaction, affirms: “*I earned it ‘cause of the way I am (...), they never reproached me or discriminated me in any way.*” Referring to her mother, an important pillar in her life, she says: “*She justified herself and justified me. Parents never want to see.*”

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<sup>16</sup> Andrés García Becerra, “Tacones, siliconas, hormonas y otras críticas al sistema sexo-género,” *Feminismos y experiencias de transexuales y travestis.* *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 54 (Bogotá, 2009): 120.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Transvestism “represents the same imitative structure by which any gender is assumed.” Judith Butler, “Imitación e insubordinación de género,” *Revista de Occidente* 235 (Dec. 2000): 85-109.

<sup>19</sup> Lohana Berkins, “Travesti. Una identidad política”, 2007; online: <http://es.scribd.com/doc/18058766/Travesti-una-identidad-politica>

<sup>20</sup> “[It] is this constant discrimination that assures them (her) their own transgression, needing the other people’s punishment to consolidate what is their great interpretation-transgression.” Espinoza Carramiana, “Forjarse mariposa,” 5.

<sup>21</sup> A “puntero,” or “ward boss,” is a non-recognized activist of a political party belonging to the lower classes and in charge of a territory. A *puntera* is the feminine noun. The “manzaneras” were “punteras” related to Duhaldisim, taking that name because, in the beginning, they were women who gave away apples [*manzanas*] in name of Duhalde’s wife, also a prominent member of the Peronism of the 1990s.

*But not my mom, I think ...it [is] because it was a way to protect me.’*” But observing her changes, though her mother didn’t speak openly about it, she talked about how short transvestites’ lives are and the condition under which they live those lives (it is some sort of a disciplinary warning mediated by affection).

As a turning point in the narration, subjected to social relations, a transvestite friend (a sexual worker) comes into the story, who questions that Iara is “cleaning other people’s dirt.” Iara recalls the event. “*My friend, the sissy,*” as she calls her transvestite friend, used to say to her: “*This is not for you, sissy -and I scrubbed the floors-* (chuckles). *You are for the Route -and I scrubbed the floors once and again-. The Route awaits you, you’ll make a fortune!*” Faced with this pressure, Iara eventually accepts to go work the highway,<sup>22</sup> National Route 3, implying a coming to terms with the prostitution that marks the boundaries of labour market insertion for a transvestite. Prostitution as a “social space of acquiring learnings, establishing relations and behaviors,” is a space of exchange with other transvestites “through actions constructing identity,” while “allowing them, by means of the actual practices and social interaction, to recreate their strategies of sexual identity.”<sup>23</sup> Besides, “it constitutes a bond to other transvestites” that allows her to develop the assumed identity and the choice taken by way of her sexuality; as well as achieving pecuniary benefits to achieve goals, dreams and personal, social and familiar desires.<sup>24</sup>

Along Route 3, Iara enters a world of socialization and learning. This learning included pieces of information such as how to wear the “*panchos*”<sup>25</sup> [padding for breasts], “*where the sissies get cheap silicone implants done,*” and “*how to deal with the ‘chongos’* [johns, the clients].” During this period she refers to herself as being a “*pupil*” or a “*daughter of the highway*” as opposed to being a “*mother of the highway*” [the older and more experienced transvestites]. Throughout this part of the interview, which deals with the relation of the bonding between “*mothers of the highway*” and “*pupils,*” she comes to mention “*La Cinthia,*” an experienced transvestite, who acted as tutor to Iara. She states: “*It was the mothers who gave birth to me.*” Repeatedly, always in transversal planes

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<sup>22</sup> In the critical reading of this piece, Rodolfo Serio contributed an appropriate observation: “*When Iara became convinced that she was intended for the route, reference is made to her physical appearance. Between popular classes there is an ordering based on aesthetics. Iara is ugly in Palermo [a well-to-do neighborhood], but pretty for a transvestite from La Matanza.(...) Summarizing, access to money is determined by access to beauty and vice versa, and thus, discrimination between classes is mainly aesthetic; it is aesthetics features that warns whether or not a person of the same class is present.*”

<sup>23</sup> Diana Carolina Clavijo Fuquene, Rocío Montoya, Sandra Suárez Rosas, and Hanny Yubely, “Construyendo realidad: imaginarios, prostitución y travestis en el centro de Bogotá,” *Revista Tendencia & Retos*, Nr. 12, (Oct. 2007): 255-257.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>25</sup> Padding for breasts and hips.

of the narration, throughout her story emerges the harshness in the life of a sexual worker: *“The highway has its corpses, not ‘cause they were run over by cars, or ‘cause the police, but for catching the HIV virus. And those are the corpses left behind. Many of them were mothers of the highway.”*

While in the past, Iara was a discriminated boy, today she is a sexual worker along Route 3, and an activist. Her journey to that *“wanting to be,”* and her daily search for realization, acts as a prism in the task of presenting a fragmented look of the *“putez”* [*the condition of being gay, especially a poor one, in opposition to being a middle or upper class gay*] of the poor, fundamentally in the Greater Buenos Aires neighborhoods.

This construction of the *“wanting to be”* process is deeply hinged on a quest for improving her living conditions (fundamentally, changing the perceived fate of standing by the highway), a fact that allows us to trace the development of an identity: to be a *“Puto Peronista”* is seen as an expression of defiance, recognition, and otherness. The becoming of a *“Puto Peronista of La Matanza”* is conditioned by several elements and definitions that are observed in Iara, within the context of family, neighborhood, and social relations. These are also marked by the relationship between sexual diversity and those Peronists not aligned with the official party structure in the township of Gonzalez Catán. When telling us about the origins and evolution of her Peronist alignment, Iara stated:

*Mom was always into the old Cup of Milk [a social service providing children with a breakfast in the 1940s]. I had a friend, Marcos, who passed away now, who was gay, and who was forever involved in politics. He was a loved faggot in the ‘hood, ‘cause if someone died, he would get you the papers done, and he would get you the coffin and all that stuff. You know, like Perón, he helped the poor, they helped the poor. My grandparents are from Chaco province [a poor northern province of Argentina]; they used to say to me, they’re peasants... they said: -You can’t imagine how happy the folks were when Evita came on the train, to give away things from the train, it was full of stuff, and for the people at the station, it was happiness itself. [...] I get goose bumps even to think of it. She adds: before she died, my grandmother, I used to tell her of my evolution towards Peronism, you know, I asked her: -That far did she go? [meaning to Chaco Province] - Yes, she went everywhere. That’s what I like of Evita, that thing of going against the system.*

These memories are marked by her life experiences linked to Duhaldism. In talking of *The Cup of Milk*, reference is made to *Plan Life*<sup>26</sup> and the circuits of

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<sup>26</sup> A social service that provides free milk to families through an activist neighbour.

“manzaneras” [see previous note on *punteros*] in the 90s. This, “I was in the cup of milk,” is evidence of a familiar situation and life conditions related to the loss of alimentary independence and a compensation of this basic need at the hands of this plan (i.e. the state). Regarding transmission of remembrances, her grandmother passes Iara the legacy of her own representation of the image of Evita alongside the poor, which is adapted to the granddaughter’s time frame. This representation acquires a new meaning, in the present observed by our interviewee, as a symbol of struggle and a set of ideals of great significance to her life. According to Daniel James, “People give meaning to their lives through the histories at their reach and try to adjust those [lives] to these [histories].”<sup>27</sup>

With these notions about Peronism, in later years, Iara arrived at a more complex discovery; which is related to her acquaintance to Pablo, a militant of the Peronist Left:

*I learned a lot when I met Pablo, you know what I mean, when there is that chemistry (...). And I said: this dude is cool... Do you know why, do you know what took my eye about Pablo? They said a lot, the people, good things and bad things... Those who speak bad things of him said: -Pablo is a Peronist whore. Why a Peronist whore? ‘Cause he is always in this and that [i.e. in politics] And I said: This dude can’t be so wrong, ‘cause if, say, he was a Peronist whore, he would not have given a crap for those below him, he would’ve taken advantage, and to hell with others. And you see him now, he is still fighting when he could have gotten a house, a good job [...] He didn’t lose his humility, he had things and he shared them [...] I met him through a mutual friend, and he taught to me that I was already a Peronist because of how I was in my life, my way of life, my struggle.*

Pablo’s life, like Iara’s, was shaped by suburban poverty, survival, and political activism. We interviewed him in his home, in Oro Verde, La Matanza. This is a humble house, alongside Route 3, with an Argentine flag in the front. Once inside we discovered on its walls several symbols, including pictures of Evita, of Peron, and posters of the *Redonditos de Ricota* [an underground rock and roll band], as well as the *Gauchito Gil* and *Pancho Sierra* [these are popular saints not sanctioned by the Catholic Church]. Surrounded by his dogs, he tells us, as a joke, “*Iorio, the singer of Almafuerte* [a rock and roll band], once said that if you ask a European saint for a favor, the answer takes more time.”<sup>28</sup> Son of

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel James, Doña María. *Historia de vida, memoria e identidad política. Cuentos contados en los márgenes* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2004), 233.

<sup>28</sup> From here on, italics indicates interview with Pablo Ayala, 36 years old, militant of the Peronist Youth, member of “Peronist Faggots from La Matanza.” Interview by Gerardo Médica and Néstor Ré, Oro Verde, La Matanza, November 11, 2010.

divorced parents, his mother was a “fellow traveler” of the Communist party. She raised him, with the help of a sister, by selling lottery tickets in the “3 De Febrero” market until President Alfonsín (1983-1989) “closed all the markets.” Through this fight for survival, he shared experiences on the streets that, eventually, drove him, along with his mother, to embark on organizational activities, as well as the reactivation of the communal center in *Barrio San Pedro*. He was sent to the Hogar Escuela Ezeiza, a boarding school for children of poor families. He remembers from those times the long night chats with friends and the awakening of “*the dream of talking in public, the desire of changing things.*”

In his narrative, Pablo stuck to a detailed chronology. He recalled his mother’s community activism, and an adolescence marked by economic difficulties due to the results of President Carlos Menem’s (1989-1999) neoliberal economic policies. He also remembers participating in a rock band (*The Bangladesh*), and having twice repeated the fifth year of secondary school. From those times alongside his mates, he concluded: “*We were interested in social questions, due to our own life histories we could have taken the wrong path, but we resisted.*”

Pablo’s interview takes us to 1998: “*I wasn’t right at all, I was wasted all day, sick in the head. I was on tour all the time. I was 23, and didn’t stop at any place (...) Today people greet me in the street, guys I have no a clue who they are. I may have slept in the house of many of them.*” With a slow tone and a hint of melancholy he tells us: “*I used to go to my granny’s, in [the town of] Lanús, to groom myself, to look like a decent person, to eat and shower after so much wandering.*” During this “*so much wandering,*” with 23 years of age and no job, he decided to give himself another chance. He told his mother: “*I want to finish school, I’ll buckle down; I’m a mess.*” From the pilgrimage on the streets and the wandering he enrolled himself in a secondary school (a night school). He remembered: “*I gave myself a second chance [...] I needed to make time to go back.*” Again in the fifth year, with younger schoolmates, he becomes “The Uncle.” “*They called me the Uncle for my age and I felt like Campora (chuckles)*” [A former Peronist President who in 1973 was *El tío*; The Uncle]. This new opportunity at an education gave a new course to the link between Pablo and Peronism. His history teacher transmits to him a passion for Peronism, an epiphany that is reinforced by the film “Cazadores de Utopías” [Hunters of Utopías: a film about the Montonero guerrillas and the Peronist Youth of the 1970s] seen at night at his granny’s house. The image projected by his teacher, and the impact made by the film, drives him to inquire about Peronism and to form a different perception of the Movement. “*Before what I told you, my idea of Peronism was Duhalde or Menem or the puntero who didn’t want to give me the social plan’s check ‘cause, he said, I was a smart-mouth.*” And then: “*I fell in love with the capacity for struggle, the magic, and the protection given by*

*Peronism. Had we, my family and I, lived during the time of that Peronism, we wouldn't have suffered what we did."*

The events of 2001, and the fall of President Fernando De la Rúa, would find him in Plaza de Mayo [the square facing the Presidential Palace] between thrown stones and rioting (a year earlier he had taken a job as a school janitor). He doesn't give a detailed account of these events, instead he says: "*I felt a protagonist, no one gives any importance to 2001 now (...) but it was historic, it was on October 17<sup>th</sup>, a Cordobazo*" [the 1945 labor mobilization considered the founding moment of Peronism; and the 1969 insurrection in Córdoba city that gave rise to a myriad armed revolutionary organizations]. To him, it was an historical moment that brought a break with the neoliberal 90s and was caused by the Argentine people taking to the streets.

A year later he becomes connected to the movement Patria Libre (a left nationalist organization) which had a soup kitchen on Route 3, km 38, and also starts being active in his neighborhood. With a Peronist friend, he organizes the Manuel Santillan El León Association (A.M.S.E.L.). Their activism included organizing neighborhood rock concerts and "*filling buses with graffiti and signing A.M.S.E.L.*" The activism of the AMSEL was strictly voluntary, and fueled by the 2001 Argentine crisis. It was a response to a necessity of self-discovery, collective changes, and it also channeled anti-establishment feelings. Pablo considers it an enriching experience: He was never a professional activist, in his own words: "*I was always at the back of the queue, in fact I wasn't even part of the admittance queue, ever.*"

Between 2000 and 2007, Pablo's activism is dynamic, with a Peronist identity emerging outside institutionalized Peronism. He recalled: "*Locally I was active in A.M.S.E.L in Los Alamos (a neighborhood of Gonzalez Catán), and would tutor students under the gaze of PJ's "punteros."* Together with a well-known Kirchnerista [supporter of Peronist President Néstor Kirchner] I was with the proto-Campora and the proto-JP Evita [two of the Kirchner youth organizations], but I didn't join with either group." After leaving these organizations in 2007 he joined the electoral campaign of progressive Peronist film maker Pino Solanas. At that time, he becomes candidate for town mayor of La Matanza. He insists that though he supported Kirchner, he disagreed with the choice of the local candidates on the Peronist ticket. On the other hand, around 2002 he had become acquainted with several militants from the 70s [meaning former Montonero guerrillas], and attended meetings, but he never joined their organization.

Several aspects are interesting in Pablo's narration. One of them is the emphasis he places on a careful chronology to his narration, while at the same time always using the present tense. This has the effect of giving his story a progressive ordering, chronological, and causal. According Gerardo Necochea

Gracia, “Most individuals perceive time through changes in things (...) more than in changes in their own persons; thus, it is all about a notion based on events external to them.”<sup>29</sup> This temporal becoming acts under the equation: changes in the country = changes in my own personal life. This is a narrative strategy employed to contextualize a personal history. Another noteworthy aspect is the overall narrative by Pablo, where the chronological emphasis implies that his activism can only be made sense of as an individual project inscribed within a collective life. André Gattaz points out that “to tame that image, the interviewee has the need of leaning on narrative axes (...) these axes determine a narrator’s teleological interpretation of himself (...) The predominance of a connecting thread is not subordinate to the narrative creativity of the interviewee, but to his own life instead.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, Pablo Ayala narrates by triangulating dates of political significance, relating them to local events and his personal life, so that within this narrative strategy he can relate to what he considers the significance of his activism.

After the chronological account of his life, the narration shifts to the “Putos Peronistas.” Throughout this long reminiscence, political and private meanings come to the surface. He recalls the day he and his friend, the Mute, went for a walk to Centenario Park in Buenos Aires and saw a “faggot” wearing pink trousers. He says, “*I tell a joke to the Mute. We look to each other and felt like two idiots. The thing is, he was selling dolls and stuff like that, and was HIV positive.*” At this point Pablo changes the tone of the narration, because he is ashamed of the remark; “*we weren’t like this,*” he explains apologetically. This anecdote defines a before and after, and changes his predisposition towards sexual diversity from one of scorn to one of solidarity.

Another topic arising in the interview is Pablo’s daily coexistence with members of sexual diversity throughout his activism, as in the cases of a homosexual rocker and an activist lesbian friend. Pablo, in the recalling of events, like Iara before him, brings Cinthia into the story. Cinthia is a transvestite connected with his mother, and thus a part of his memories:

*While mother lived in Mrs. Dolores boarding house, there were a group of transvestites living there too. Well, in truth, we were the only family living there. It was kind of a hiding place for thieves and a last resource for transvestites. It was kind of outside the law. The only one with a garden was my mom. At night, when my mom came from work and when she went out somewhere, ‘Cinthia’ and the other transvestites of the ‘hood used, to*

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<sup>29</sup> Mario Camarero and Gerardo Necochea Gracia, “Continuidad, ruptura y ciclo en la historia oral,” in Gerardo Necochea Gracia and Pablo Pozzi, eds., *Cuéntame cómo fue. Introducción a la historia oral* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2008), 55

<sup>30</sup> Gattaz, “La búsqueda, 34.

*say: Don't worry, go now, we watch you, you're safe with us (...) A long time after, 'Cinthia' was in a Corso [a carnival parade], and apparently there was a fight (...) she was chased by a bunch of guys. I was living along route 3, by kilometer 35, at the time, and she jumped the wall and hid in my yard. The dog started barking, and I saw the guys throwing stones at the house. I came out and chased them off (...) When they went away, I saw a shadow, it was Cinthia, she was stabbed with a "shiv" [a piece of metal, with a sharp point]. I gave her something to dress the wound with (...). After that, not long ago, 'Cinthia' says to me: Do you remember when you saved me? I answered her that I owed her, 'cause of what she did with my mom. So, what I told you, plus the story of the Mute, there was something latent there.*

With this latency about accepting sexual diversity, Pablo starts to build a deeper relation with otherness on different planes. One of these planes was the discussions with Peronist activists of the sexual diversity movement with regard to Iara. Another was the request that Pablo write an article for a publication put out by activist friends from the city of Rosario (in Santa Fe Province). Though he thought of writing about an Argentine saint at first, he changed his mind and embarked on an article about the "Front of Homosexual Liberation" (F.L.H) back in the 1970s.<sup>31</sup> He was captivated by the image of its leader, Néstor Perlongher, whom he calls "*an insurrectional leader from the diversity.*" He confesses he didn't finish the article, but the research done about the works of the poet Perlongher and the F.L.H. allowed him to understand the changes in homosexual activism in the 80s and 90s. He was fascinated by Perlongher and his understanding that gay rights was a collective struggle, and especially because he felt the poet to be deeply misunderstood. "*The faggot [referring to Perlongher] didn't fight to buy tolerance but for rights that would make us equals.*" At the time of the Gay Pride Parade of 2007, following "*Perlongher's steps,*" Pablo and his activist friends decided to go to Plaza de Mayo. Pablo recalls: "*Before that we talked with our Peronist mates, and a process in which I experienced the otherness is begun and I 'Peronized' them [make them Peronist]. That day we went with the rug [banner] and we raised it in front of the Cabildo [Argentina's first parliament house] and people began singing the March [the Peronist anthem].*"

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<sup>31</sup> On the Gay Liberation Front, see: Néstor Perlongher, "Historia del Frente de Liberación Homosexual en Argentina," in Néstor Perlongher, *Prosa Plebeya* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 1997), 77-83.

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### From Route 3 to Plaza de Mayo

On November 17, 2007, they climbed into a bus of bus line 86. Pablo was accompanied by Iara, “El Yiro” [the whore], and other members of the La Matanza sexual diversity activism. They were carrying a banner (a rug as he calls it) with the phrase “Peronist Faggots Association present” written on it. The day before Pablo Ayala broadcast a message through the local media. It stated:

*La Matanza Peronist Faggots Association summons you to join the Gay Pride Parade next Saturday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, in what for us is a double celebration, since it also commemorates the Peronist militant. We will be present for the first time in the parade celebrated every year in defense of sexual diversity and demanding its acceptance. We represent homosexuals from poor neighborhoods subjected to a double burden. On the one hand, we are burdened by our sexual orientations, marking us as the target of derision and discrimination. On the other hand, we are burdened by our social condition of being part of the poorer segments of society without access to decent living conditions. We are the servants, the seamstresses, the hairdressers, the transvestites with the cheap breast implants. The others, the middle-class gay, they are accepted by capitalist society due to their capacity of fitting into the market, but we are not all part of that privileged group (...). Because this Saturday we will meet in Peron's Plaza, which is also that of his putos. (We gather in the intersection of Entre Rios and Yrigoyen streets in Congreso, at 3:15 in the afternoon. Organizing Board of the Double P Association.)<sup>32</sup>*

In Plaza de Mayo they raised the banner for the first time and they were the center of attraction for the media cameras as people began to sing the Peronist March. To Pablo Ayala, heterosexual, it was proof that “Perlongher was alive and that Peronism was eroticizing the city.” For the gay and transvestites of La Matanza it was a kind of “Peronist Faggots” October 17<sup>th</sup>, a day of liberation, as they arose from underground into the limelight; from a place in the Buenos Aires suburbs where everything seems to end and into public view. After the Parade, and the media impact, PP founder Matías Alosent gave the following declaration to *Veintitres* magazine:

*We got together six months ago. We're about 30 guys who gathered with the intent of helping the gay community with their struggle with everyday life. We were moved by the impotence felt in watching so many gays and*

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<sup>32</sup> First communiqué of “Peronist Faggots from La Matanza”

*transvestites ill-treated, people I deeply identify with, since I myself was a victim of cruel treatment. It's weird to see how society came to accept those we know as gays, that is the upper and middle classes homosexuals and yet, they do not come to terms with us, the poor faggots. That is what made me decide to begin the struggle (...) The Parade was a way to present us before society. We wrote letters to associations asking them for support, but they didn't give a shit because we are just the sissy paupers. We are the sissies who scrub floors, and sell waste cardboard boxes from the garbage. We are the poor transvestites studying till their eyes hurt to end up as hairdressers. This won't do. A change is needed.*<sup>33</sup>

The Association's presentation created a visibility that forced a reconsideration of several things. First, it historicized its presence by emphasizing its links with Perlongher's Eros Group in the Homosexual Liberation Front (FLH): Then, it politicized sexual diversity by relating it to popular sectors (thus articulating being gay with being Peronist). In subsequent days and weeks, in the neighborhoods all along Route 3, they gathered once again in discussion groups but militant actions were limited by the "lack of political training." Months later, as told by Pablo Ayala, they were joined by Pablo Lucero, from Mendoza province. Lucero was former member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, (PCR) who was expelled for his sexual proclivities. According to Ayala, Lucero "had clearly understood that he was a Peronist faggot."<sup>34</sup> The militants granted an interview with the newspaper *Página 12* on July 2008 in which they declared:

*To be a faggot is a matter of class (...) We represent the poor faggot, the homosexual from a poor neighborhood with no access to a decent life, health care, education, and a job," explains Pablo Ayala 36 (...) Lucero, 27, from Mendoza province and a student of foreign language teaching, believes that sexual diversity defense organizations don't realize that the place you come from may define you as a person. He states as an example: "Here in the suburb of Buenos Aires, police arrest a boy and it's never clear if it is because he has dark skin, is effeminate, or just doesn't live downtown, where faggots aren't abused for no reason."*<sup>35</sup>

Declarations, and the piece published in *Página 12* had a widespread effect on the "Peronist Faggots." A Buenos Aires city branch is organized, and the PP begin thinking of setting up a national association. In addition, they were

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<sup>33</sup> Lazzaro (2008).

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Pablo Ayala.

<sup>35</sup> "A shout from the heart" interview in *Página 12* magazine, Buenos Aires, July 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, supplement "I am."

summoned by the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (I.N.A.D.I.). Without relying on any kind of official response, in mid-2008 they decided to organize a new meeting at the Universidad de Buenos Aires' Paco Urondo Cultural Center. At this meeting, the capital branch and the National Association of Peronist Faggots, Lesbians, Transvestites<sup>36</sup> comes into being, joining not only poor gays but also middle class and wealthier ones. Since 2008, using the "Peronists Faggots from La Matanza" as a jump off point, the gay Peronists have moved toward a more militant activity that brings together political education, diversity workshops, radio programs, press releases for magazines, blogs and documentaries, and hands-on field work. The main purpose of the "P.P." is to generate a new social and political activism committed to popular "putez" [the condition of being gay, from the Spanish is "puto"] and sexual diversity. As such PP played a crucial role in mobilizing support for the new gender identity law, as the same sex marriage law, and legal safeguard protecting transvestite rights.

### **A final consideration**

Iara's and Pablo's interviews allowed us to visualize the life of young people in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, who were devastated by the social fragmentation caused by economic policies of the 1990s. In those lives, as individual and collective lives are torn apart, the processes of "*in situ subjectivation*" become evident. In this kind of "*subjectivation*," the development of new solidarities, amongst socially outcast peers, become more evident.<sup>37</sup>

In both accounts, the "wanting to be" follows as evidence of an individual and collective journey in which the central objective is to modify what is perceived as "the fate" of marginalized social sectors. It is here where the "Peronists Faggots," beyond its role as an association that links the demands of sexual diversity and Peronism, turns into a modular or existential space where people's journeys through life converge around new identities. By making evident a "putez" proper of the urban underclass the new identity leads to the possibility of a struggle for recognition, acceptance, and rights.

Following Iara's account and fully conscientious of the fragmentation, but also of the projected point of view, her anecdotes are a connecting bridge to the

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<sup>36</sup> With the "Peronist Faggots National Association" an inter-class association, or an alliance of classes, that permits the growth and permanence in time of "Peronist Faggots."

<sup>37</sup> Conformation of subjectivity is anchored in concrete situations before social destruction and marginality. Through this process subjectivity is found in "the operations produced by individuals in limit situations and in the symbolism produced." Silvia Duschatzky and Cristina Correa, *Chicos en banda. Los caminos de la subjetividad en el declive de las instituciones* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002), 20.

stigmatization of belonging to the poorer classes' sexual diversity. Those same anecdotes reflect how divorced the life of the gay underclass is from the everyday-life discursive constructions of the middle and upper classes sexual diversity, who regard themselves as the "politically correct homosexual" or "gay friendly" classes. Pablo, in an off-the-record conversation, gave an illustrative comment: "*Here everybody thinks that if you are gay you live in 'gayland,' so to speak.*" This "*gayland,*" as a representation where everything is rosy, is opposed to the "putez" experienced by Lara living in poverty and marginality.

Seen from another angle, "Peronist Faggots" as a foundational act, poses the value of having included into the national political agenda the problems derived from sexual diversity within popular sectors. As a political strategy, the new association searches for "collective compromises" and "contact points,"<sup>38</sup> harkening back to Perlongher's criteria of the 70s and resignifying them in the present. This imprints a logic of militancy on their identity, so that "*we are faggots, we are a minority, but as Peronists faggots, we belong to a sizeable popular collective.*" This logic impregnates their struggle around crucial issues. Thus, they make claims on the body politic which could be thought of as belonging to a minority in an ampler and more potent dimension: that of claiming social rights where the universality of the protection of those more vulnerable is at the core of the demand. In addition, they seek to anchor their demands, and their identity, within a powerful cultural imagery: that of Peronism as perceived as a synonym for social rights. One of the things perceived in the interview narrations is the new meaning and value assigned to the term "*faggot.*" By its use they affirm a new identity with a term which, used positively, implies a constant defiance of discrimination and social stigmatization. Moreover, "*faggot,*" in opposition to "*Gay*" suggests a differentiation of classes, experiences, and visions of the world.

To conclude, every enquiry modifies our notion of the world. In our case, the contact with the otherness was, and still is, an enriching experience that gives new meaning to parts of the neat cultural preconceptions we carried with us. This is fundamentally so, because we feel respect and admiration for those who struggle in Argentina, independently of what they do when their bedrooms doors are closed.

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<sup>38</sup> Paola Ríos, "¿Ser o estar 'queer' en Latinoamérica? El devenir emancipador Lemebel, Perlongher y Arenas," *Íconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, Nr. 39, Quito, (Jan 2011): 17.

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