Urban segregation and public space: young people
in enclaves of structural poverty

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This article explores some of the changes currently occurring in enclaves of structural poverty in Argentina. While many studies have dealt with middle-class impoverishment, this study addresses the growing geographical concentration and accumulation of social disadvantages, something that has triggered a process of urban segregation and threatens these enclaves with exclusion. Control of the public space in such areas of structural poverty proves to be a determining factor in many of the disadvantages suffered by these communities: social isolation, internal fragmentation and depletion of household asset portfolios. Setting out from an ethnographic analysis of the way young people appropriate the public space and impose a "street culture" with its own norms and practices, this paper explores the dynamic complex of disadvantages that operates as an engine of exclusion for these enclaves and their inhabitants.

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I

Introduction

Amartya Sen's theoretical and methodological work on poverty was a clear turning point for both analysis and public policy in this area (Sen, 1981, 1983 and 1995). By grounding the problem of poverty not just in the lack of resources but in the capabilities of households and their members too, this work gave rise to new approaches (for both analysis and action) centred on the disadvantages affecting particular sectors which generate and reproduce poverty. This new analytical outlook meant that the issue of poverty was addressed within the framework of theoretical debates on equality and civic rights in modern societies. At the same time, a start was made on exploring (and highlighting) different socio-economic dimensions at the micro, meso and macro level that constrain the ability of households to achieve full social integration. The result was that poverty analysis attained a higher level of complexity.

The present article is inspired by this analytical perspective, adopting two of its fundamental assumptions. Firstly, it aims to move beyond a static, restrictive and dichotomous (poor/not poor) view of poverty and take a more dynamic, process-oriented approach that stresses the accumulation of advantages and/or disadvantages. This analytical approach has been developed and consolidated in the contemporary literature on social exclusion and vulnerability, where disaffiliation processes are viewed as the outcome of a growing concentration and accumulation of disadvantages in particular sections of society.[1] Secondly, and following directly on from the foregoing assumption, it accepts the need to explore sociocultural dimensions associated with situations of poverty in which mutually reinforcing complexes of disadvantage can be found. The labour market, but also the household of origin, the neighbourhood and local community, are among the places where these advantages and/or disadvantages are generated. The many factors and processes that the disadvantages arising in these places can trigger emerge as a key issue both for studying and assisting vulnerable groups, and

for increasing our ability to anticipate social exclusion processes.

This paper will seek to explore just one of the areas where advantages or disadvantages can be generated: the local neighbourhood and community. In particular, it will seek to analyse a specific factor associated with the neighbourhood and community life, which is the role of the public space in hastening the accumulation of advantages or disadvantages in poor urban communities. What has prompted this article is an interest in ascertaining how the neighbourhood public space is experienced or lived, and how it affects its inhabitants as individuals and the community as a whole.

The considerations set forth in this article are based on the study of dominant youth cultures (or "street cultures") in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of poverty in two localities in Greater Buenos Aires: Lanús and Florencio Varela.[2] It does not deal with environmental or economic conditions in poor neighbourhoods, focusing rather on the characteristics of the relationships and values prevailing in a public space dominated by young people. In particular, it will analyse the production of stigmatizing differentiations of the "us and them" type associated with the neighbourhood public space. These differentiations are found at different levels of analysis (micro, meso and macro) and attach themselves to individuals in successive layers that act as sources of advantage or disadvantage in their daily lives.

The article contains five sections. Section II that follows looks at the conceptualization of the neighbourhood as the most immediate public space, halfway between the public and private worlds, and at the same time as a possible source of advantages and/ or disadvantages for the community and its inhabitants. Section III examines the association of sociocultural

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[1] See Paugam (1995), Room (1995), Castel (1999) and Bhalla and Lapeyre (1999).

[2] The information on which this article is based was obtained from fieldwork carried out in the second half of 2000, comprising 60 interviews with young people living in neighbourhoods within the districts of Lanús and Florencio Varela in Greater Buenos Aires. These interviews are the source for the quotes that appear in small type in sections III and IV. The names of respondents and the neighbourhoods where they live have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

aspects with the spatial dimension, highlighting how the place of residence begins to act as a source of disadvantage and exclusion. Section IV explores the creation of a dominant youth culture (or street culture) in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of poverty and the effects of this on the community, especially the young. Lastly, section V brings together the arguments analysed to suggest that in today's Argentina poor neighbourhoods are beginning to suffer from a new disadvantage associated with the norms, values and practices that dominate the local public space. This new aspect is characterized as a cultural dimension of urban segregation that is simultaneously a cause and an effect of exclusion.

II

Urban segregation and the public space
in enclaves of poverty

The different definitions of local community or neighbourhood have common practical and instrumental problems that are difficult to resolve. These problems have to do with the feasibility of setting limits or boundaries that provide identifiable units of analysis. Setting out from a systemic perspective of local community, this article recognizes and accepts that the social and environmental limits of a neighbourhood may be flexible and diffuse. What it emphasizes are the formal and informal social relationships among those living there. This does not mean relinquishing the possibility of taking the neighbourhood as a unit of analysis, but rather focusing the analysis on social relationships that are underpinned by a common geographical reference. As Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) have pointed out, such relationships are the "the social fabric of human communities, be they neighborhoods, local communities, or metropolitan areas". The substance, fluidity and scope of these relationships are revealed during the research process itself, which means that they cannot be defined in advance. The neighbourhood, then, is a flexible unit of analysis whose initial delineation may (or may not) be modified during the course of the research.

The neighbourhood as the scene of social relationships and interaction is associated with the idea of the local public space. Thus understood, it is the most immediate public space; the first public encounter upon emerging from the private space.[3] The public space is the *locus* where neighbourhood social encounters, interactions and relationships take place; nonetheless, the attributes taken on by these social practices are defined by the characteristics of local public life, and depend on these. On the one hand, the street corner, the square, the park, the kiosk or corner shop, the school or club doorway, are public spaces where the neighbourhood makes itself known. On the other hand, the prevailing climate —of security or insecurity, violence or friendliness, mutual recognition or indifference— will mould the characteristics of the interactions and relationships that are constructed in local public spaces. This being so, as noted earlier, it is not possible to determine in advance the precise substance of the social practices that constitute the essence of the neighbourhood, as has been attempted by some conceptualizations that emphasize and prioritize social networks based on friendship and/or kinship. We agree with Sampson (2001, p. 102) that "for better or worse, in many neighborhoods, neighbors are acquaintances or strangers rather than friends", and it might be added that these relationships are not necessarily free from conflicts or dominated by contrasting values and norms.

Nonetheless, whether relationships are based on cooperation or conflict and interactions on friendship or mutual indifference, the neighbourhood is a place whose social and cultural practices are familiar to those involved in them. In other words, it is not just any

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[3] This article follows the distinction proposed by Rabotnikof (2003) between the different ways in which public-private differentiation has been understood, equating this dichotomy with the contrast between opening and closure. "…By 'public' is meant what is accessible or open to all, in opposition to the private, understood as that which is out of bounds to others" (Rabotnikof, 2003, p. 20). The ways in which these open spaces are appropriated (and abandoned) are in fact part of the main analytical focus of this article.

public space, but a place of transit that separates (or joins) the public and private worlds. It is for this reason that, as Pierre Mayol puts it, the neighbourhood can be understood as the progressive privatization of the public space. According to Mayol (1999, p. 8), "the neighbourhood is, almost by definition, a domain of the social environment since for those who use it it represents a known portion of the urban space where they feel they are more or less recognized. The neighbourhood can be understood, then, as that portion of the public space in general (anonymous for everybody) into which a particularized private space is gradually insinuated because of its practical day-to-day use." Because of this closeness and immediacy, the "neighbourhood public space" takes on particular importance in the experiences and living conditions of those participating in it (i.e., its inhabitants), and it can be regarded as having a direct effect on the local community insofar as it gives rise to different practices of sociability. In fact, the public space is a fundamental ingredient for the very existence of the community. However, its effects on the community as a whole and on local residents in particular may be either positive or negative (in terms of being advantageous or disadvantageous).

Freie (1998, p. 49) notes that it is in the public arena that a great variety of people can meet, the habit of association can develop, and the roots of democracy can be cultivated. The public space and the social practices generated there may provide the basis for collective action, for exchanging goods, information and other resources, for making contacts, for generating, disseminating and maintaining particular social values and norms. The neighbourhood can thus be an important source of civic, social and cultural capital.

This normative definition of the public space does not always coincide with experience, however. In certain contexts the public space may risk becoming the scene of violence or crime, of values and norms that are different from or at odds with those of society at large, or of isolation and segregation. In any of these contexts, the local public life or social practices that constitute the neighbourhood take on particular characteristics. In the first case, residents may withdraw from the local public sphere by expanding the limits of private life, thereby isolating themselves further from one another and reducing the likelihood that collective action or mutual support networks can be generated. The second case may give rise to social practices that, being based on values and norms

contrary to, distinct from or rejected by society, hinder the social integration of residents. In the third case, the neighbourhood may become a social wall behind which redundant and unenriching living conditions, social relationships and experiences are reproduced, something that takes on particular importance in conditions of poverty. These situations, highlighted merely as examples among others that could be mentioned, are not mutually exclusive but can accumulate and reinforce one another. Internal fragmentation, isolation from society at large and the depletion of household asset portfolios are some of the effects that may derive from the characteristics taken on by the local public space and that can turn the neighbourhood into a liability or, to put it in less economicist terms, a major source of disadvantages for its own inhabitants and the community as a whole.

Thus, the local socio-spatial environment proves to be an aspect of particular importance for the study of poverty or, more specifically, of situations of social vulnerability that may lead to exclusion. When he became president of the Population Association of America, Douglas Massey saw the twenty-first century as an age of extremes, in which poverty and wealth would become increasingly concentrated and isolated (Massey, 1996). This process of dualization (social and spatial at the same time), found in both developed and developing countries, would have profound consequences for the ability of contemporary societies to integrate their members socially. According to Massey (1996, p. 407), these limitations are compounded by sociocultural factors associated with the new segregation of the urban poor: "In the emerging ecology of inequality, the social worlds of the poor and the rich will diverge to yield distinct, opposing subcultures. Among those at the low end of the income distribution, the spatial concentration of poverty will create a harsh and destructive environment perpetuating values, attitudes, and behaviors that are adaptive within a geographic niche of intense poverty, but harmful to society at large and destructive to the poor themselves."

Different studies, particularly some carried out in the United States and Europe,[4] have addressed this dimension of analysis. In Latin America, and in Argentina specifically, few efforts have been made to explore the new socio-spatial conditions of poverty.

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[4] See Wilson (1987 and 1996), Jencks and Peterson (1991), Massey and Denton (1993) and Musterd and Ostendorf (1998).

Over the last three decades, and particularly since the 1990s, Argentine society has been undergoing a profound socio-economic transformation whose effects on the social structure are only just beginning to be perceived. Several studies[5] have explored, as part of the social consequences of the new socio-economic model, the process of impoverishment in large sections of the middle class leading to the emergence of the so-called "new poor". There has been less interest, however, in analysing the new conditions facing the "old poor" or structural poor. The few studies that have focused on this issue are at one in warning of the concentration and accumulation of numerous disadvantages as a new attribute of traditionally poor neighbourhoods, with the potential for a "new marginalization in old territories" (Auyero, 2001). Katzman (2001) sees the emergence of growing social isolation affecting the urban poor in the major cities of the Southern Cone, with the resultant creation of urban ghettos. Similarly, Prévôt-Schapira (2001) believes, in the case of Argentina, that cities are fragmenting into numerous urban and social spaces characterized not only by contrasting living conditions, but also by profound differences in expectations and in opportunities for social mobility and integration.

To sum up, the arguments presented so far emphasize the importance of the neighbourhood public space for the study of social vulnerability. Following Mayol (1999), we regard the neighbourhood as an object of consumption that residents (or users) make their own by appropriating the public space. As we mentioned earlier, however, neighbourhoods are not exempt from conflict and the social practices that predominate there are not always the same. Thus, the neighbourhood public space is a black box, exploration of which can illuminate new aspects of social vulnerability. Who appropriates the public space, how they do it and how they assert themselves over the local community, what type of sociability is associated with this appropriation, and what consequences the public space thus shaped has for the opportunities of the community and those who live there, are research issues that emerge from this approach. They will be addressed in the sections that follow with a view to unravelling, through ethnographic analysis of young people in poor neighbourhoods, the way certain practices, norms and values are consolidated in the public space and the effect this has on the community and its inhabitants.

III

The neighbourhood as a symbolic construct

Lanús and Florencio Varela have contrasting environmental characteristics. Although both belong to Greater Buenos Aires, Lanús forms part of the ring surrounding the city of Buenos Aires, while Varela is located in the second, outer ring of the conurbation, 25 km to the south of the federal capital. Lanús was a destination for the waves of European migrants who arrived in the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it industrialized early and rapidly. The urbanization process in Varela, on the other hand, is more recent, having been fed by internal migrants from the northern provinces, immigrants from neighbouring countries and displaced former "shanty town" dwellers. These settlers were attracted by the availability or low price of land, but since no local industry ever developed, they tended to work in

neighbouring municipalities or in the capital. Another important point is that Lanús is highly urbanized, has one of the highest indices of population density in Greater Buenos Aires and presents a marked heterogeneity in its social structure, with large middle-class and working-class sectors, but also with areas of extreme poverty. Florencio Varela, on the other hand, has a very low population density, there being areas where agriculture still predominates, and is very homogeneous in its social composition, the overwhelming majority being poor: it is the municipality with the highest index of poverty in the whole conurbation of Greater Buenos Aires.

These characteristics of the two municipalities result in clearly contrasting socio-economic urban situations, with major consequences for the transition to adulthood.[6]

[5] See Minujin (1992), Minujin and López (1994), Minujin and Kessler (1995) and Kessler (2000).

[6] See Saraví (2002) for an analysis of these effects.

The disparities are not confined to economic and environmental aspects, however. Structural differences are reflected in the different perceptions of the two areas in the social imaginary. Whereas Lanús tends to be characterized by the predominance of prototypically working-class norms and values, Florencio Varela is believed to have the features of a typical ghetto of urban poverty, such as low educational levels, the sale and use of drugs, violence and crime, very high levels of joblessness, insecurity of employment, and so on. The public image of the two places has been predefined as a result of processes involving social prejudice, individual experiences, the media and even the type of State intervention. The decantation and objectivization of socially constructed perceptions have resulted in each of these urban spaces being assigned its own identity. These identities, however, are not necessarily rooted in empirical facts, but have taken on a life of their own as they have been perpetuated in the collective imaginary.

When I was preparing to begin my fieldwork in these two locations, my family, friends, acquaintances and other people who knew what I was planning all gave me the same advice (although many of them had never been in these places): "take care in Varela, it's very dangerous". Nobody warned me about the risks and perils of certain specific neighbourhoods in Lanús, however. Anthropologists get used to suggestions of this type and disregard them as mere expressions of the exoticism with which anthropology is generally associated; they do have a value in themselves, however, as a manifestation of perceptions about "otherness". In this case, despite the heterogeneity of the situations to be found in the two places (most especially in Lanús), each of them was presented as having a single, unchanging identity.

All the young people interviewed knew the other area in which I was working and had formed an opinion about it; two of them had a closer knowledge, as they had lived or had family in both. In the interviews with them references to these two areas came up, once again revealing the public image of each.

How did your life change when you moved from Varela to Lanús?
It changes because of the people you mix with. Because in Varela or Solano, I mixed with people who were on drugs because there was no way, because…, because of all the social problems there were, and here in Lanús kids who were on drugs had other values, you know. It's like…, they were more mummy's boys and did it more because of the fashion, going out, exams, this and

that…, or just fooling around. But there in Varela it was like kids did it just to keep going a lot of the time, you know; you had to get three or four pills down you to go out stealing, to have the nerve to go out and steal. You just had to put up with things there…, it was something else, something else. (Aníbal, 23, Lanús).

There were three houses where we lived. The one at the front was my uncle's, the middle one was ours, and the one at the back was my grandmother's. My uncle had a fight [with the parents] as well and left, but he went to the Barrio Fresno [in Varela]. It was a shame he went. You realize with the kids, with my cousins, the huge differences in what they were like and what we were like. Huge differences in the words they use, manners, everything. *And you put that down to the neighbourhood?* Absolutely. Absolutely, because the oldest girl is more like me, because she grew up in the house in San Pablo [Lanús] where we were. Working people live in San Pablo, down-to-earth people, but halfway decent, I mean there are no *villas* [slums], no low-life… *And how are you different from your cousins?* The words they use, the music they listen to…, it's all cumbia, I don't listen to cumbia for instance, I dance sometimes but I like a different kind of music…, little things, but, well… Friends too. Their friends there carry guns, here I haven't got any friends like that or…; I didn't meet kids who smoked or drank until I was 22, when I was grown up, while they were with all that kind of people when they were still little. (Vicky, 25, Lanús).

This opposition, associated furthermore with social and cultural differences between groups, is a specific example of the oppositional mechanism underlying the (social) construction of identity. This basic distinction between "us" and "them" is reproduced at different levels. As already noted, at the macro level (Greater Buenos Aires) Lanús is seen as a "working-class area" and Varela as a "ghetto of urban poverty"; when we entered these communities, however, we found that people were not as alike as all that, and at both the meso (town) and micro (neighbourhood) level new distinctions between "us" and "them" emerged. In every new social context (*locus*) this oppositional mechanism is reproduced, with distinctions being drawn between different social groups characterized by contrasting sociocultural features (values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, norms). Thus we hear that Lanús also has its ghettos of urban poverty and that Florencio Varela has working-class areas, and even that within these ghettos not everybody adheres to the dominant norms, values and practices.

When José, one of those interviewed in Lanús, spoke about the situation of young people, he drew a clear distinction between an "us" to which he belonged

and which was constituted by the neighbourhood, and a "them" represented by the neighbouring *villa* (slum), the two being separated by a narrow (but sufficient) strip of asphalt.[7] Here the social distinction between "us" and "them" is overlaid by a spatial differentiation, but even in the *villa*, in a single geographical space, social distinctions arise. In his interview, Antonio showed a clear interest in differentiating himself from the other youths living in the *villa*. We found a similar situation in Florencio Varela, where, although spatial contrasts are less obvious, young people identified similar differences. Julia, for example, stated her intention to move to an area of working people, where her family ought to be, by contrast with her current neighbourhood, which was presented with the opposite attributes, i.e., as a neighbourhood of people who did not work.

> I tell you, 70% of the kids here are either thieves or on drugs. Because these are really run-down areas, you see, and 21-year-olds like me, 60 or 70% of them are sitting around on street corners drinking beer… I drink beer too, but what I mean is they're drinking beer, taking drugs, stealing, or you walk past and they ask for coins. *But don't you live in that neighbourhood?* No, I live over there. Over there it's different, it's more of a neighbourhood, there are more decent people, on this side there are alleyways… It's more like a shanty town, over there it's not, it's more of a neighbourhood, there are tarmacked roads, all that. Look, I think these kids go wrong because they've already got that mentality because of the area they live in, because of the crime all around them, and another thing, they're selling them the drugs right there, so they've got them on hand. (José, 21, Lanús).

> The people in the neighbourhood aren't friends, more like acquaintances. Because there's no friendliness here. Besides I don't know what's going on in their minds, I'm 21 but I seem…, I don't know, I've got the mentality of a 40 -or 50-year old. *Are you an exception in the neighbourhood?* I wouldn't go that far, but something like that. *Why?* Because I don't like trouble. Here they've got no manners, no decency, no…, they don't know how to behave, they're a different class. Lots of drugs too. And well, if you don't want to get

mixed up in all that, the best thing is to stay out of the way and not be tempted. (Antonio, 21, Lanús).

> No, my idea is to get on, in every way. For instance, the whole block are relatives and I wouldn't want to end up… it's not that I'm saying, well, it's a nasty area because it's got this, that or the other, but I'd like to change, move on, get out even if it is to a working-class neighbourhood; here you see how people meet on street corners to sell drugs, all that type of thing, and it's ugly. (Julia, 18, Varela).

Thus the distinction between "us" and "them" is associated with contrasting attributes, which are objectivized in different groups of young people. These identity categories are relative and flexible, however, depending on the level at which the dividing line is drawn; in other words, a young person will be part of "us" or "them" depending on what the reference group is. Antonio, for example, belongs to the "working class" when his status as an inhabitant of Lanús is being emphasized, he will be a member of an "urban ghetto" when what is being considered is the fact that he belongs to a *villa*, and he will be "working-class" again when the internal distinctions within the *villa* are considered.

Not only are individuals (young people in this case) aware of the perceptions associated with their places of residence, but their day-to-day lives and interactions tend to be affected by them. The weight of identity young people bear because of their social and geographical position can be emotionally stimulating and provide increased self-esteem, but as Elias and Scotson (1994) point out, it can also become a source of rejection and exclusion. The distinction between "us" and "them" is at the same time a hierarchical differentiation in terms of social status, sometimes entailing a value judgement about what is and is not desirable in society, and always acting as a source of stigmas that conditions the practices of both: "Two months after the accident, I got another girl… Then we had a fight because her mother knew where I lived…, she found out that I lived here. She was a bit hoity-toity…" and all sorts of examples could be given in which stigmas associated with places of residence have made young people less employable: "Whenever you fill in a job application and put La Cava… you know they won't be calling you."[8]

In the analysis of social perceptions about different urban areas presented so far, the aim has been

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[7] Prévôt-Schapira (2002) maintains that as the gradients of urban poverty situations have multiplied, the need to "distinguish" between "us" and "them" has increased; the fear of exclusion heightens the logics of delimitation in impoverished areas, in an effort to reaffirm that one is not in the same situation as the others. Thus, according to that author, new boundaries arise, traversing the spaces of the periphery, separating the poor from the less poor, *villa* residents from those living in *asentamientos* (shanty towns), owners from non-owners, etc.

[8] *Clarín*, 10 January 1999, cited in Auyero (2001).

to highlight not only the interweaving of sociocultural and spatial distinctions, but also the effect of this association on the lives (opportunities) of their inhabitants. The neighbourhood represents a kind of signature associated indelibly with certain specific attributes in the social imaginary; we are from a place that has a name, as we do, and we may like or dislike this name, have chosen it or not, but we have to live with it. The association between sociocultural and spatial attributes thus acts as an exclusion mechanism, opening up or closing off opportunities to obtain a job, interact with others, engage in certain types of consumption. As Sabatini, Cáceres and Cerda (2001) note, the stigmatization of neighbourhoods and areas where poor groups are concentrated is a key aspect of residential segregation, and is one of the new aspects being added to structural poverty, not only in Latin American cities but almost as an inherent feature of today's cities everywhere. Territorial stigmas (Wacquant, 2001) are a fundamental aspect of social exclusion:

I'm covered with tattoos, I'm written on all over. I think it had to do with where I lived as well, it must have made people wary, who I was. It was a mess. Everything around me was a mess. I mixed with kids on drugs, thieves…, that was my lot, being in that…, in that place. *Would you like to get rid of the tattoos?* Yes, yes. Because you make an impression on people, you come across. I can't say that the first impression is the most important, but the first impression closes a lot of doors to you. There are plenty of jobs I can't have because I'm covered with tattoos, you know? I can't work in short sleeves anywhere; and that's a problem I've got now. (Aníbal, 23, Lanús).

This external homogeneity, however, dissolves when we explore communities from within. As was mentioned in earlier paragraphs, new differentiations will be found between "us" and "them" within a given neighbourhood. These differentiations and conflicts, determined by who dominates the local public space and how, have equally profound consequences for the daily lives of residents. This is the subject I intend to explore in the next section.

IV

Disputing the local public space

The "world of the street" has become the main place of socialization for young people in poor sectors (Kuasñosky and Szulik, 2000). The street, meaning not only the pavements and street corners of the neighbourhood, but also its squares, its football pitches, the kiosks and shops where beer is sold, constitutes one of the main spheres of sociability, interaction and recreation for these young people, by contrast with the situation of young people from other sections of society. Differentiated appropriation of the public space by social sectors is a determining factor in the increasing importance that the presence of young people is taking on in the neighbourhood public space in urban contexts of structural poverty.[9]

The fragmentation of Latin American societies and Argentina's in particular during the 1990s is reflected in the urban structure and the public space. As Makowski (2003, p. 96) notes, "public spaces have fragmented, turning into airtight compartments where the social autism and disconnection of the urban experience itself are reproduced". This differentiated appropriation of public space manifests itself with particular clarity in the case of young people. While shopping centres and other enclosed spaces have been occupied by elements of the middle and upper sectors (Ariovich, Parysow and Varela, 2000), for young people from poor sectors "the street" is the only place that is accessible, available to be conquered. As we shall see further on, the process has gone the other way in middle sectors, with a withdrawal from "the street" being observable in different spheres of daily life.[10] But at the same time, a combination of different factors has

[9] This presence in enclaves of structural poverty has been observed by different authors in a variety of Argentine contexts, and in all of them there is a similar manifestation of the strong impact that this "street culture" has on the atmosphere and dynamic of daily life in the community as a whole (Avery, 1987; Anderson, 1991; Auyero, 1993; Wacquant, 2001).

[10] The proliferation of "gated communities", shopping malls and private schools is one of the paradigmatic examples of this.

meant that for young people from poor sectors, the public space represented by "the street" is not just more important than for other social sectors, but the most important of all as a place of meeting and sociability. Exclusion from places such as school and the labour market in which the transition to adulthood is institutionalized, social discrimination that marks out spheres of belonging and non-belonging, the poverty of resources that obstructs access to the market, the overcrowding and other shortcomings of dwellings compounded by frequent family conflicts that drive young people from their homes, and the identity aspects associated with the street, are some of the factors that help explain why the street is so important for young people living in enclaves of poverty.

In the neighbourhoods studied, the public space is characterized by the predominance of a particular youth culture or "street culture" defined by a specific set of norms and values, practices and behaviours. The young people who control the street corners of these neighbourhoods generally do not study, do not work (or do so sporadically), and spend most of their time together in the street talking, fighting with others, drinking alcohol and taking certain drugs, and occasionally engaging in minor crime. Pedro and Diego recount in their interviews what it means to form part of this street culture:

> When I was 16 I lived on a street corner day in day out, sleeping there with my brother. I just hung around. And look…, you stand on the corner all day and you start to ask people for money and you spend the whole day doing that and you get some money together… I don't know, for some drink, for fags, you're there all day on the corner and you go home to eat and then you go back again. That's what I did for a couple of years, about two years… And all my friends were the same, there were about 15 of us, plus the ones who came from somewhere else, passing through, just like us from another neighbourhood, they got together with us. But we never went stealing or anything, me and my brothers, oh no. Sometimes I used to say to my old lady, thank God we don't go stealing. No, I was thinking about my mum the whole time, I thought about my mum, and I say no, I can't do that, I'm a drunk, I'm a drug addict, and that's all I need, to turn thief and end up in a ditch. (Pedro, 22, Varela).

> That's when the group started to go downhill a bit, the kids went off a bit by themselves and started with the drugs, stealing…; I had problems too, then I said no, never again, I pushed off. […] It's because of the area, the type of area it is. For example…, the generation before us, they're 25 or 26, and when we were playing

football these kids were already drinking…, they were already drinking beer in the club, they were smoking marihuana and…, taking cocaine and that stuff. We saw it and never…, we never paid any attention, because we had no idea what they were doing or what it was. Of course, because that neighbourhood…, they sell drugs there and everything, pills, acid…, it's a shopping mall…; at night…, more goes on at night than by day, because cars start to appear, lorries, buses, everything. So that's what it was like. One person started to get involved, then another, and another, and so on, we all ended up like that…, almost all. (Diego, 21, Lanús).

The central objective of this section is not to analyse the causes leading to the emergence of this street culture, but its consequences in terms of advantages or disadvantages for young people in the neighbourhood and the community as a whole. Given the re-emergence of culturalist approaches to the analysis of social exclusion, however, it is worth making two observations here.

First, as Massey and Denton (1993) point out, the problem with culturalist approaches lies precisely in their neglect of the connection between the cultural characteristics of particular groups and the structural conditions of their participation in society. Different studies show that, in situations where extremely poor sectors with few opportunities are concentrated and segregated, it is difficult to follow the norms and values promoted by society. In particular, young people subjected to these restrictive conditions tend to develop a set of norms, values and practices that are perceived as alternative or deviant, but that do enable them to cope with the frustration caused by the realization of how unattainable socially respectable goals are (Merton, 1984).

Secondly, this relationship between the two dimensions needs to be analysed in context, considering that opportunities are determined by a person's social and historical background. In Guatemala City, for example, Roberts (1973) observed that the urban poor, despite the conditions of extreme deprivation in which they lived, were very active in pursuing socially hegemonic values and goals and in taking advantage of small opportunities for improvement arising out of the characteristics of the urbanization process, such as land invasions, self-building and informal work. Thus, extreme poverty is not necessarily accompanied by the emergence of particular norms, values and practices.

It is not too much to say that large cities in Argentina have been going through a process of socio-spatial fragmentation in recent years. One of the main

features of this is that, by contrast with the past, urban spaces with a high concentration of poverty tend to be characterized by the manifest unavailability of traditional paths to social advancement. As Roberts pointed out in the case of Guatemala, the *villas* of Argentina, while beset by want of every kind, used to show dynamism in the pursuit of better living conditions. The legalization of land ownership, community organization, State schooling and formal jobs were some of the channels that promised upward social mobility. It might be said that these expectations of social mobility from generation to generation (validated by everyday experience) were the main mechanism of social integration for much of the twentieth century in Argentina. In recent decades, however, not only has the economic development model changed, but so have the traditional mechanisms of social mobility, and these are now being called very much into question (again on the basis of everyday experience), particularly by the younger generations.

> *Do you think about the future?* Yes, yes!!! But I'd rather not at times, because I'll suddenly think to myself, "so what are you going to do, then"; sometimes it's like there are two people inside me saying, "what are you going to do, then, you've got nothing…" I mean, it's not that you've got nothing but you're like…, it scares me a bit. And besides the way my luck is…, anything to do with work and money upsets me, sometimes I don't even want to turn the TV on…, when I do turn the TV on I just watch music channels. (Seba, 23, Varela).

> *What did you do the whole day?* No, no, I read, I'd shut myself away and watch TV, and I'd swap between reading and watching TV, listening to music, and that kind of thing. *Not now?* Yes, I still do it, but now I'm more active, before I used to shut myself away, it was pretty depressing really. That's what I'm telling you, I had no work, I couldn't do anything, I couldn't make plans. It's not really depression either, it's a kind of depression, not the real kind where you just get more and more down, no, I'm there thinking about my problems… *What problems?* Ehhh, the future, how I'm going to… how I'm going to support myself, I don't know, one day soon I want to have my own house and how am I going to get that, that worries me. (Federico, 21, Lanús).

This last aspect is crucial to the problem before us. It is not just the outside observer who perceives that the traditional mechanisms of social integration have been eroded; the people involved can see it as well. This brings a vital subjective dimension to any process of social exclusion. As Mills (1959) put it, "When

people cherish some set of values and do not feel any threat to them, they experience well-being. When they cherish values but do feel them to be threatened, they experience a crisis." Young people perceive the threat of exclusion. As Kuasñosky and Szulik (2000, p. 58) indicate, after working with a similar group of young people, "society is seen as something alien to them, a place where they do not belong".

The lack of opportunities for and expectations of social mobility (which can be expressed as a situation of disaffiliation or exclusion) gives rise in young people not only to feelings of uncertainty and frustration, but also to a profound crisis of self-esteem and identity. During this transition period, which is crucial in the life cycle, the construction of the individual as a person and citizen is called into question. Different ethnographic studies[11] have shown that under these conditions and in particular urban contexts, young people tend to develop alternative systems of roles and status, which tend furthermore to be based on norms and values that differ substantially from those promoted by society.

In another study (Saraví, 2002), we saw that the family transition (whether it takes place through marriage, consensual unions or maternity) provides young women with a socially accepted mechanism for acquiring a new status or role. Starting a new family brings young women new activities and responsibilities. Even more importantly, though, it gives them a new social identity as wives, mothers or housewives. Here we suggest that in a similar way, young people find a system of status and roles in the street, in the neighbourhood public space. This new context, with its own norms and values, works as a defence and retreat mechanism for the young; some of them find in the culture of the street a source of prestige, self-esteem and identity; others, simply a way out of the exclusion which has been their life.

Mayol (1999) remarks that the neighbourhood can be viewed as an object of consumption which users appropriate by taking over the public space, imposing their own law on the external order of the city. Thus, in neighbourhoods that have a high concentration of poverty but are characterized fundamentally by an extended absence (real and perceived) of opportunity, the young appropriate the public space, constructing an environment where they are not taken to task for

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[11] Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Elias and Scotson (1994) and Craine (1997).

dropping out of school, being unemployed, slacking, using drugs and alcohol, or stealing and behaving violently. The street culture, with its own norms and values, upholds and reaffirms this set of practices that go against the "right" way of living. In this way, the evident facts of social exclusion or disaffiliation are evaded or resignified in the neighbourhood, in the appropriated public space.[12] Given the perception and experience of exclusion, society outside comes to be seen as a threat. By controlling the local public space, young people are responding through the construction of an internal space of integration that, paradoxically, will be perceived by the outside world as a threat, in a play of reflections that hastens the process of urban fragmentation and segregation.

> *What did you do when you were on the street?* I drank, hung around with friends who were on drugs. And, well, they took drugs and they were always offering them to me but I never took any; I came close to it but I never did. With this group of friends it was like when I was with them I forgot about my problems. And I think that's what affects the kids, thinking their problems have gone away. (Ernesto, 25, Varela).

> The worst years [in the neighbourhood] were the 1990s, up until '98. For instance, four years ago, not just anyone could get by here; I mean not just anyone could walk along the street where my house is. They'd be robbed, beaten up. *Who by?* People who have disappeared now or are in prison, I don't know where they are. *Were they kids your age?* My age, older, younger, the lot. *And why was there so much violence?* Because there were a lot of them and they were high. *On drugs?* On everything, and also because they thought they…, because they were ignorant too and thought they were better, and at the same time they felt hard done by, but when they were together they felt proud of being the best or…, well, that kind of thing. I played football with them, but I always knew very well who my friends were… (Alberto, 23, Lanús).

However, street culture is dominant because of its presence in the neighbourhood public space, not because all young inhabitants subscribe to it equally. As we pointed out earlier, there are divisions between young people in a neighbourhood: "us" and "them",

"ins" and "outs". The dividing line between the two is their participation and involvement in the street culture; thus, the "outs" are those who do not share the norms, values and practices characterizing the dominant youth culture in the neighbourhood; also known as *giles* ("nerds") by the "ins", they live in the same neighbourhood and attend school or work, do not use drugs, and are not involved in violent and/or criminal activities. Despite exclusion, the *giles* persevere with the traditional channels of social mobility and integration.

> And sometimes it's really awful living here. I mean, it depends what people think of you, if they think you're what they call a *gil* then you have a bad time. *What is a* gil*?* For them a *gil* is someone who works, goes to school, something like that. *Are you a* gil*?* Definitely. Anybody who doesn't go around…, who hasn't got friends like that…, people who go around stealing and stuff. (Antonio, 21, Lanús).

Although there is a relationship of conflict between "ins" and "outs", they both display insecurity about the pattern chosen. "Ins" tend to call the street culture into question when they are away from the public space of the neighbourhood. This insecurity becomes manifest when they express their desire to "get out". Getting out means executing a major change of direction in their lives, leaving the street. Practically, it means giving up drugs and alcohol, going back to school or getting a job, starting a family; symbolically, it means becoming a *gil*.

> I mean, when I'm asked why I was on the street corner, why I was hanging around on the corner and why I took so many drugs, I say, 'well, to get away from reality', because that's the truth. It's an excuse, then it was an excuse. And standing on the corner was an excuse for me myself, it was 'right, I'm off to the corner and I'll get together with the others, I'll drink some wine and smoke a couple of fags' and you're totally broke. Well, you might get down in the dumps and you get worse, or you might get so that you don't know what to do with yourself. But most of them want to make it and they're waiting… Because you know, the kids aren't bad, they live in a bubble. They get up, they have a fag, and they spend the whole day drinking, night comes and they keep drinking until they've had enough and they go and sleep. But they're not bad, not bad people to know. (Lautaro, 18, Varela).

The "outs" display the same insecurities, but the other way around. Their day-to-day experiences, together with the pressure exerted by the street culture,

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[12] Appropriation is not just symbolic, but physical as well. The two dimensions of appropriation are closely linked, something that is clearly demonstrated by neighbourhood hostility to strangers or outsiders. The presence of outsiders is not just an occupation of the space, but also represents the symbolic presence of the outside world (norms and values).

erode the perseverance that is their defining characteristic. The uncertainty that plagues the "outs" each day is the doubt as to whether they are not, in fact, *giles*.

> Kids here are lost now. I don't know, I mean because of going hungry, or drugs. More the drugs, because they say that since they haven't got work they're going to steal so they can buy some branded trainers, some Adidas. But they buy the clothes, everything, and three hours later they're out stealing again and they've already got the clothes, so they go for drugs. And it's like that. *And why aren't you doing the same?* Because it scares me; I think 'what if I go out and steal something and I get shot?' Sometimes I really feel like going out and stealing, but not to buy a pair of trainers, to be better off, you know, to do more for my family, you see. But some day you lose, some day you lose, you know? I was arrested once before. (Matías, 21, Lanús).

> That's not the way I saw school, because I knew a lot of people who didn't go on with secondary school. I mean, the kids I got together with in the neighbourhood, almost none of them went to school, you understand? And my old lady said to me, 'you've got to learn, you've got to learn', but I didn't see it that way, for me it was finishing primary school and that was that. Because it was like where I was everybody finished primary school and then that's it, afterwards we're off to have fun. (Andrés, 18, Varela).

Street culture exerts huge pressure on the "outs", and it does it from different sides. Their day-to-day lives are constantly affected by their status. Firstly, as we saw in earlier paragraphs, the mere existence of the street culture offers a different way, an alternative that is always waiting when they become disillusioned and discouraged. Living in that environment is not easy, and the "outs" respond with a combination of isolation and confrontation. These responses, though, turn into new problems for them themselves and for the community as a whole.

In his studies of African-American ghettos in Chicago, Wilson (1987 and 1996) observes a process of "class-selective migration": middle-class black families leave these communities to get away from an environment characterized by lack of opportunity, concentration of poverty, violence, drug use and other similar features. As might be expected, the result is a vicious circle of increasing concentration of poverty and disadvantage. In the neighbourhoods studied in Varela and Lanús, a number of the young people defined as *giles* expressed their desire to leave. Diego,

for example, when he made up his mind to "get out" after a problem with drugs, left the neighbourhood and moved into his grandparents' house. Likewise, Mauro spoke of his desire to study at a boarding school to escape the influences of his neighbourhood.

> Then I came back to live in my grandmother's house. Because it's not the same any more, being there in that neighbourhood, because it's not like it was when I was little and we played football and hide-and-seek…, not now, now all the kids do is take drugs, take drugs and steal, and that's it. So…, since I don't like all that kind of thing… Let them live their own lives, but I don't want to be with them like that now, because if they go too far the police come and they don't mind too much who they go after. I've still got friends there, the thing is that I haven't got that much contact with them because they're working and others… [meaning they steal], and I've got no time for the rest now. *Why didn't you go down the same path as them?* I did, but the thing is I backed off a bit afterwards, also I had some problems with drugs and… and I said 'right, that's it, that's it' and I came to my grandmother's. (Diego, 21, Lanús).

> I want to get into that school because you have to be there Monday to Friday and you go out at weekends, like to try… because I know I can and a lot of people have told me I can do what I want to do. I want to learn. Teachers have told me that I was going to be able to do it if I wanted to, they all said the same, I hate doing nothing. Of course, I've absolutely got to be there inside or at least until the weekend, well, then I go out at the weekend and smoke with the drifters, we go out dancing, get a bit high perhaps, go drinking and then it's Sunday, I sleep until four or whatever in the afternoon and then I go back again. (Mauro, 17, Varela).

More common, though, is a process of isolation within the neighbourhood itself. Young people who are not integrated into the street culture of their neighbourhood withdraw from the public space. They do not make friends locally, they avoid certain streets and corners, they restrict their contacts with local residents, and they try to attend private schools, or schools outside the community. The main consequences of the "outs'" strategy of withdrawal and isolation are: firstly, a greater presence of the "ins" in the neighbourhood public space, so that their norms, values and practices tend to consolidate even more as the dominant ones; and secondly, a loss of community social capital, meaning that relationships between local residents are weakened, interaction between different groups is reduced, alternative models to those of the

street culture become less visible, and fear, insecurity and mistrust spread in the community. In this way, the community not only cuts itself off from society at large, but begins to experience an increasing internal fragmentation.

> *Have you got friends in the neighbourhood?* No, because it's like everyone takes care of their own house, their own family. Besides there aren't any kids my age…, well, there are, but they're like addicts, they've gone wrong let's say. They meet up a lot just near my house, by the palm tree. They get together to drink, take drugs, stir things up. (Martita, 19, Varela).

> No, my friends are in the [private] school, no, I don't mix with the people from the neighbourhood. When I was more of a kid I used to, I played football, but then I stopped. Because…, well, those kids don't do anything, I mean anything at all, they just don't lift a finger. Besides they're bad company…, they hang around drinking beer on the corner all night. It's not a good crowd to make friends with. I don't know, they're a different class of people, because they were never much interested in school; for instance, none of those kids in my neighbourhood study, none of them do anything. I always see them going out to play on the pitch, then from the pitch to the shop opposite my house to drink beer and play table football, and they stay there on the corner drinking beer. (Daniel, 18, Varela).

In a neighbourhood, isolation has its limits; "an individual who is born or takes up residence in a neighbourhood is obliged to take account of his or her social environment, to participate so as to be able to live in it" (Mayol, 1999, p. 14). Literally, for the "outs" or *giles* (mainly young males), living in the neighbourhood is not a simple experience. They are doubly penalized and excluded, by society and by their neighbourhood, and they are subject to strong pressure in both directions. If they want to survive in the neighbourhood they have to adopt and follow norms and practices of street culture to deal with the "ins", but at the same time they have to stand up to the opposition from street culture and the obstacles its disadvantages and deprivation place in the way of efforts to uphold and pursue the values, norms and practices that society promotes. The experience of Alberto, who is still persevering with his plans to obtain a university degree, reflects the multiple pressures to which the "outs" are subjected.

> I felt affected too. Because I didn't…, I didn't have the same mentality as them and it all looked…, the violence reached me and I can't let them get into my thinking, I can't explain to them, so I have to do the same as they do to get by. *What do you mean, the violence reached you?* If someone turned up wanting to hit you or whatever, and I had to try to talk them out of it, but the point came when there was nothing more to be said and I had to respond in the same way because they were never going to come round to my way of thinking. *If they wanted a fight, you fought?* Absolutely. *And why did they come after you?* Stupid things. Because they saw that I was studying, I wasn't the same as them, then they wanted to test me out, something like that. *And what did they say to you?* No, they didn't say anything, no, they threw stuff. The number of times they threw stuff at me, stones… Sometimes when I could give them the slip I did, I pretended not to notice. But when I was sure they knew that I'd realized what was going on, then I had to respond somehow because that's how things work…, that's the way it is. (Alberto, 23, Lanús).

The community suffers in all kinds of ways from the violence associated with the street culture that dominates the public space of the neighbourhood. As Auyero (2001, p. 16) points out: "Today, with democracy, the people living in the *villas* are not afraid of the soldiers but of their own neighbours, particularly the younger ones." Thefts carried out by people from the same neighbourhood, the charging of "tolls" on certain access roads, fights between gangs of youths and indiscriminate violence are all a part of everyday life.

> Yes, most people here, here in this neighbourhood, if you ask them they'll tell you: no, better not get involved because you're just walking into trouble. No…, it's really bad here, in my neighbourhood at least, things are bad here. (Martita, 19, Varela).[13]

Street culture arises as a defence mechanism to cope with crisis, with manifest exclusion. As Massey points out in the quote given at the beginning of this article, however, it ends up by harming society as a whole and those involved in it. The foregoing analysis suggests that the public space dominated by this street culture is one more link in a chain of disadvantage and has different but equally profound effects on the "ins", the "outs" and the community as a whole.

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[13] A few weeks after this interview Martita was raped a few blocks from her house, the latest in a series of young women to have suffered an attack of this kind in the same neighbourhood.

V

Conclusion

The public space in areas of structural poverty was long promoted (and still is) by anti-poverty specialists and international organizations in particular as a potential asset for the poor. As a place of meeting, interaction and dialogue, the public space tends to be associated with community involvement, the planning of collective action, and the promotion of mutual solidarity and cooperation. The public space is treated, although not always explicitly, as the foundation of a community's social capital. In this article I have tried to show that this is not always so, and that rather than an asset this space can actually be a liability. One of the new attributes, or rather, one of the new disadvantages of structural poverty, giving it a wholly new character, are the characteristics being developed by the public space in these communities. As Borja (2003, p. 60) notes, "the poverty of the public space makes them poorer still".

In a recent study, Sabatini, Cáceres and Cerda (2001) set forth with the utmost clarity two aspects associated with residential segregation that reaffirm the importance attributed to the role of the public space in this article: the subjective dimension of residential segregation as one of its most important attributes, and the harm done by residential segregation in Latin American cities as one of the new characteristics of these. The authors referred to define the first of these aspects as the subjective perception that the poor have of "objective" segregation. It would be helpful, however, to extend this to recognition not only of segregation itself, but also of the absence of opportunities, the sense of not belonging, the intuitive feeling of exclusion. The second aspect, the harm done, refers to the growing association between residential segregation and symptoms of "social disintegration" which, in the view of the authors cited, include indicators such as youth inactivity, school drop-out and repeat rates and teenage pregnancy, to which we might add violence, crime, insecurity and drug and alcohol use, among other things. As we can see, the harm done by residential separation ties in with the norms, values, practices and behaviour that define street culture in the areas of structural poverty studied, and with the stigmas surrounding some of these neighbourhoods or urban spaces, which predominate in the collective imaginary. It might be said that this harmfulness is the cultural dimension of segregation.

The neighbourhood public space may perhaps be regarded as the link between the subjective and cultural dimensions of segregation.[14] The neighbourhood is a place of transit between the private and public spheres, an intermediate space in which matters belonging to the public domain are privatized and individuals reconstruct part of the outside world in their own way. Accordingly, the neighbourhood public space, thus appropriated, offers a way of making the outside world less alien or threatening.

It is in the neighbourhood public space that the subjective dimension of urban segregation begins to endow it with a cultural dimension. Street culture arises out of the experience and perception of exclusion. In this privatized or appropriated public space, young people construct an environment with norms, values, practices and forms of behaviour that enable them to cope with or avoid the frustration and exclusion represented for them by the outside world.

The cultural dimension of segregation (also known as the ghetto effect), whose *locus* is the neighbourhood public space, constitutes one of the principal aspects that are giving structural poverty a new character. Studies in the United States and Europe have associated this new poverty with the concept of an "underclass". Is it possible that the changes in the social structure of Argentina (in Buenos Aires and perhaps in many other Latin American cities as well) are so deep that a new type of structural poverty is emerging? As MacDonald (1997) has noted, a process of this kind cannot be perceived in the space of a single generation. Nonetheless, there are some tendencies now apparent that show specific sectors of society to be increasingly vulnerable and at risk of exclusion. This article has sought to point out that among the risk factors are changes associated with the neighbourhood public space in enclaves of structural poverty. Two aspects are worth highlighting.

As we saw in earlier sections, appropriation of the neighbourhood public space is not without its conflicts. The domain of the public space immediately generates a boundary between "us" and "them", between "ins"

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[14] It would also be true to say that it is the factor which enables the relationship between the two dimensions to be understood.

and "outs". This gives rise to two observations which should be re-emphasized in these conclusions. First, the homogeneity perceived in the public space is always false or merely apparent. In the case studied, a thorough analysis of relationships within the community brought to light the divisions between "ins" and "outs" discussed earlier. In their different ways, both groups are affected by the disadvantages of the neighbourhood, the street culture. Nonetheless, the presence of "outs" or *giles* still represents a (potential) resource that could enable the community to change the public space. Second, it is upon this false homogeneity (among other aspects) that territorial prejudices and stigmas are nonetheless constructed. Thus, the public space, and more specifically the street culture, ceases to be a defence mechanism created in response to exclusion and becomes a powerful force for exclusion for the community as a whole.

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