

The Silences of Dispossession

"Silences of Dispossession offers a timely account of indigenous struggles around soybean expansion in post-neoliberal Argentina. Eloquent and engaging, Biocca confronts colliding responses to agrarian transformations in light of histories and memories of dispossession, resistance, and negotiations with the state."

—Paola Canova, author of *Frontier Intimacies: Ayoreo Women and the Sexual Economy of the Paraguayan Chaco*

"In an important contribution to development and peasant studies, Biocca argues that whether rural people resist or acquiesce to dispossession depends on local rationalities. Comparing two groups of Indigenous rural peasants in the Argentine Chaco, she demonstrates the importance of collective memory, previous engagement with capitalist regimes, and aspirations for inclusion."

—Nancy Postero, Professor of Anthropology,
University of California San Diego

The Silences of Dispossession

Agrarian Change and Indigenous
Politics in Argentina

Mercedes Biocca

PLUTO  PRESS

First published 2023 by Pluto Press
New Wing, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA
and Pluto Press Inc.
1930 Village Center Circle, 3-834, Las Vegas, NV 89134

www.plutobooks.com

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Selected excerpts from “Between Resistance and Acquiescence: Experiences of Agrarian Transformation in Two Indigenous Communities in Chaco Province, Argentina,” by Mercedes Biocca in *Reimagining the Gran Chaco: Identities, Politics, and the Environment in South America*, edited by Silvia Hirsch, Paola Canova, and Mercedes Biocca. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021, reprinted with permission of the University Press of Florida.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7453 4306 8 Paperback
ISBN 978 0 7453 4310 5 PDF
ISBN 978 0 7453 4308 2 EPUB

Typeset by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton, England

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Indigenous Peoples, Agribusiness, and the Post-neoliberal State in Argentina

“They want to calm things down with the historic reparation but the state shouldn’t just pay salaries. That would only make us employees of the state. Ours is a society that cherishes natural resources and they refuse to hand over the land. Without land or resources, we have no future.”

(Interview with Darío, 2016)

In November 2010, after a long bus journey, I arrived in Chaco, a province located in the northeast of Argentina, for the first time. On the roads leading from Resistencia, the provincial capital, to Pampa del Indio and Colonia Cacique Catán—the two settlements where the stories that I tell in this book took place—rather than the traditional Chaqueño landscape of plump thorny bushes and large hardwoods such as *quebracho* and *algarrobo*, all I could see was plains that had been bulldozed flat. They were then cleared with intentionally lit fires to prepare for their incorporation into the global agribusiness market. The uniform landscape wasn’t just empty of vegetation; it was devoid of people too. Historically, this was the territory of the Indigenous Qom and Moqoit communities. Their ancestors lived as hunters and foragers, often retreating into the thick local scrubland to take refuge from raids by the Argentine army soon after the nation was founded. By the late 1920s this land had been transformed into cotton plantations where Indigenous laborers were hired to weed and harvest. But in 2010 all that could be seen were massive machines, textile silos, and empty tanks of glyphosate.

This desolate sight is hardly exclusive to Chaco; indeed, it can be found across several provinces in the country. The geographic transformation that has created this landscape is rooted in changes in soil use that took

place during the prelude to neoliberalism in Argentina. The implementation of industrialized agriculture in the 1970s was a key part of this process, which intensified exponentially in the 1990s with the appearance of transgenic products and the rise in international commodity prices, especially that of soybeans.

In just a few years, Argentina shifted from possessing an extensively diversified agricultural sector, in which family agriculture played a significant role and one that served internal and external markets, to one that specialized in a few basic products for export in which large companies and agro-industrial producers occupied the lion's share (Teubal 2008; Gras and Hernández 2008; Delvenne et al. 2013; Lapegna 2016). While in 1991 soybean output was just 11.3 million tons, by 2003, when Néstor Kirchner's administration came to power, it had risen to 30.5 million tons.

Néstor Kirchner's presidential term (2003–2007) marked the beginning of the post-neoliberal period in Argentina. Similar to other countries in Latin America such as Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, the new millennium saw the arrival of governments that did not necessarily represent a clean break with the neoliberal project but that did introduce significant changes to socioeconomic policy as well as presenting a very different cultural discourse (Yates and Bakker 2013; Petras and Veltmeyer 2014). Among the most significant transformations was the revalidation of public institutions whose reputation had been severely undermined by the 2001 crisis. This was achieved through modifications in the Supreme Court such as the implementation of transparent procedures for the selection of new federal judges. In the economic sphere, a significant shift from the neoliberal was the policy of debt repayments, which ended with the entirety of the debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) paid off. Other measures that represented major shifts in policy were the renationalization of privatized companies (such as the oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales, and Aerolíneas Argentinas, the national airline), the expansion of social welfare policies, and the promotion of national industry and domestic consumption. The Kirchner administration also pursued different policies overseas with a more pan-Latin America outlook and an emphasis on human rights in the wake of the state terrorism of the 1970s.

However, one of the most obvious continuities was the expansion of the soybean monoculture. Far from slowing down during the post-neoliberal period, the production of this crop almost doubled, and by 2015

it had reached 58.8 million tons. In that year, at the end of the second administration of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, soybeans accounted for 55 percent of the almost 37 million planted agricultural hectares in the country (Department of Agricultural Statistics 2019).

The switch to the crop was driven by high international prices and growing external demand as well as policies implemented by post-neoliberal governments, including the Law for the Promotion of Bio-Fuels passed in 2006, which offered tax benefits for its production. This was accompanied by the Strategic Agri-food and Agri-industrial Plan implemented in 2010, which favored the expansion of agricultural production by large producers linked to agribusinesses over small and mid-sized Indigenous and *criollo* producers (Lapegna 2016; Córdoba et al. 2018).

INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AND ACQUIESCENCE DURING THE SOYBEAN PERIOD

Although the cultivation of transgenic soybeans was initially concentrated in what is known as the “core” zone (the pampas region), it soon spread north into the province of Chaco. In terms of agricultural production, Chaco had traditionally been regarded as a peripheral region. The poor soils and subtropical climate made it difficult to produce the country’s traditional export crops, so agriculture in the province concentrated solely on the internal market with a significant focus on cotton, which was heavily subsidized by the state.

The peripheral status of the province, which is inhabited by approximately 1,055,259 people and has one of the largest Indigenous communities in the country, is reflected by high rates of poverty, which in 2001 affected 55.1 percent of the population and 21.7 percent in 2010 when the last national census was carried out.

From the end of the 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century, the combination of glyphosate-resistant seeds and direct planting made it possible for an export crop to be grown in the north of the country for the first time. However, far from transforming the unequal development that had been seen in Argentina throughout its history, the expansion of soybeans had devastating economic, social, and environmental consequences that ended up reinforcing the marginalization of the province and its inhabitants.

In Pampa del Indio, an area located to the far north of Department Libertador General San Martín, the expanse of the oil crop did not just transform the landscape; it also radically changed the dynamics within Qom communities as well as the relationship between them and the state. The new production model was brought there by a large company called Don Panos, and for Indigenous families this meant the loss of their ability to forage in scrubland forests, an increase in unemployment levels, and, due to increased pollution, the destruction of the crops they grew for consumption at home. The main shareholder in Don Panos at the time was Eduardo Eurnekian, a powerful businessman with one of the largest fortunes in Argentina and connections to leading political parties. The result of soybean expansion was that the Ruta 3 highway, which connected Pampa del Indio with the rest of the world, became the scene of a series of blockades set up by Qom families demanding subsidies for production, social welfare plans, and greater environmental monitoring. At the time, one often heard people joking on buses, saying “I’m going to Pampa del Indio, but who knows when I’ll get back,” or racist remarks from those of European descent complaining about the Qom “always being on the road” (Field notes, 2010).

These transformations, and the resistance they produced, seemed the very embodiment of what authors of numerous studies in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania* have described as processes of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003, 137). In general terms these processes are the ways in which dominant groups seek to resolve the structural problems associated with overaccumulation of capital by expanding and consolidating global capitalist relationships.

Although these studies have sparked numerous debates about the means by which accumulation by dispossession occurs and the role of the state and large multinational companies within these processes, subaltern resistance to them—Indigenous, peasant, worker, and other social movements from below—is generally taken for granted (Cox and Nilsen 2014).

* For Latin America, see Spronk and Webber (2007), Cáceres (2015), and Ojeda (2018); for Asia, see Li (2010a; 2010b), Hall (2012), Banerjee-Guha (2013), and Jakobsen and Nielsen (2019); for Africa, see Patnaik and Moyo (2011), Büscher (2009); for Europe, see Mamonova (2015); for Oceania, see Howlett and Lawrence (2019).

However, this image of resistance as the only possible response of subaltern groups to dispossession did not fit with what I had observed on my visits to the Indigenous community in the town of Las Tolderías to the southwest of the province. To get to this Moqoit community, also known as Colonia Cacique Catán, one must travel around twelve miles along a dirt road that turns off from Ruta 89, which joins the provincial capital to the large soybean-producing areas such as Charata and Las Breñas. Throughout my journey and during my stay there, in contrast to what one might expect, I didn't see any blockades or demonstrations. I did, however, regularly see busloads of members of the community headed off to work in other provinces.

This was due to the expansion of soybean cultivation: increasingly, the Moqoit were traveling to carry out deforestation and clearance work in Santiago del Estero, a neighboring province. At the time, one often heard expressions such as "People from Las Tolderías are hardworking," or "you won't see people around here blocking the road like they do elsewhere," establishing clear differences with what was going on in Pampa del Indio, in the north of the province.

One of the main objectives of this book is to study the varied range of political reactions of subaltern groups to contexts of dispossession. With this in mind, I argue that in order to understand how subaltern groups—in this case, rural Indigenous communities—relate to processes of accumulation by dispossession, it is necessary to investigate the complexities of their "local rationalities" (Cox and Nilsen 2014)—that is, the way they perceive, feel, and act in relation to power from above. In other words, in this book I show how the different positions of subaltern actors with regard to these processes are informed by their memories—of struggle, negotiation, resistance, and incorporation—of previous periods of capitalist development, their historic and present status as subaltern groups, their actual experiences of dispossession—which might include enclosure, environmental damage, market mechanisms, and the use of force—as well as their aspirations, which are informed by the specific political contexts in which these processes take place.

INDIGENOUS CITIZENSHIP IN THE SOYBEAN ERA

The post-neoliberal context in which events analyzed in this book took place was not just characterized by the expansion of soybeans into areas

previously considered to be at the periphery of agricultural production. On the contrary, Argentina's post-neoliberal era also saw the return of Indigenous peoples to the Argentine political scene. The reorganization of the state implemented by center-left governments meant, in addition to greater state intervention and regulation of the economy, the reconstruction and expansion of the sectors of the population that the majority of economic, social, and cultural policy was designed to help. These "popular sectors" were expanded to include, in addition to the "white, or criollo" urban and rural poor, historically marginalized Indigenous populations.*

One of the first symbolic gestures of that inclusion occurred when, a few months after assuming the presidency, Néstor Kirchner became the first Argentine president to attend the Pachamama festival, an Indigenous celebration linked to the agricultural cycle held every August 1. That year the celebration was particularly significant because in July 2003 the Quebrada de Humahuaca, a stunning natural landmark in the provinces of Salta and Jujuy, had been declared Patrimony of Humanity by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO), and the national government had arranged for the international body's decision to be announced in parallel to the Indigenous holiday. At the event, held in Maimará, Jujuy Province, the president gave the following speech:

I am excited because today the country is truly coming together in Jujuy. We're happy to be sharing this day here with you because it is recognition for a living part of our culture, our history, and our vision of Argentina but also because the designation of the Quebrada de Humahuaca as Patrimony of Humanity is just the beginning. ... We always said that we were going to integrate Argentina into the world but that we weren't going to kneel to, or repress, anyone. We also said that first things first and the first thing we must address is our poor, our unemployed, our homeless, our brothers and sisters

* Although Indigenous rights began to be recognized at the end of the twentieth century, for example in the constitutional reform of 1994 in which the peoples' initial occupation of the land was recognized and the creation in 1996 of the National Registry of Indigenous Communities (RENACI), until the arrival of the post-neoliberal governments, actual policies to fulfill these constitutional mandates were few and far between (Briones 2015).

who need the healing hand of the state and nation of Argentina. We are going to be there working with you. Be in no doubt of that, some might get angry, some might not like to hear us say things like that but Argentina belongs to everyone and we all dream with our brothers in the [Indigenous] communities who offer us a clear vision of a nation and spirituality that can rebuild an Argentina in which a roof can be stretched over the head of everyone. ... We're going to work hard and unconditionally together with you to make up for the years of neglect and deferment from which [Indigenous] communities have suffered. (Casa Rosada Archive 2003)

Seven years later, in May 2010, as part of the celebrations for the Bicentenary of National Independence, hundreds of Indigenous peoples from different communities across the country paraded through the streets of the capital and occupied seven blocks of Avenida 9 de Julio, one of the main thoroughfares of the city of Buenos Aires. "Marching for the truth, for a pluri-national state" was the slogan at the march, which combined the Wiphala and Argentine flags.

The march concluded with an event at which President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner met with representatives from the Indigenous communities in the Salón de las Mujeres of the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace. On that occasion, the president said:

I genuinely want to thank you for sharing this moment. I heard each of your languages, each of your expressions and I have received your gifts. I remember when in this Salón de las Mujeres Argentinas we included Aimé Painé in homage to the Indigenous peoples.* She's here, together with other women, because between us we are building a definitive Argentine identity. Respect, freedom, equality, equitable distribution of income, the winning of rights, protection of traditions, and not wanting to be anyone other than who we are. I think that the most important thing is to be able to choose who you want to be. And to ensure for those who wish to preserve their traditions, their language, what they learned from their grandmother and great-grandmother, as someone was recently saying here, is also a right that should be respected not just

* Aimé Painé (1943–1987) was a Mapuche-Tehuelche singer famous for her work promoting Indigenous folk music.

because the constitution says so but because at the end of the day it is the obligation of every human being to respect what the other wants to be, their history and identity. The history of humanity, unfortunately, is a history that is also full of discrimination, neglect and denial of identity and culture. And I think that as Argentines, and as universal citizens, we have an obligation to tend to these wounds and, especially, respect each of our cultural identities. I like that things that have never happened in 200 years of history are beginning to happen in the Argentine Republic of the Bicentenary. (Casa Rosada Archive 2010)

These events, albeit mainly symbolic, are nonetheless significant if one considers the fact that, throughout the two hundred years of its existence as a nation, Indigenous peoples had never been present at the head of political and media power in such numbers in Argentina. But in addition to these sorts of speeches, during successive governments the expansion of popular sectors and inclusion of Indigenous groups was implemented in a tangible manner through what was known as a “Public Policy of Interculturality” by which several measures aimed at promoting greater visibility of these groups as political, social, economic, and cultural actors and offering them a greater say in the formulation and implementation of public policy were implemented.* In rural areas, the “Public Policy of

* These measures included: a) the creation of the Indigenous Participation Council (2004), a forum for participation and consultation between the state and Indigenous peoples coordinated by the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (Resolution 737, 2014); b) Proposal N° 215 of the National Plan against Discrimination (Decree 1086, 2005), which sought to “make effective the promotion of indigenous rights across the country”; c) the opening of the Department of Indigenous Peoples and Natural Resources within the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development run by leaders from Indigenous communities; d) the establishment of Bilingual Intercultural Education (2006) as a mode of teaching; e) Law 26522 on Audiovisual Communication Services, which promotes the right to communication of identity and led among other effects to the creation of the Coordinator of Indigenous Argentine Audiovisual Communication (2011); f) the creation of the Department for the Affirmation of Indigenous Rights (2010), whose goal was to promote greater participation of Indigenous communities in the formulation of public policy; g) the opening of the National Registry of Indigenous Peoples (RENOPI); and h) the establishment of a regime of exceptions for the registry of all citizens who claim Indigenous heritage and lack a National Identity Document (DNI), to allow access to social security provisions (Universal Allocation for Children, Allocation for Pregnancy, pensions and retirement plans), among others.

Interculturality” involved the expansion of selection criteria for development programs and the establishment of special procedures aimed at Indigenous communities that sought to respect their ways of life, organizations, and traditional modes of production.*

However, this new initiative of interaction and dialogue, barely seen before between Indigenous communities and the Argentine state, was occurring in a context of significant tension caused by the expansion and consolidation of the (neo)-extractivist developmental model based on increased soybean cultivation and the exploitation of natural resources (Gudynas 2009; Svampa 2013; Petras and Veltmeyer 2014; Lapegna 2016). To return to the central argument of this book, I suggest that to properly understand the processes of accumulation by dispossession analyzed here and particularly how Indigenous communities relate to them, one must answer the following questions: What kind of experiences have shaped how these communities perceive the events related to the expansion of soybean cultivation in the post-neoliberal period? What meanings and memories inform their “local rationalities” in their specific historical context of inclusion and exclusion? What different positions were held by these communities while these processes occurred? In other words, it is necessary to examine and incorporate the multiple memories, perspectives, and aspirations of the actors involved in the analysis of specific processes of dispossession (Nielsen 2018).

Considering the full range of political responses to processes of accumulation by dispossession is important not only for an understanding of the insidious mechanisms by which capitalism expands, but also for comprehending the political dilemmas this diversity of reactions presents. By “political dilemmas,” I mean the circumstances under which a practical position taken as part of a struggle for social justice or labor justice might, for instance, undermine the struggle for environmental justice. Recognizing these dilemmas is an essential step toward a conception of

* These criteria and measures included: a) the declaration of an emergency of community land and the suspension of evictions of communities (Law 26.160, 2006); b) the creation of the National Program for Territorial Surveys of Indigenous Communities set up to define the boundaries of land occupied by Indigenous communities and establish the framework for their subsequent recognition (2007); and c) the establishment of special procedures for programs and projects coordinated by Unit for Rural Change and the Ministry Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (2009) focused on Indigenous communities.

the potential bridges that might be built between the different struggles and negotiations of subaltern groups within these contexts.

WHEN THE GLOBAL BECOMES LOCAL

One of the challenges that arises when we try to analyze the relationship between processes of accumulation by dispossession, post-neoliberal governments, and the different positions of Indigenous communities is the need to consider both global and local historical processes without giving one greater priority than the other. It is important to move beyond the fallacy of a global-local dichotomy: first, because it is the only way in which we can avoid being overwhelmed by the sensation that global forces are imposing themselves upon us and there's nothing we can do about it. Second, because it will allow us to avoid exclusive specificity, helping us see that our struggles are not isolated occurrences but constitute part of a historical wave from which a larger resistance movement might emerge (Cox and Nilsen 2014, 3).

To achieve this, I used the Extended Case Method (ECM) (Burawoy 1998, 2001, 2009). This is a methodological approach that, through theoretically guided ethnography, allows us to analyze how global and local processes are connected or separate across space and time (Hart 2004, 2006; Jakobsen and Nielsen 2020). When working with the ECM, the starting point is the hypothesis that our perception of the world is governed by the theories to which we adhere—for example, Marxist theory in this case—and especially what one might call a focus on accumulation by dispossession. As Burawoy argues, “rather than theory emerging from the field, what is interesting in the field emerges from the theory” (1991, 9). It is important to make clear that theoretically guided ethnography does not regard social reality as a mere reflection or fully resolved confirmation of preexisting theory. To the contrary, the method focuses on cases that cannot apparently be explained by our chosen theoretical framework. Because it requires immersion in local environments and direct contact with actors and informants, the ECM provides the necessary tools to expand our theories by analyzing specific aspects of capitalist development in different places as well as the resistance and negotiations it generates. This methodology allows for a macro analysis of the structures and power flows of accumulation without losing sight of the importance of local experiences or what in the following chapters are

described, following Nilsen and Cox (2013), as “local rationalities”—the varied, fragmentary, and contradictory ways in which these processes are perceived and interpreted as well as their different effects on people’s actions.

The Extended Case Method in Chaco

With the goal of analyzing the dynamics generated by the expansion of soybean farming, both in terms of resistance and in terms of accommodation, I embarked upon field work in Chaco. One of the reasons I chose this province for my research was the publication in local newspapers of reports establishing that between 2007 and 2008 there was a correlation between the increase in mortality rates among the Indigenous communities of that province and the soybean boom. For example, *Página 12* published an article in May 2008 entitled “Chaco, Where Poverty Is Even More Impoverished,” in which it reported that “the socioeconomic situation being suffered in Chaco can be explained, according to the specialists consulted, by the process of rural expulsion caused by single crop planting practices, especially soybeans.” I wanted to analyze the issue in greater depth because becoming widespread among the population was the idea that poverty in Chaco and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples were exclusively caused by a crop rather than a production model or long-standing political, economic, and cultural systems.

The debate about the socioeconomic consequences of the expansion of soybean cultivation was also related to historic conflicts between the Peronist government and the opposition. As tensions between the Kirchner administration and the agricultural sector grew following the implementation of a series of policies, such as an increase in the taxation of exports of soybeans, large portions of the urban middle classes who did not support the government began to fill their social media feeds with images of Indigenous communities living in extreme poverty. These images were presented as evidence of the supposed failure of the government’s economic and social policies. The accusation was that the government was more interested in increasing its control over provincial governors through its distribution of income from export tariffs than addressing the needs of rural communities. A good example of these arguments can be found in an article published in *La Política Online* (2008), which reported that

in the Impenetrable forests of Chaco, indigenous populations are suffering from extreme neglect and poverty comparable to the most underdeveloped areas of Africa. While the government crows about the global economic crisis and boasts about the “strength” of Argentina, dramatic cases of extreme malnutrition, tuberculosis and Chagas are hitting Capitanich’s province. ... However, nothing can help the fact that the published photographs ... reflect the banality and criminal incompetence of a government that celebrates its trade surplus but is unable to fulfil the state’s responsibility to provide even the most basic support.

Meanwhile, supporters of the government argued that opposition sectors seeking to reestablish the neoliberal model were using the historic poverty and marginalization of Indigenous communities for their own ends to manipulate public opinion. As a counterargument, the government presented the policies of social inclusion it had been implementing since 2003 and the progressive—albeit gradual—improvements in social indicators among these groups. Significantly, the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of Indigenous peoples were absent from these debates.

My first visit to Chaco occurred between December 2010 and February 2011. Initially I got in touch with representatives from the Department for Family Agriculture, who arranged my visits to the interior of the province. These initial journeys were useful for building up a network of contacts as well as gaining a better understanding of the different realities and challenges faced by the Indigenous communities of Chaco. The case studies I selected were those of Colonia Cacique Catán, home to several Moqoit communities, and Pampa del Indio, which is mainly populated by Qom communities.* Both groups belong to the Guaykurú linguistic

* Throughout this work I shall use the denominations *Moqoit* and *Mocoví* and *Qom* and *Toba*, interchangeably. Although the term *Toba* has been imposed upon Qom communities and has negative connotations, they have now reappropriated the name and use it themselves interchangeably. *Toba* is a word of Guaraní origin and means “large forehead,” alluding to the ancient custom of shaving one’s eyebrows (Tola 2010). Qom, in contrast, refers to those who speak the same language (qom laqtaq) and share certain practices (for a more detailed analysis, see Tola 2010).

family.* Colonia Cacique Catán is located in the southwest of the province close to Charata, in the Department of Chacabuco. This department is part of an area known as the Western Agriculture Region, where much of the land has been used for agriculture for many years. Pampa del Indio, meanwhile, is located in the Department of General San Martín and forms part of an area known as the Mixed Northern Region. In contrast to Chacabuco, agricultural activities here initially focused on raising livestock and tannin production (commercial agriculture only arrived in the area in the 1940s). In spite of their differences, between the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century both experienced a significant increase in soybean production, resulting in significant changes to the geography and to economic, social, and cultural dynamics in each region.

The decision to focus my research on communities inhabited by different ethnic groups who had experienced contrasting forms of exclusion and insertion in the history of capitalist development in Argentina—as well as variations in the modes of relationship, negotiation, and rupture with the state—is aimed at revealing the different ways in which subaltern groups perceive, interpret, and experience processes of accumulation by dispossession. I have tried to avoid homogeneous representations of Indigenous communities that sometimes appear in sociological studies of dispossession. By investigating parallel case studies in areas where the land has historically been used differently, I was able to emphasize the importance of the unequal geographies of capitalism and how they relate to the specific ways in which processes of dispossession occur. These distinctive characteristics in each case reflect more clearly the contingent and varied nature of the process of accumulation by dispossession.

In 2012 I spent four months doing fieldwork in Pampa del Indio and Colonia Cacique Catán, followed by several brief visits to both areas in 2016, 2017, and 2018. In both Pampa del Indio and Colonia Cacique Catán, I conducted structured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews with key interlocutors and carried out participatory observation. In general terms, I employed the “snowball” sampling method, by which the interviewees suggested further informants for me to contact.

In many cases the interviews were carried out on the patios of the homes of Qom and Moqoit families, meaning that although they were originally

* Made up of the Qom, Moqoit, Pilagá, and Abipones peoples.

planned as individual conversations, they often ended up involving larger groups. These groups varied in nature, sometimes involving other family members who happened to be present in the space where the interview was taking place as well as neighbors who were invited to join in and share their opinion. In contrast, the interviews with public officials, both criollo and Indigenous, generally took place in their offices and were carried out individually. It was through these interviews and the accounts I gathered that I was able to consider the uniqueness of the “local rationalities” and their most relevant aspects in understanding how processes of accumulation by dispossession were perceived, experienced, and resisted (Nilsen and Cox 2013).

However, being a person of European descent and a temporary visitor to the area where the communities lived obviously influenced my analysis and my perspective on the issues in question. Significantly, both the interviews and the testimonies were carried out and recorded in Spanish. Because Spanish is my first language, I did not require translators or mediators, but even though both the Qom and Moqoit communities are generally bilingual, it is nonetheless a language that has been imposed upon them. The language in which the information was collected is in itself significant in terms of relationships of power and the experience of silencing. In spite of these limitations, in these pages I have tried to bear faithful witness to the perspectives of the Indigenous groups with whom I have shared my analysis of forms of development, access to resources, citizenship, and agribusiness. Finally, it is important to make clear that with the exception of public officials and organization leaders whose positions are public knowledge, the names of those interviewed for this publication are pseudonyms.

THE SILENCES OF DISPOSSESSION: ARGUMENT AND OUTLINE

This book analyzes the different ways in which subaltern groups interact with and mold processes of accumulation by dispossession at a local level. Taking a long-term historical perspective, this book shows how these processes are perceived, experienced, and resisted or accepted, depending on the different ways in which dispossession, resistance, and negotiation have been incorporated into local collective memory.