UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LAW,
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Master's degree in
Human Rights and Multi-level Governance

Trans-Forming Pedagogies:

from Popular Education to the Case Study of Mocha Celis

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A.Y. 2025/2026

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Introduction

This research project emerges from a curricular internship carried out between September 2025 and November 2025 at "Mocha Celis", the first popular high school (*bachillerato popular*) in the world created by and for Trans* and Non-Binary people. Based in Buenos Aires, the school welcomed us into its everyday life and allowed us to witness an alternative way of schooling based on a collective project that combines teaching, political organization and material accompaniment for communities made structurally vulnerable by cis-heteropatriarchal[1] and capitalist forms of exclusion. Being received into this space produced a shift in what we understood education to be and what it means to build institutional alternatives when institutions, in the broadest sense, are absent, hostile or insufficient.

"Mocha Celis" showed us, concretely, that a form of struggle and resistance from below is possible; one that is horizontal, community-rooted and capable of producing highly material effects on people's lives. This thesis is therefore also an effort to make visible what is too often treated as marginal or "exceptional": the political everyday labor through which oppressed communities build infrastructures of survival and dignity. While "Mocha Celis" is at the center of our fieldwork entry point, it does not stand alone. It is part of a broader constellation of TTNB (*Travesti*, Trans, and Non-Binary) educational experiences that have emerged in Argentina and beyond. Their existence and proliferation contest the idea that educational inclusion is only a matter of policy reform, and instead foreground the role of collective organizing, territorial networks and political pedagogy.

Bringing these experiences into a Master thesis in Human Rights and Multilevel Governance is also a deliberate political positioning regarding the very nature of "human rights". Indeed, we are interested in shifting the analytical point of view away from the neutral and detached voices that often dominate international and institutional discourses toward the voices of oppressed communities and collective practices of resistance. In our reading, rights are not only a matter of formal recognition or normative declarations but are always mediated by power, contested in everyday life, and made (or unmade) through

[1] In this study, we understand the heterosexual-cis norm as a system in which sexual conduct and kinship relations are hegemonically organized around heterosexuality, which is constructed as the culturally accepted "natural" order and, therefore, shapes the moral conduct of society. The core of heteronormativity rests on the binary of sexual difference: the assumption that humanity is biologically divided into men and women.

institutions, economies and social relations. This is why we take seriously the knowledge produced by communities themselves and why we treat grassroots educational projects as sites where the limits and contradictions of rights implementation become evident.

From this standpoint, the present work asks what kinds of alternative educational pathways in Argentina can actually work for marginalized communities, specifically TTNB people, when the dominant school system is itself one of the infrastructures that excludes and harms them. Our research question, then, is whether a framework can be built that does not reproduce the violence and abandonment that the formal educational framework has historically distributed. In this sense, our central hypothesis is double: on the one hand, TTNB movement-built schooling can be liberatory for TTNB people because it creates spaces where recognition is not conditional on conformity, where knowledge is produced from lived experience, where accompaniment exceeds the classroom, and where collective presence interrupts isolation and abandonment; on the other hand, these projects are politically relevant beyond TTNB communities since they expose the limits of cis-binary schooling as a supposedly neutral institution, and they invite a broader transformation of education as a collective right. If educational institutions reproduce cis-binary governance and social hierarchies, then counter-education is not only a safe space for those most affected but it is also a proposal for society as a whole, because dismantling binary logics and disciplinary regimes expands the horizon of who can appear, speak, learn and be recognized.

Literature review and methodology

In order to address these questions, we began with an extended phase of bibliographic research aimed at building a theoretical and conceptual framework for analyzing popular education and TTNB counter-education in Argentina. The first axis concerns the genealogy and meaning of popular education in South America. Authors such as Paulo Freire were foundational for our work because Freire's reflections on oppression, dialogue and *conscientización* offer a vocabulary for thinking education as a political practice rather than a neutral transmission of content. Freire's critique of banking education, and his insistence that learning is inseparable from the ability to name the world and transform it, provide a key entry point for understanding why popular

pedagogy is not merely an alternative teaching method, but a dispute over power, knowledge and subject formation.

At the same time, we approached Freire not as a closed topic but as a starting point that has been reworked, challenged and expanded by later authors and by concrete experiences. In the Argentine context, Adriana Puiggrós' contributions are central for understanding the historical entanglement between educational projects, state-building and social struggle, as well as for thinking the "popular" as a political field of contestation. In dialogue with this, authors such as Claudia Korol allow us to foreground feminist and de-patriarchal dimensions of popular pedagogy: the refusal of abstract universalism, the centrality of embodied experience and the idea of knowledge as a collective practice linked to struggles for life. Other contributions includes scholarship that emphasizes education as territorially situated and historically formed, help us articulate popular education as a practice embedded in social spaces, identities and material relations, rather than confined to classrooms.

The second axis concerns queer, trans*, and transfeminist frameworks that allow us to analyze how education intersects with gender governance, regimes of recognition and material survival. In this regard, we engage with authors such as bell hooks, Judith Butler, Josefina Fernández, Lohana Berkins and Michel Foucault, and we also situate these contributions in dialogue with contemporary queer and transfeminist debates (including those associated with Paul B. Preciado). From hooks, we draw an understanding of education as a practice of freedom that requires the transformation of classroom relations, authority and the very idea of who counts as a knower. From Butler, we retain an analysis of gender not as an inner truth but as a regime continuously produced and enforced through institutions and norms, which helps us read schooling as a site where binary governance is reproduced through documentation, language, discipline and everyday interactions. Fernández and Berkins, in different but complementary ways, allow us to situate TTNB categories in the Argentine context as historically produced political identities, linked to *travesti* activism and to struggles for recognition and survival. Finally, Foucault's reflections on biopower help us analyze how life and death are governed through institutions, and why education cannot be separated from the broader administration of bodies, populations and "normality".

A clarification is essential at this point: from a decolonial standpoint, we attempted as much as possible to build our bibliography through the work of subjects and collectives located in the region, rather than reproducing the epistemic privilege of the Global North. Even more strongly, the statistical sources and datasets used throughout the thesis are, for the most part, produced by TTNB people, organizations and networks that are part of Argentina's trans* and gender-nonconforming social fabric. This choice is both methodological and ethical: in fact, one of our guiding commitments in writing this thesis has been to avoid extractivist or invisibilising practices, and instead to create space for subaltern voices that have too often been spoken for, translated without care or rendered as objects of study. In line with this commitment, all interview excerpts are kept in their original language (Spanish), precisely to preserve meaning, force and political value. This choice reflects our intent to avoid smoothing out or re-framing people's words through translation, especially when those words carry situated registers, community vocabularies and political textures that are inseparable from the context in which they were produced. We think that keeping the excerpts in Spanish allows the reader to encounter the interviewees' voices more directly, including their conceptual choices and the local terms through which experiences of resistance, and collective pedagogy are articulated. At the same time, it is a way of recognizing that translation is never neutral, since it always entails interpretation, and it can inadvertently (sometimes consciously) weaken or distort what is being said. The same approach applies to bibliographic materials consulted in Spanish: whenever possible, we have retained quotations in their original language as well. While this choice may at times make the reading more demanding, we considered it ethically preferable, since translation could risk altering the meaning, tone and political texture of the text. We also acknowledge that English versions exist for some of the sources consulted. Nonetheless, our presence in Argentina during the research and writing phases made it materially and economically easier to access these texts in Spanish. That said, some works were consulted in English, and in those cases quotations are reported in English accordingly.

Methodologically, a substantial part of this thesis is grounded in fieldwork interviews conducted in November and December 2025. Interviews were held both in person and remotely. Most in-person interviews were individual and took place within "Mocha Celis" (classrooms, administrative and academic offices, the school library etc.), but also,

in some cases, in the homes of the people interviewed. One specific interview, with students, was conducted collectively in the school library. In each interview, we began by requesting consent for audio recording, by communicating the anonymity of the interview and the research project and by explaining the use of the material. However, the recordings were later lost due to the loss of the recording device; therefore, all direct quotations included in the final chapters are drawn from written notes.

Our interviews were qualitative and non-structured in the sense that we did not rely on a fixed list of questions, but rather on a set of thematic points that guided the conversation, actively avoiding what could be seen as "data extraction". This is a methodological and ethical stance too: the informality of our interviews was intentional, precisely to disrupt the formal academic hierarchy between investigator and investigated. In our case, the line separating these roles was further blurred by the relational and temporal context since at the moment of many interviews, we had already been present in the school for months, collaborating daily for several hours. This created a relational component that was not only professional but also human, emotional and political. Moreover, many contacts beyond Buenos Aires were obtained through the dense relational networks that characterize TTNB communities in Argentina. This networked access is itself part of the phenomenon we analyze. Indeed, it shows how movement infrastructures circulate resources, care and knowledge and how they make schooling possible under conditions of scarcity.

Beyond this, throughout the thesis we include our own standpoint as active participants in both the projects analyzed ("Mocha Celis") and in the research and writing process itself. We understand this gesture as an auto-ethnographic orientation that our supervisor encouraged us to integrate, and that we consider epistemologically coherent with the object of study. Our voices, experiences and perspectives are not less valid than those of the authors we analyze or the people we interview; on the contrary, we consider it important to validate our standpoint against the fiction of neutrality. In fact, there is no neutral or impartial point of view, since what is often presented as "objective" tends to reproduce a historically dominant positionality (cis, white, bourgeois, able-bodied, and located in the Global North) and its extractivist ways of narrating the world. This thesis chooses, instead, to make perspective visible and to treat positionality as part of its analytical strength.

Ultimately, in agreement with our supervisor, we considered it methodologically appropriate to include, within Chapter III, a selection of photographs and visual material created by and within "Mocha Celis", as a complement to the interview-based analysis. In this regard, we treat visual and artistic practices not as illustrative "add-ons", but as meaningful sources in their own right. In fact, they condense collective memory, political imagination and everyday pedagogical life in ways that cannot always be captured through transcripts or analytic prose alone. Bringing these materials into the chapter is therefore a way of expanding what counts as evidence and how knowledge is communicated, allowing the thesis to register the sensorial, affective and symbolic dimensions through which "Mocha Celis" and the TTNB communities narrates themselves and makes their struggles visible. At the same time, this choice helps us resist a purely text-bound academic register by making space for the forms of expression through which the school produces and circulates situated knowledge.

Political and ethical clarifications

Before offering an overview of the thesis structure, we want to take space in this introduction for a set of political and ethical clarifications, aware that this introductory framing is intentionally substantial.

First, we have so far written in the first-person plural, "we". This is because the present work was born from our internship at "Mocha Celis" and is the result of a long process of shared research, interviewing and drafting carried out by us, Chris Scollo (she/they) and Silvia Babini (she). The fact that the final thesis is formally submitted under a single author name (in this case, mine; and the same applies to Sivia's version) is the product of bureaucratic and administrative constraints typical of academic institutions, which still struggle to move beyond individualist and neoliberal logics of knowledge production. The work therefore exists in two versions: mine, which adopts "Mocha Celis" as the final case study; and Silvia's, which analyses TTNB popular educational experiences outside Buenos Aires. In the absence of these limiting conditions, we would have published this work as a single shared thesis. We therefore reclaim the collective nature of this research, which is the result of negotiation, dialogue and sometimes conflict, which did not weaken the project but enriched it. We explicitly reject the imposed individualism of neoliberal

academic production and express a political desire for institutional openings that make collective knowledge production not only possible but recognized.

Second, we acknowledge our privileges not only as Europeans, but also because one of us occupies a privileged position as a cis and white person. Even though both of us belong to the queer community, we tried to keep these asymmetries in mind throughout the research process and to avoid imposing our analytical categories onto our observations as if they were universal. However, this reflexive stance does not solve power differences, but it is part of our ethical discipline of research.

Also, a necessary mention concerns language. English, as the writing language of this thesis, facilitates certain moves against gender binarism simply because it does not gender most nouns and adjectives. By contrast, Spanish (as well as Italian and other neo-Romance languages) is grammatically gendered in a way that constantly reproduces a masculine/feminine binary and a patriarchal linguistic order. This is well known within queer communities, yet we want to make it explicit for readers: in this work, the use of "x" in Spanish and "they" in English refers to a broader spectrum of gender expression that exceeds the masculine/feminine binary and recognizes the existence and validity of dissident gender identities. We consider transfeminisms also a question of language, because hegemonic social values are reinforced through writing. Likewise, our use of "Trans*" or "T*" signals heterogeneity pointing to the variety, fluidity and historical transformation of gender-nonconforming identities, rather than treating "trans" as a single stable category.

A further linguistic and political clarification concerns our use of the concept "Argentina". This nation-state was consolidated through the genocide, enslavement and systemic marginalization of dozens of peoples, nations, communities and collectivities who have inhabited these territories long before the name "Argentina" existed. We are aware that using this term can contribute to the invisibilisation of ongoing decolonial struggles, like those of Mapuche, Aymara, Guaraní, Tehuelche nations and peoples, among others (this list is not exhaustive, and we name it precisely as a partial gesture of recognition). We also want to acknowledge the names these lands already had and continue to have in different languages, such as *Abya Yala*, and, in *Mapudungun* (Mapuche's language), *Wallmapu, Puelmapu* and *Gulumapu*. Naming, here, is part of a political ethics in which we aim at recognizing our position as Europeans walking on

these lands and we refuse the comfort of treating the nation-state as a neutral geographical container detached from colonial violence and ongoing Indigenous resistance.

Thesis structure

The thesis is organized into three chapters. Chapters I and II are shared between the two versions of the thesis (mine and Silvia's), and they provide the common theoretical, historical and political framework. Chapter III is the point of divergence: my version focuses on "Mocha Celis" as a case study grounded in our internship experience, while Silvia's version offers a comparative map of TTNB popular educational projects outside Buenos Aires and analyses the different institutional and territorial conditions that make these experiences possible.

Chapter I lays the conceptual and historical groundwork. The first paragraph clarifies that we use "popular education" not as a fixed definition, but as a contested field shaped by struggle and as a political practice oriented toward dignity, rights-making and collective organization. Then, we reconstruct key concepts that organize this field like Freire's critique of banking education, education as dialogue and cultural action, the role of experience and territory, and the idea that schooling is never a neutral institution because it is always implicated in power relations and social hierarchies. We also mobilize feminist and decolonial contributions that deepen these foundations, emphasizing the embodied, situated and relational nature of knowledge production in popular education.

The second paragraph traces a genealogy of popular education in South America, refusing simplistic origin stories that would either reduce popular education to a single method or locate its emergence exclusively in one historical moment. We situate Freire within a longer horizon of emancipatory pedagogical thinking and within the political ruptures produced by dictatorship, neoliberal restructuring and popular resistance.

The third and last paragraph focuses on *Bachilleratos Populares* in Argentina and on their emergence, evolution and pedagogical-political character. We reconstruct how these experiences developed as movement-built educational infrastructures linked to popular organizations, how they created collective coordination spaces and how they negotiated institutional recognition (especially through processes of officialization) while trying to preserve autonomy and horizontality. This chapter therefore builds the conceptual bridge that allows us to read TTNB *Bachilleratos* not as isolated innovations but as part of a

broader Argentine tradition of counter-education that disputes what schooling is for, who it is for and how it should be governed.

Chapter II extends the analysis by placing cis-binary gender governance at the center. The first paragraph examines TTNB political categories and contested regimes of recognition, combining theoretical perspectives (Butler, Fernández, Berkins) with an attention to the concrete institutional sites where gender is enforced like documentation systems, enrolment forms, attendance registers and everyday interactions where misgendering and policing operate. Here, TTNB subjectivities are treated not as a homogeneous group but as historically produced categories that emerge through struggle and that expose how recognition is granted, withheld or conditioned by power.

The second paragraph foregrounds material survival as analytically inseparable from schooling. Drawing on movement-produced reports and data, as well as testimonies and narrative accounts, we show how structural exclusion from formal labor markets, precarious housing and unequal access to health shape educational trajectories. This section links the broader horizon of rights to the concrete infrastructures that make life possible or impossible. Education, here, cannot be reduced to "individual mobility": it is entangled with the governance of life and death, with abandonment and protection, and with the uneven distribution of social legitimacy.

The final paragraph returns explicitly to pedagogy and emancipation, developing the double argument that is central to the thesis: TTNB popular schooling can be liberatory for TTNB people and at the same time it demands a transformation of the educational system for society as a whole. Through hooks and through testimonies and documents produced within TTNB educational spaces (including materials such as *Travar el Saber*, "EFETT" documents and other movement archives), we mention practices such as integral accompaniment (*abordaje integral*), collective governance and the reworking of curriculum and knowledge. The chapter concludes by opening the path to Chapter III: it frames TTNB *Bachilleratos* as movement-built institutions that respond to cis-binary governance not only by "including" TTNB students, but by transforming what inclusion, knowledge and education can mean.

Chapter III, in my version of the thesis is devoted to the *Bachillerato Popular "*Mocha Celis" and is grounded in the three-month curricular internship that allowed us to participate in daily school life. The chapter begins by situating "Mocha Celis" within the

tensions between legal recognition and institutional violence since Argentina's normative frameworks (such as the Gender Identity Law) coexist with persistent exclusion in schools, labor markets and health systems. In this context, "Mocha Celis" is analyzed as a political and pedagogical response rooted in *travesti* and trans* organizing. The first part, mainly based on the interview carried out to one of the founding members, reconstructs the making and genealogy of "Mocha Celis": its activist roots, its debates over who the school is for and how it should remain politically centered on TTNB communities without becoming exclusionary and its complex relationship with institutional recognition and material support.

The second paragraph shifts to everyday pedagogy and accompaniment. Here, thanks to teachers, students, workers and volunteers that accepted to talk to us, I analyze "Mocha Celis" as a space where education is inseparable from care infrastructures: food, social support, bureaucratic mediation and the creation of a safe territorial environment. I explore how curriculum and knowledge are politicized (through what is taught and how it is taught), how memory is sustained as a living practice and how teachers and students co-produce a horizontal learning environment that contests banking education. At the same time, I do not romanticize this space: we also register tensions, conflicts and the challenges (and contradictions) of sustaining non-hierarchical pedagogy under conditions of structural violence. Throughout, our situated perspective as participants is treated not as a methodological "problem" to hide, but as part of the knowledge the chapter produces about what it means to build an educational institution as a practice of resistance.

Silvia's third chapter builds a comparative "map" of TTNB educational experiences beyond CABA (*Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires*), focusing on initiatives in La Plata, Córdoba, Tucumán, Rosario, Reconquista, and Chaco. It opens by reconstructing their emergence in context, showing how activist demands become viable projects through negotiations over resources, a place to operate, schedules, attendance, and forms of recognition.

The second part develops transversal analytical axes to read the cases comparatively. It foregrounds precarious temporalities, the *abordaje integral* that ties schooling to accompaniment and care, shifting relations with institutions through negotiation and selective refusal, and the making of educational space in non-school venues under conditions of spatial precarity, closing with naming and curriculum as political and non-

neutral technologies. Mentioning Silvia's chapter within my thesis is important because it reinforces that the two versions, while formally separated, are the product of one shared research process and a common analytical horizon.

Challenges and limitations

One of the main difficulties of this project, despite both of our fluency, was working across multiple languages. We are both Italian native speakers; bibliographic research and interviews were conducted mainly in Spanish; and the thesis is written in English. This multilingual process may have influenced interpretation in more than one way and we acknowledge the possibility of errors. We also acknowledge the limited use of AI tools to support the formulation and clarification of some phrases, with the intent of rendering the work as accessible as possible. At the same time, we recognize the ethical, political and environmental problems raised by these technologies, arguing for a use of responsibility and carefulness that does not replace critical authorship.

A second difficulty was collective writing itself. We live and are trained within an extremely individualistic society and therefore negotiating rhythms, boundaries, ideas and responsibilities without hierarchizing the work was challenging. At the same time, it was a process of both personal and academic growth, and we hope collective knowledge production becomes increasingly common and institutionally supported.

Finally, the interview process, particularly the group interviews, also presented methodological challenges. This was our first sustained experience with this format, and the research was further constrained by the loss of some audio recordings following the loss of the recording device. At the same time, these difficulties became a learning site: through practice, we refined concrete strategies for turn-taking, for sustaining respect among us and for managing the interaction in ways that avoided paternalism and supported a horizontal dynamic of shared experience and co-produced knowledge.

CHAPTER I – Popular Education as an Emancipatory Political Practice

1.1 Popular pedagogy: theoretical foundations and key concepts

This chapter lays the conceptual and historical groundwork for understanding popular education not as a stable pedagogical model, but rather as a political field shaped by struggle and uneven institutionalization of its practical experiences.

Many authors have tried so far to find a definition of popular education; however, there is not a consensus in the pedagogical field around its definition. For example, Puiggrós (in Rodríguez, 2013) distinguish between a 'banking' and authoritarian education and another that is dialogical and democratic, defining popular education the one that has «como sujetos participantes centrales a los sectores oprimidos y desposeídos de la sociedad y como educadores a sectores que expresan proyectos de transformación social» (p. 30). Freire, on the other hand, frames it as «un tipo de educación que viene a problematizar la hegemónia y proponer algo transformador, contraponiendo lo oficial con lo popular, siendo lo oficial entendido como una "*educación bancaria*"[2]» (Freire, in Luppino, 2022, p. 7). Finally, Lidia Mercedes Rodríguez (2013) describes popular education as «*u*n proyecto político, una utopía, un horizonte de sentido. El proyecto político popular remite a un horizonte de justicia e igualdad. Donde se pueda "ser parte". […] El espacio político de lo popular organiza un nuevo imaginario. Es alternativo en el sentido que decíamos antes, propone una opción. Las relaciones de subordinación son significadas como opresión, se organizan nuevas identidades.» (p. 36)

In this thesis, we do not use "popular education" as a settled definition. Instead, we use it as an analytical lens to track how education becomes a site of struggle over dignity, recognition and resistance. In fact, rather than a fixed pedagogical model, it is more accurate to treat it as an open field of practices and historical reconfigurations, whose meaning shifts depending on which social actors mobilize it, in what conjuncture and against which forms of domination. Our argument builds on this openness: what we will call "popular education" is recognizable not by a single method but by recurring commitments that actively contests the hierarchies that conventional schooling normalizes. As Adriana Puiggrós (in Rodríguez, 2013) warns, «no podemos quedarnos

[2] The Frerian concept of 'banking education' will be analyzed in the next section.

con categorías definitivas, no podemos decir "la educación popular es esto". […] Hay muchas maneras de organizar ese concepto y la práctica de la educación popular.» (p. 14). This changing dimension reflects the fact that popular education is historically produced through struggles and re-significations: its meaning shifts as different subjects mobilize it, in different conjunctures, to confront different forms of oppression. It has been a pedagogical proposal that enables to think about and debate central categories in revolutionary struggle, such as (popular) power, the paths to (permanent) revolutions, disputes over state power, analyses of class exploitation, patriarchal oppression and colonial domination; and projects such as socialism and feminisms. (Korol & Castro, 2014)

In this sense, popular education operates as a signifier that condenses different claims around education and social transformation. Puiggrós (in Rodríguez, 2013) describes it as a complex field of multiple articulations in which practices intertwine demands emerging from different social actors (indigenous populations, migrants, women, LGBTQIANB+ people, urban popular sectors, racialized communities, vulnerable childhoods, among others) resulting in specific sociological, political and cultural configurations rather than a uniform model.

Korol and Castro (2014) suggest that popular education is best understood as a living political-pedagogical tradition that has repeatedly re-made itself by moving through historical struggles and being transformed by them. In fact, rather than remaining tied to one country, one method, or one institutional setting, it has circulated across South America; see for example the literacy and political formation processes within rural communities in Brazil, or the revolutionary itineraries in 1970s Central America alongside insurgent experiences and later into the organizing work of peasant movements and popular feminisms in Argentina. It also took root in urban peripheries and working-class neighborhoods across Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Peru and Uruguay, where its work was not only about schooling in the narrow sense. It helped sustain collective practices and opened new ways of naming rights and injustice as part of broader movement-building. Popular education widened both its concepts and its practices while making contact with emancipatory pedagogies that connected critiques of capitalism with critiques of heteropatriarchy and colonialism. It encountered with Brazil's *Movimiento sin Tierra* (Landless Workers' Movement) and its Pedagogy of the Land, as well as with

Zapatista decolonizing education. Additionally, Indigenous worldviews deepened its decolonial stance. In the twenty-first century, this cumulative process also meant a broader popularization and renewed political inscription, intertwining with revolutionary projects such as Venezuela's Bolivarian process and Bolivia's efforts toward decolonization.

What holds this field together is an idea of education built from below, from the margins, rooted in lived experiences and collective needs and explicitly attentive to how power shapes knowledge, societies and oppression dynamics. Throughout this thesis, we treat schooling as a governance device that not only transmit knowledge but also classifies people's legitimacy and decides who can appear as "a student" in the first place. Indeed, popular education does not treat learning as a service to be sold, nor as a mere pathway to the obtention of a specific diploma. It proposes education as a collective process in which political organization is grounded in the recognition that learners are subjects of knowledge, rather than passive objects of instruction. Its central question is therefore not only how to teach, but what kind of social relations are enacted through teaching and which forms of knowledge are legitimized or excluded within educational processes. It is important to clarify this point in order to understand that popular education aims at resisting a form of dominant formal schooling that reproduces hegemonic and patriarchal knowledge and social relations.

Crucially, popular education typically emerges where structural inequality shapes everyday life, including access to education itself. In such contexts, formal schooling often appears not as a neutral institution but as an exclusionary apparatus that reproduces hierarchy through classist and racist dynamics. The political stakes of education therefore become visible in basic questions such as who decides what counts as knowledge, whose experiences are recognized as meaningful and which voices are authorized to name reality within the classroom. In addition, while educational interruption is often narrated as an individual story, we want to emphasize that in the contexts analyzed in this thesis emerges that it is structurally produced through institutional misrecognition. This shift will become crucial later, when we analyze educational trajectories as inseparable from work, housing and health.

Nonetheless, this critique does not deny that schools can be spaces of learning and social mobility; rather, it argues that schooling is also a site where power operates. Knowledge is selected and evaluated through hegemonic rules that often privilege colonial and cis-

heteronormative worldviews, while devaluing communal knowledges. The result is that education can become a technology of annihilation in training people to fit into the existing dominant order, frequently presenting that order as natural and inevitable. We use "annihilation" deliberately here to underscore how powerfully the schooling system can shape subjectivities that are useful to the reproduction of the dominant order. This is why the form of education matters as much as access, since a school can include on paper while expelling in practice.

On the contrary, for popular education the problem is not only exclusion in a quantitative sense (who can access schooling), but also exclusion in a political sense; this is why popular education is framed not only as an "alternative pedagogy," but as a critique of schooling as an apparatus that can reproduce ideology and social relations. From here, the next move is to specify the pedagogical and political alternative that has most strongly shaped popular education in South America: Paulo Freire's conceptualization of the *pedagogía del oprimido.*

Paulo Freire is one of the most influential references for popular education because in his works[3] he theorizes education as a political and relational practice, rooted in the lived conditions of oppressed[4] communities and oriented toward transforming them. In Freire's approach, education is not a one-way transmission of content but a collective and dialogical process in which subjects (both 'students' and 'educators') name their exploited conditions and the structures of oppression that create them and develop the capacity to act together to fight them. What is at stake is not only learning outcomes but also the emergence of people as historical agents capable of reading and reshaping their world.

A key point into this framework is the critique of the verticality and of the monopoly over knowledge traditionally assigned to the teacher. In fact,

> Freire pone en juego una visión de la educación que realmente cambia las coordenadas, cambia el orden de los sujetos; y toma un punto, a mi manera de ver, central, que es la posibilidad de la

[3] Freire's notion of popular pedagogy can be explored in depth across his writings, beginning with P*edagogía del oprimido* (2005), *La educación como práctica de la libertad* (1997) and E*ducación y cambio* (2002).

[4] Freire's naming of subjects as 'oppressed' «rather than merely 'poor' [Ed. Note: poor in the sense of finding themselves in a position of economic disadvantage] shifts the analytical focus away from stigmatizing attributes and toward the responsibility of oppressive systems and power relations, while also insisting that oppression is not a closed or deterministic reality but one that can and must be transformed.» (Gorondy Novak, n.d., p. 1)

> educación, del intercambio de lugares entre el sujeto educador y el sujeto educando. Esa es una de las cuestiones centrales que plantea Paulo Freire. Porque el concepto de "educación dialógica" pone en crisis a la educación moderna, dado que un pilar de la educación moderna es el lugar del maestro, el lugar del educador, el lugar del profesor; el lugar del saber está en el lugar del profesor. (Puiggrós in Rodríguez, 2013, p. 11)

This analysis will return considering *Bachilleratos Populares* (BP) as schools that institutionalize dialogue not only as a classroom technique, but as a tool to challenge hierarchies and oppression. In them, dialogue is a political reconfiguration of the pedagogical bond and a clear stance against the capitalist and neoliberal model of hierarchical relation. Moreover, this reconfiguration is coherent with an approach that takes equality as a starting point rather than an endpoint. Importantly, this does not erase the roles of educator and learner, but it denies that those roles should be organized as superiority and inferiority.

Turning back to Freire (2002), his critique of *educación bancaria* captures how oppression is reproduced pedagogically when knowledge is treated as a deposit to be stored in passive recipients: «el maestro todavía es un ser superior que explica a ignorantes. Esto forma una conciencia bancaria. El educando recibe pasivamente los conocimientos y es un depósito que hace el educador. Se educa para archivar lo que se deposita.» (p. 12). In such a model, learners are discouraged from questioning the world, their experiences are treated as irrelevant and education becomes training in adaptation. Against this, Freire proposes a problem-posing education, in which teaching begins from concrete situations and knowledge is produced through dialogue and shared reflection.

A decolonial deepening of this critique is developed in the reading proposed by Inés Fernández Mouján (in Rodríguez, 2013), who revisits Freire's notion of education as cultural action as a historically situated concept within the pedagogy of liberation. For Mouján, the cultural dimension is a constitutive terrain where domination is exercised, because power also operates through the regulation of which worldviews can count as true. In this perspective, thinking education as cultural action becomes inseparable from conflicts over identity and from the critique of Eurocentric conceptual inheritances in societies marked by colonial processes like *Abya Yala*. Mouján (in Rodríguez 2013) foregrounds Freire's insistence that liberation cannot be produced by transmitting emancipatory messages from above, but only by building conditions for collective knowledge-production and for taking the word. As she writes: «para Freire, la acción

cultural liberadora de los hombres y mujeres – en tanto quehacer que se realiza en un tiempo y en un espacio – exige la comprensión de la educación como intervención cultural pues, como la opción es una operación dialógica y transformadora, es imprescindible entender y asumir la educación como un acto de conocimiento y no de memorización.» (p. 87)

Here, the contrast with banking education becomes sharper, showing that cultural action is incompatible with pedagogies of repetition and discipline, because it is defined as a dialogical intervention that treats knowing as an active, collective practice.

At the same time, the author stresses that cultural domination works through what Freire (2002) calls "cultural invasion", an anti-dialogical operation that imposes a single worldview, blocks the creativity and growth of the oppressed and produces alienation and estrangement. In colonized contexts, this invasion can become mimetic, pushing the invaded to see reality through the invader's gaze and to internalize inferiority as a norm. For that reason, taking the word is not simply expressive but a political rupture. Consequently, in the formulation made by Fernández Mouján, Freire's proposal of education as cultural action aims to interrupt this dynamic by reconnecting thought and reality through a praxis that reactivates the capacity of subalternized subjects to know and to transform their world. Nonetheless,

> esta operación no se realiza mágicamente ni automáticamente pues, en el caso de las sociedades colonizadas, es decir, donde se desarrollan procesos culturales alienados, el propio pensamiento-lenguaje no atraviesa el proceso de subjetivación-objetivación; el sujeto deshumanizado no se asume como sujeto pensante, sino a través de otro, se encuentra alienado en el discurso del otro "colono", poderoso y opresor. Por ello, el concepto que construye sobre la realidad no se corresponde con la realidad objetiva, sino con la realidad que imagina. Esto le impide actuar como sujeto pensante sobre la realidad para transformarla. En la situación de dominación colonial, los procesos de subjetivación y objetivación se encuentran disociados. (Mouján in Rodríguez, 2013, pp. 87,88)

In colonial contexts, Freire argues, oppressed people are denied the conditions to affirm their own subjectivity and to narrate their experience in their own terms. Their voices are not granted a space of recognition; when they are "heard," it is largely in order to control and silence them. Read in this way, we could say that Freire's insistence on dialogue and problem-posing education acquires a specifically decolonizing meaning: liberation requires dismantling the cultural mechanisms that naturalize neo-colonial oppression, recovering plural ways of naming the world and rebuilding the conditions in which

subjects can think and act from their own political and territorial realities. This decolonial reading is important because it clarifies the recurring mechanism of domination, which works by severing people from the authority to name their own reality. Popular education attempts to reverse this by rebuilding the conditions for speaking and acting collectively. Beyond this, Freire (2002) insists that knowledge is relational and situated and that educators cannot approach learners as empty vessels: «no hay saber ni ignorancia absoluta: hay sólo una relativización del saber o de la ignorancia. Por esto, no podemos [ed. note: nosotrxs entendido como lxs docentes] colocarnos en la actitud del ser superior que enseña a un grupo de ignorantes, sino en la actitud humilde del que comunica un saber relativo a otros que poseen otro saber relativo.» (p. 8) In this sense, popular education refuses to ignore what people already know beyond the classroom. Instead, it takes those lived knowledges seriously, because they are precisely what can generate new questions, and with them, new forms of reciprocal education.[5]

Two further concepts articulate this political pedagogy: the first one is conscientization, which is the process through which oppressed people develop critical consciousness of their situation and their capacity to respond. The second one is praxis, described as action informed by critical reflection, through which people intervene in reality rather than merely interpreting it. Together, these concepts turn education into a site where thinking and acting are reconnected and where knowledge is valued for its capacity to expand collective agency.

In the Frerian conceptualization of popular education it's clear that liberation cannot be delivered from above; on the contrary it requires collective participation and critical reading of reality. Moreover, knowledge is never abstracted from social life, but embedded in identities and territories. This alternative pedagogy rejects the idea of learning as a neutral transfer of content; it recognizes that knowledge is never produced in abstraction. On the contrary, it is always situated and it comes from histories, from relationships, from social positions and from the material worlds people inhabit. This is why the Freirean refusal of banking pedagogy is not only a methodological claim about better teaching techniques; in popular education, the point of departure is not the

[5] In P*edagogía del oprimido*, Freire draws on his encounters with rural workers to illustrate how easily an educator can arrive carrying conceptual tools linked to the educational project and yet remain unfamiliar with the concrete realities of people's lives. In those exchanges, he realized that the peasants and workers possessed forms of cultural, lexical and historical knowledge about land, labor and lifestyle that he did not have (and that any serious educational process had to start by taking that knowledge as legitimate).

curriculum as an external mandate, but the concrete realities through which learners make sense of the world (realities that are always territorial and historically formed).

This emphasis can be made explicit through approaches that treat socio-political space as an unavoidable dimension of any pedagogical proposal. As Zaylín (2008) puts it, educational processes must attend to a plurality of social coordinates that shape the identities of the subjects that form part of the educational projects (both teachers and students):

> Estos espacios sociales los constituyen, entre otros: el espacio geográfico y de territorio; la historicidad del sujeto, su subjetividad; la memoria histórica, individual; la conformación de la personalidad y su socialización en los diferentes espacios sociales; la formación e identificación cultural, nacional. Todos ellos a ser considerados necesariamente en una propuesta educativa que articule cultura e identidad de los sujetos involucrados mediante aprendizajes educativos y desde la experiencia que las interrelaciones sociales establecen. (p. 35)

In this sense education is never just education, because it always involves a negotiation between lived experience, collective memory and consequently the distribution of voice and recognition inside a learning space. From this perspective, identity becomes pedagogically relevant not as an essential attribute that individuals carry unchanged, but as a socio-historical and relational formation. Identities are produced through social learning (through shared languages, values, affiliations, desires, exclusions and forms of belonging) that take shape in specific contexts and change across time. This also means that identity is never purely individual but is formed in relation to others and to the institutions and discourses that name people from the outside. In educational terms, this implies that both learners and educators participate in shaping the meanings attached to identity in the classroom, sometimes reproducing dominant norms, sometimes displacing them and sometimes opening space for alternative narratives and forms of recognition.

Popular education, in this sense, does not aim at homogenizing learners into a single legitimate subject, nor does it treat difference as a problem to be managed. It works with difference as a social fact and as a political issue: different histories and cultures and different positionalities coexist within learning spaces and can either be disciplined by rigid hierarchies or turned into resources for collective growth. When education is conceived as dialogical and problem-posing, diversity is not tolerated; rather, it becomes a starting point for asking why social inequalities are organized the way they are and how

those inequalities enter classrooms through language, expectations, authority and institutional norms.

This is where territory becomes more than a backdrop; in fact, in popular education, it is not only a geographic space but also a social and symbolic one. It is a site where power is exercised, resources and rights are disputed and where communities build infrastructures of mutual support. Educational practices are shaped by these territorial dynamics, because what people need to contest and transform is directly linked to the conditions of life in specific territorial and social spaces. Treating territory as pedagogically central therefore means recognizing that education is implicated in struggles over housing, work, health, violence, migration and citizenship as existential pillars of everyday life of marginalized communities in neoliberal capitalist contexts.

In other words, understanding knowledge as situated is a commitment that reorganizes pedagogy from the inside. It demands that educational projects begin by listening to the ways people already interpret their world and by taking seriously the knowledges produced in everyday life (often outside institutions, often devalued by formal schooling but in reality, vital for survival and collective organization).

Notably, popular education in South America has intersected with transfeminist and popular feminist philosophies and pedagogies, which insist that everyday life, bodies and social relations are not ‘private’ matters outside politics, but key terrains where oppression is lived and can be contested. This perspective resonates with Freire’s insistence that education is never neutral, but it sharpens the analysis by showing how domination is reproduced not only through institutions and macro-structures, but also through gendered roles, the distribution of care, sexualized bodies, sexual exploitation and forms of violence that operate in families, neighborhoods, workplaces, hospitals and schools. Feminist pedagogy within popular education thus reorients pedagogy toward the lived sites where power becomes intimate and normalized (and therefore where it must be named and transformed). The feminist pedagogy proposed by Claudia Korol (2014), in many of its key articulations, speaks directly to the popular pedagogy discussed so far through Freire and other authors. For example, she put emphasis on a methodology that refuses to treat theory as an external illumination of people’s lives. Her approach aligns with the epistemological stance developed in popular education above, where knowledge

begins from concrete social practice, not from abstract principles imposed from above. In her words:

> La concepción metodológica dialéctica de la educación popular considera como punto de partida de los procesos pedagógicos la práctica social inmediata de las personas. Se propone ir desde lo conocido, inmediato, concreto, hacia lo desconocido, complejo, para poder abstraer desde allí, teorizando con base en las prácticas. Práctica-teoría-práctica es el camino metodológico propuesto, a diferencia de los modos tradicionales que parten de la teoría, o del mundo de las ideas, para "iluminar" el de las experiencias. (p. 79)

Korol's view on popular education implies that people's experiences, especially those that have been historically excluded from 'legitimate' knowledge, are not raw material to be corrected by expert discourse, but starting points for collective theorization and for the construction of strategies of transformation. Moreover, Korol's methodological emphasis makes the collective dimension of popular education even more central by stating that if educational processes move from practice to theory and back to practice, then learning cannot be reduced to individual competence. It requires shared spaces «para que los dolores que produce el desaprendizaje de las opresiones pueda ser compartido y sostenido en los colectivos» (p. 22). From this perspective, the group is not merely a learning context, but an epistemological and political condition of knowing: it is the space «para identificar los obstáculos epistemológicos, para intentar superarlos, y para que el diálogo desde diferentes perspectivas nos permita enriquecer el conocimiento, y nos sostenga en nuestras posibles caídas o dificultades para atravesar ese proceso.*»* (p. 77). The collective dimension, therefore, is structurally tied to the political horizon of the pedagogy of the oppressed, insofar as it enables social transformation to be imagined and practiced through the construction of militant organizations that do not delegate revolutionary action to so-called "representatives," but instead assume, firsthand, the responsibility of becoming active and incisive political subjects in struggle. It is here that Korol's proposal reveals its revolutionary charge: a pedagogical practice oriented toward the emancipation of oppressed subjectivities, marked by a militant energy and by an understanding of education as the building of collective power. Not by chance, hers is a true *pedagogía de las revoluciones* oriented toward the «descolonización, despatriarcalización y desmercantilización de la vida» (p. 78). In this sense, Korol helps illuminate and broaden the theoretical landscape of popular educations, «que hacen de la esperanza no una ilusión

mágica, sino una acción colectiva tendiente a revolucionar las subjetividades aplastadas por las derrotas» (p. 24).

With Korol, this first part comes to a close; in the following sections, we will move toward a more historical reconstruction of educational struggles in the continent and then focus on one of the most significant materializations of popular education in the Argentine context: *Bachilleratos Populares.*

1.2 History of popular education in South America

Tracing a genealogy of popular education in South America means avoiding two simplifications that often distort the field: the first is treating popular education as a timeless, coherent method; the second is locating its origins exclusively in twentieth-century critical pedagogy. In fact, while Paulo Freire is a decisive reference, the vocabulary and political imagination that later nourish popular education emerge earlier, in the context of (de)colonial projects that sought to redefine education as part of a broader emancipatory horizon. In this sense, popular education appears historically as a name available to articulate a pedagogical project tied not to elite modernization, but to the well-being of the majorities and the construction of a different social order.

This is why Simón Rodríguez[6] occupies a foundational place in the continental genealogy. As Rodríguez Mercedes (2013) notes,

> Desde el siglo xix "educación popular" […] era un significante disponible para nombrar una novedad, la de la educación del "pueblo". En el Simón Rodríguez que a principios del siglo xix regresa a América para acompañar el proyecto bolivariano se trataba de una pedagogía que acompañara un proyecto emancipatorio, donde la centralidad se ubicaba en el bienestar de las mayorías. Por eso no participaba de una visión del progreso que subordinara a su lógica el bienestar de las mayorías. (pp. 28, 29)

What is crucial in this formulation is that popular education is not imagined as the extension of schooling to those who were previously excluded, but as a pedagogical form consistent with the reorganization of social life and with a critique of "progress" when

[6] Simón Rodríguez (1769–1854) was a Venezuelan educator, writer and political thinker, best known as Simón Bolívar's teacher and mentor. He is considered a key figure in South American pedagogical thought because he linked education to emancipation and to the building of more egalitarian republican societies. Rodríguez criticized the uncritical imitation of European models and argued that South America needed to invent educational forms rooted in its own population and mixed realities. He advocated inclusive public schooling oriented toward the popular classes and imagined schools as spaces of integral formation, capable of bringing together knowledge, work and citizenship.

progress is defined against the needs of the many. Simon Rodríguez, in fact, anticipates a debate that will remain structurally present across South American educational history: whether schooling is oriented toward emancipation or toward assimilation into a capitalist modernity that often presents itself as inevitable. Ariel Zysman (in Rodríguez, 2013) captures the modernity of Rodríguez's position when he argues that Rodríguez states «una posición que inaugura el debate pedagógico moderno, esto es, la posibilidad de articular el sentido de la educación a la construcción de una sociedad distinta, emancipada de la metrópoli española y con un fuerte componente utópico en la constitución de un nuevo sujeto social.» (p. 115). In other words, the question is not simply how to teach, but what kind of society education is meant to help build and what kind of subject education is meant to form. This orientation becomes even more concrete in the social composition Rodríguez imagines for the school itself, since he «imaginaba una escuela poblada de negros, ind*os [ed. Note], esclavos y trabajadores a partir de los cuales habría de construirse una nueva sociedad y donde enseñar equivalía a pensar y hacer pensar la realidad. Rodríguez (1828) se refería a esa escuela como escuela social»[7] (p. 115). The emphasis on an *escuela social* matters because it anticipates a later cornerstone of popular education, namely the idea that education is inseparable from social practice and from the collective capacity to think reality critically rather than merely adapt to it. Nonetheless, it is essential mentioning Simon Rodríguez since his vision of education as a decolonial tool aimed at forming the fighters against the Spanish colonizers.[8]

However, these emancipatory meanings did not become hegemonic in the formation of national education systems. In Argentina, the nineteenth century was also the terrain of a competing pedagogical project that linked schooling to liberal state-building and to a "civilizing" program. Zysman (in Rodríguez, 2013) explicitly frames this counter-horizon in the figure of Sarmiento, who had a pedagogical project as an «expresión del liberalismo que ubicó a la escuela en el centro de la escena para llevar adelante una aculturación de

[7] We retain the term "ind*os" as it appears in the original quotation for methodological transparency; however, we stress that it is a colonial and inaccurate term for Indigenous peoples in the Americas and should not be used today. Yet, its presence in the cited passage likely reflects the historical context in which it was written.

[8] For a wider and deeper analysis of popular education's trajectories in South America, cfr.: Holliday, J. O. 2020. *La Educación Popular Latinoamericana. Historia y claves éticas, políticas y pedagógicas.* El colectivo and Puiggròs, A. 2016. *La educación popular en América Latina. Orígenes, polémicas y perspectivas*. Colihue.

la sociedad que diera lugar a la modernidad capitalista del cono sur»[9] (p. 115). This is important not only as historical description, but because it illuminates how public instruction could be articulated to an assimilationist project that defined modern citizenship through a particular cultural and economic model.

In fact, Zysman argues that, looking at the system consolidated by the end of the nineteenth century, it is possible to speak of a victory of the Sarmientine discourse over the Simón Rodríguez horizon, meaning that «de los múltiples sentidos disponibles para un proyecto educativo a principios de siglo xix, la educación popular se articuló con un discurso escolar específico que redujo la construcción del sujeto pedagógico al ideal de ciudadano moderno, ilustrado y capitalista» (p. 116). This helps explain why popular education in the region re-emerges also as a counter-hegemonic practice: not because it is a "new" invention, but because its more radical meanings were historically displaced and subordinated within capitalist educational regimes.

Within this longer story, Freire's contribution can be understood as the most elaborated political pedagogy within a broader South American struggle to link education to emancipation, especially under modern conditions of oppression. What changes with Freire and the other authors is the development of a specific conceptualization of popular education capable of confronting twentieth-century neoliberal regimes of domination, that are not only institutional and economic, but also social and deeply tied to a system of marginalization and exploitation.

A crucial turning point for understanding contemporary popular education in South America is the way neoliberalism reorganized not only institutions and economies but also social life and subjectivities:

> El desarrollismo en la década de 1960 y principios de la de 1970 en América Latina, las dictaduras, la socialdemocracia, y luego con el arrasador asentamiento del neoliberalismo. Este último ha logrado una construcción hegemónica: hay que comprender que no afectó solo las instituciones, sino que penetró en la conformación de los sujetos y organizó al conjunto de la sociedad. El neoliberalismo caló el mundo, triunfó y organizó, y sigue teniendo las llaves del imperio. (Puiggrós in Rodríguez, 2013, pp. 11, 12)

[9] In South America, the term *Cono Sur* (Southern Cone) refers to the region at the southern end of the continent, most commonly Argentina, Chile and Uruguay and sometimes also southern Brazil and Paraguay.

This analysis is important because it suggests that neoliberalism cannot be understood only as a set of policies; it must also be read as a cultural regime that produces ways of thinking and relating, including within education.

In educational terms, this reconfiguration often translated into reforms oriented toward market logics and the treatment of education as an individual investment rather than a collective right. At the same time, neoliberalism deepened forms of exclusion and precarization that forced popular sectors to reorganize their strategies of survival and resistance, frequently building infrastructures of mutual support where the state retreated. In this sense, popular education re-emerges as both a response to exclusion and as a practice through which social movements produce political subjects capable of interpreting and confronting the new forms of oppression.

This regional shift is also linked to the political transformations of the early 2000s, when several governments in South America emerged through explicit rejection of neoliberal agendas. As Puiggrós notes, «Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva y Néstor Kirchner en 2003, y dos años antes Hugo Chávez. Los escenarios son distintos, pero coinciden en el rechazo a las políticas educativas cuyo motor son intereses del capital y las reglas del mercado que avanzan aceleradamente» (p. 11). While these political cycles were heterogeneous, they nonetheless marked a moment in which the legitimacy of neoliberal reforms was publicly contested, opening new possibilities for movement struggles and demands and educational experiments. However, the impact of neoliberalism did not disappear with these political shifts. Its social effects (poverty, inequality, fragmentation of community ties and the reorganization of labor) continued to shape the conditions under which popular education projects operated.

Turning to Argentina, we focus on how dictatorship and neoliberal restructuring not only produced economic exclusion but also reorganized the conditions of collective life. This is the terrain on which movement infrastructures, including educational ones, re-emerged as strategies of survival and political recomposition. Even though this context produced severe educational exclusion, it also created a dense landscape of social movements that would later become central to the emergence of *Bachilleratos Populares* (BP). To begin with, the last military dictatorship did not only reshape the political field through repression, but it also reorganized the social structure by destroying collective infrastructures and by paving the way for financial liberalization. Moreover, the transition

to formal “democracy” did not automatically reverse this trajectory. Instead, subsequent governments deepened structural reforms that aligned the country with a neoliberal model, transforming state priorities and worsening welfare protections. This period set in motion a long process through which inequality intensified, community ties were strained and large sectors of the population became increasingly exposed to symbolic and material precariousness.

Within this context, social movements did not simply return after dictatorship, but they reconstituted themselves in a changed terrain. One of the key processes was the reconstruction of social bonds and organizational capacities that had been shattered by repression and by neoliberalism’s individualizing dynamics. In fact, these years are marked by a process of «reconstrucción de las relaciones sociales destruidas o fragmentadas por la dictadura y [el] modelo neoliberal» (Zibechi, in Aguiló & Wahren, 2014, p. 98). This reconstruction did not occur in a single organizational form. Rather, it unfolded across a heterogeneous landscape: recovered factories, unemployed workers’ movements, territorial organizations, youth collectives, cultural centers and community initiatives that sought not only to survive but to re-open spaces of political socialization and to experiment with forms of popular power and collective struggle.

This landscape also needs to be read within the broader South American consolidation of neoliberalism during the 1990s, when market reforms became widespread and were presented as the only viable route to ‘modernization’, while the public narrative framed economic growth as the primary solution to poverty and inequality. However, as the decade progressed, the limitations of this model became increasingly visible: external shocks and capital flight combined with the erosion of labor protections and the weakening of social policies, produced an expansion of structural impoverishment across the country. The social costs of this trajectory were not limited to income and employment, and they also affected education, both directly, through budgetary decisions and institutional reforms, and indirectly, by reshaping the conditions under which people could remain in school. While school enrollment had increased markedly since the 1960s, during the 1990s that expansion slowed significantly. (Luppino, 2022) This slowdown signals a broader shift in the state’s role in guaranteeing educational access and equity. In a context where youth and adult education had already been marginal within the formal system, the neoliberal cycle further marginalized it in pedagogical and budgetary terms,

contributing to the accumulation of unmet educational demand among young and adult populations, especially in popular sectors and in territories already affected by precarization.

From the second half of the 1990s onward, social mobilization gained momentum and began to reshape the landscape of collective action. Nonetheless, protest did not emerge out of nowhere; rather, it intensified over time as the contradictions of the model became harder to manage and as a growing sector of people experienced the loss of social rights in concrete, everyday ways. By the end of Menem's second term (1995–1999)[10], Argentina had seen the consolidation of a new and expanding sector of people pushed into exclusion and marginalization, groups that had lost a significant portion of their social protections precisely as the state retreated from its responsibility to guarantee them. This trajectory converged dramatically at the beginning of the 2000s. The administration of Fernando de la Rúa (1999–2001)[11] inherited an exhausted model and attempted to sustain it through austerity and political management, but the social and economic situation deteriorated rapidly. Education funding provides one clear indicator of this deterioration: in 2001 public spending on education represented 4.86% of GDP, but it fell sharply in the following period, reaching 3.74% by 2003. These were the lowest levels of educational budget allocation in three decades and they coincided with a broader collapse of social conditions. In 2001 unemployment reached a peak of 21.5% and the impact of this level of joblessness was felt across households and territories: poverty stood at 32.7% and extreme poverty at 10.3%. The following year exposed the most brutal face of the neoliberal cycle's social consequences: poverty rose to 49.7% and extreme poverty to 22.7%. Placed in longer perspective, poverty increased by more than 30 percentage points between 1993 and 2002, years that correspond to the consolidation and exhaustion of the neoliberal model. (Luppino, 2022) These indicators are not offered merely as background. Instead, they help explain why, in this context, educational projects built from below

[10] Carlos Saúl Menem was an Argentine politician from the Justicialist Party (Peronism) who served as President of Argentina from 1989 to 1999. He is best known for the country's neoliberal turn in the 1990s, marked by large-scale privatizations, deregulation and market opening, alongside the Convertibility Plan that pegged the *peso* to the U.S. dollar to curb hyperinflation. While these policies brought a period of monetary stability and increased consumption, they also contributed to creating the social conditions leading into the later crisis.

[11] Fernando de la Rúa was an Argentine politician from the Radical Civic Union (UCR) who served as President of Argentina from 1999 to 2001, leading the Alliance coalition.

emerge not simply as pedagogical experiments, but as survival infrastructures tools that become indispensable when the neoliberal nation-state offloads its collapse onto people's lives.

Turning to the December 2001 social uprising, we must read it within this accumulation of tensions. In fact, it was not a single event, but a rupture moment produced by a convergence of economic collapse, institutional delegitimization and the widespread perception that the political system had become incapable of representing collective needs. In this context, the immediate triggers included the *corralito*[12] and the freezing of bank deposits, which turned economic crisis into a direct assault on everyday survival strategies, particularly among middle and popular sectors. In this moment, protest escalated through a combination of organized mobilizations and spontaneous actions, including the spread of *cacerolazos*[13] and the occupation of public space, with the slogan "*Que se vayan todos*". This slogan condensed a generalized rejection of political elites and of the existing order. The government's response relied with the declaration of a state of exception and heavy repression, with deaths and violence in multiple areas of the country. The resignation of President De la Rúa became an emblematic image of institutional collapse, but the deeper significance of the uprising lies in how it revealed the exhaustion of neoliberal legitimacy and opened a new political terrain in which collective actors could recompose themselves.

Importantly, much of the protest cycle of the 1990s and early 2000s cannot be reduced to a generalized "anti-system" sentiment. In fact, many mobilizations articulated concrete claims around the defense of social rights that had been gradually secured during the second half of the twentieth century and were now being dismantled. These protests often expressed a demand to preserve rights and protections in the face of privatization and state retreat. In that sense, the cycle of protest was not only an expression of desperation, but was also a struggle over what kind of society was being constructed and which lives were treated as disposable within neoliberal modernization.

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[12] The *corralito* was a set of emergency measures introduced in Argentina in December 2001 that sharply limited bank withdrawals and restricted access to cash, aiming to prevent a run on banks and stop capital flight. The restrictions froze much of people's savings and severely disrupted daily economic life, becoming a major trigger of mass protests during the 2001 crisis.

[13] A *cacerolazo* is a form of protest in Argentina in which people gather and bang pots and pans (*cacerolas*), often in streets, balconies or public squares, to make collective noise and express political and economic anger. It is typically used as a mass, grassroots, non-violent tactic because it is accessible, highly visible and audible and can spread quickly across neighborhoods.

The post-2001 period opened a contradictory scenario: on the one hand, Argentina experienced acute political and economic instability between 2001 and 2003, with rapid shifts in institutional authority. On the other hand, this very instability created space for territorial organization and for the expansion of movement infrastructures. As the state attempted to reestablish institutional control, eventually consolidating a new phase with the inauguration of Néstor Kirchner, movements operated in a terrain marked simultaneously by opportunities and constraints. It is in this conjuncture that a crucial educational process begins to take shape: multiple collective actors stepped into the educational void produced and deepened by the neoliberal cycle.

Recovered factories, teachers' cooperatives, unemployed workers' movements, unions and even sectors linked to public universities began to create popular schools and secondary-level experiences so that people expelled from formal schooling could resume their education.[14] These initiatives were not conceived merely as alternative sites to complete secondary education. They were framed as experiments in building another kind of school, one capable of producing critical subjects and strengthening collective ties in territories devastated by exclusion and poverty. In other words, the educational project was inseparable from a broader political-pedagogical attempt to rebuild social ties and produce practical infrastructures of dignity and rights in contexts where formal institutions had failed.

This is the immediate terrain out of which *Bachilleratos Populares* (BP) emerge, where they respond to a very concrete structural condition: at the beginning of the new millennium, the Argentine state did not offer massive, accessible alternatives for youth and adult education. In fact, it was an area relegated within the formal system in pedagogical and material terms. BP therefore appear as an answer to a lack of opportunities in educational access, but they are not reducible to gap-filling. They also develop as movement-led spaces that articulate education with territorial struggles and with prefigurative practices in other areas such as self-managed work, cooperative production, culture, community health and assembly-based democratic organization. In this way, BP become intelligible as political-pedagogical projects that both restore a right and dispute the meaning of schooling itself.

[14] To further analyze the topic make reerence to: Sverdlick, I. & Costas, P. 2007. La actuación de los movimientos y organizaciones sociales Bachilleratos Populares en Empresas Recuperadas y Organizaciones Sociales. In: *Ensayos & Investigaciones del Laboratorio de Políticas Públicas*, Nº 30.

If we anticipate the details that will be developed in the next section, the early BP experiences emerge through spaces of debate and coordination that crystallize after 2001 and 2002, especially among organizations and collectives already active in territories and recovered workplaces. From there, the first BP are established, and, over time, the field expands, generating coordination spaces and cycles of mobilization and demands oriented toward recognition, salaries, scholarships, funding and the defense of political-pedagogical autonomy. This trajectory will be unfolded more precisely by reconstructing the internal process through which movements built the BP as a collective project and by tracing how their development interacts, sometimes productively, often conflictual, with the reconfiguration of state authority in the post-2001 political cycle. This will be made based on the works of Wahren (2020) and Luppino (2022).

1.3 Bachilleratos Populares: evolution and pedagogy

The emergence of *Bachilleratos Populares* (BP) was not an automatic result of the 2001 rupture, but the outcome of a concrete internal process through which organizations translated a diffuse social demand into a shared political-pedagogical project. In the immediate post-2001 period, debates around popular education intensified within movements and grassroots organizations that were already active in working-class neighborhoods and in recovered workplaces. In that climate, a short-lived but significant coordination space took shape around popular education, lasting a little over a year and fueled by the discussions that followed the rebellions of 2001 and 2002. Its purpose was to create a space for political formation and pedagogical reflection, aimed at strengthening militants and educators within a Freirean perspective. It involved different organizations, like *Barrios de Pie*, the *Organización Popular Fogoneros* (OPF) and the *Cooperativa de Educadores e Investigadores Populares* (CEIP), and devoted itself at organizing workshops and debates across different settings (that is, between popular neighborhoods and worker-recovered factories). This circulation across spaces signaled that education was being conceived as inseparable from territorial practice and from collective organization. Out of this process, the proposal to create movement-led secondary education projects for youth and adults began to crystallize. CEIP promoted the initiative and OPF advanced it in parallel, each rooting the project in the specific social worlds

where they already had ongoing work: namely, recovered workplaces in the case of OPF, and in the case of CEIP in territorial-based organizing.

This is how the first two BP were founded in 2004: the BP IMPA, located inside the recovered factory of the same name in Buenos Aires and the *Bachillerato Popular Simón Rodríguez* (BPSR), established in the *Las Tunas* neighborhood of Tigre. From the beginning, these experiences responded to an urgent and practical problem: in the territories where these organizations operated, young and adult populations needed to complete secondary education, yet the state did not offer neither feasible nor accessible spaces capable of absorbing that demand. These educational projects, alongside the goal of guaranteeing educational completion, also emerged as deliberate attempts to build self-managed schools with alternative formats and as counter-hegemonic schools conceived as collective institutions with an explicitly emancipatory horizon. In other words, the early BP were built at the intersection of a social necessity (the concrete need for secondary education) and a political-pedagogical wager (the refusal to reproduce the dominant state format as the only imaginable form of schooling). Indeed, they were conceived as movement institutions, embedded in broader struggles over rights and territorial life and organized to produce not only diplomas but also new educational relations and new collective capacities. As the first experiences consolidated, the need for articulation quickly became apparent and by mid-2005, the earliest BP began to coordinate through an initial space of collective articulation known as *Interbachilleratos.* At first, the purpose of these meetings was explicitly pedagogical and aimed at exchanging teaching experiences, debating educational practices, strengthening curricular areas and organizing shared training processes in popular education. Over time, however, the agenda necessarily expanded and as the projects grew, so did the everyday organizational problems of sustaining them, while resource constraints and questions of long-term viability began to enter the discussion. These "practical" issues soon became political, because they were tied to a central contradiction: whereas BP needed recognition, funding and labor protections to survive, they also needed to preserve the autonomy that gave them meaning. As a result, while internal debates were still carried out to sort out this issue, the focus gradually moved toward a reivindicative and political register, centered on basic demands such as recognition of diplomas, stable financing, wages for educators and scholarships for students. Nonetheless, these discussions did not

remain internal but progressively transformed the character of the BP themselves and of the articulation space that linked them. Even their self-designation became politicized: projects that had often been described as 'secondary schools for youth and adults' increasingly adopted the name *Bachilleratos Populares*, emphasizing their political identity rather than merely their educational level. At the same time, the emergence of shared demands enabled a turn toward coordinated collective action. The first protests were largely mobilizations directed at the education ministries at the national level, the provincial level and the City of Buenos Aires. Through these actions, the BP established channels of negotiation with public officials, although always in a field marked by disputes and ongoing conflict. As the struggle intensified, the repertoire of protests broadened and became more confrontational and mobilizations directed at education ministers were joined by public classes, including actions staged during high-visibility events such as the inauguration of the Buenos Aires Book Fair. (Wahren, 2020) Some of these protests generated significant media coverage and resonated within the broader educational field, contributing to the consolidation of the BP and their articulation space as a recognizable actor with a distinct political-pedagogical profile. It was within this cycle of collective action that the CBPL (*Coordinadora de Bachilleratos Populares en Lucha)* was formed, reconfiguring *Interbachilleratos*. What had begun primarily as an articulation for pedagogical exchange was resignified into an articulation of struggles aimed at increasing visibility and strengthening collective pressure around shared demands. Meanwhile, the growth of the sector continued, but at a measured pace: even as the number of experiences increased, it generally did not exceed five new BP per year during this phase.

This period closed with a key institutional shift. In fact, at the end of 2007, the BP in the Province of Buenos Aires achieved official recognition through the private-management route. In the summer of 2008, the BP in the City of Buenos Aires obtained a comparable form of recognition under the Planning area of the city's Ministry of Education, being classified as a *Unidad de Gestión Educativa Experimental* (U.G.E.E.). These recognitions did not resolve the fundamental tension between autonomy and state regulation, but they decisively altered the political terrain. In other words, what was nearly impossible, became imaginable as an attainable horizon for new projects. However, we read officialization as an ambivalent threshold: even though it stabilizes projects materially, it

also introduces new regimes of regulation that can narrow autonomy. This tension between autonomy and recognition will reappear in Chapter III, as a tension between self-definition and survival, specifically in the context of *Bachilleratos Populares* TTNB (hence in Silvia's thesis). On the other hand, the case of "Mocha Celis" will show that it is possible to cede a small portion of political autonomy, while also having huge material support by the state.

Nevertheless, the officialization achieved in 2007–2008 marked the opening of a new stage, defined above all by accelerated growth. In fact, movements that might not have considered launching a BP earlier now saw conditions as more favorable, expecting that officialization could be achieved within a reasonable timeframe. Furthermore, for many organizations, founding a BP became a strategic way to strengthen territorial work and expand legitimacy through an educational project aligned with movement priorities. The scale of this shift appears clearly in the numbers: from 2008, the number of BP created started to increase (See tab. 1.1 below)[15].

Year	**CABA**	**Province BA**	**Other regions**	**TOTAL**
2004	1	1	-	**2**
2005	1	-	-	**1**
2006	1	2	-	**3**
2007	2	3	-	**5**
2008	5	4	-	**9**
2009	4	5	-	**9**
2010	5	12	-	**17**
2011	4	8	1	**13**
2012	3	4	1	**8**
2013	3	6	1	**10**
2014	2	3	-	**5**
2015	3	1	1	**5**
No date	-	3	3	**6**
TOTAL	**34**	**52**	**7**	**93**

[15] Authors' elaboration of Luppino, 2022, p. 48; Looking at the table, specifically at the last vertical row (TOTAL) we can see how the number of BP created started growing slowly and had its peak in 2010.

Yet, this expansion also sharpened contradictions, in fact from 2008 onward, the BP intensified protest actions and increasingly placed salary payments for educators at the center of their reivindicative agenda. At the same time, internal debates about officialization became more intense: during this phase, two developments took place; firstly, teachers in officialized BP began to receive salaries and in the Province of Buenos Aires the transition from private-management agreements to state-based arrangements was confirmed. These changes improved material conditions for many projects, while they also raised difficult questions about bureaucratization and the risks of institutional capture. These tensions intersected with explicit political disputes, such as the conflict that revolved around *kirchnerismo*[16] and the question of whether BP aligned with the governing political party could be part of the same coordinating space. The underlying issue was about how much autonomy was necessary for sustaining protest and confrontation without being constrained by political alignment. This dispute culminated in a rupture at the end of 2008 and the emergence of a new articulation space explicitly aligned with *kirchnerismo*: the *Coordinadora del Oeste*. Today it is known as *Batalla Educativa* and brings together more than forty BP (Wahren, 2020). Secondly, a rupture emerged in 2009 within the CBPL around officialization, the payment of teaching salaries and the possibility that these processes would narrow the autonomy of the BP. For a set of territorial organizations, the concern was on the one hand about the regulations attached to recognition and subsidies that could reduce decision-making capacity and on the other that the bureaucratic labor required by officialization would absorb militant energy, shifting it away from the political-pedagogical project that had initially grounded the BP. Finally, the outcome was another split, further diversifying the organizational map of the sector.

Additionally, around 2012, the launch and expansion of the FinEs program (*Plan de Finalización de Estudios Primarios y Secundarios*) began to shape another phase (Wahren, 2020). Designed as a large-scale pathway for completing primary and secondary education, FinEs reconfigured the landscape in which the BP operated and forced these experiences to confront a new set of dilemmas. On one hand, FinEs presented

[16] *Kirchnerismo* is a political current within Argentine Peronism associated with Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. It is characterized by a center-left orientation that emphasizes an active role of the state in the economy, expanded social policies, neoliberal human-rights and alliances with trade unions and social movements.

itself as connected to popular education, explicitly invoking Paulo Freire as a pedagogical reference in its documents. On the other hand, its expansion generated displacement effects since it contributed to budgetary weakening in other secondary-level adult education spaces, including CENS[17] that had agreements with BP and it became the state's argument for refusing further officialization of BP, on the grounds that the "gap" the BP had originally addressed was now covered by an existing state program. This situation generated strong debate among BP regarding whether to accept recognition through FinEs or to reject it. A large majority framed FinEs as a regressive experience, arguing that it weakened pedagogical quality and precarized teaching labor. Other BP, however, treated it as a pragmatic option and pursued it as one of the few possible routes to secure recognition for diplomas and salaries. The result was a more fragmented field: some BP achieved recognition through FinEs, a smaller number obtained recognition as adult schools through other routes and many continued operating without official recognition at all. (Wahren, 2020)

During this stage, the opening of new BP slowed and the scale and frequency of protest actions declined compared to the previous period. Maintaining each plan of struggle became more difficult as organizational energy dispersed and political opportunities narrowed. Moreover, from 2016 onward, another shift occurred: part of BP mobilization increasingly converged with broader actors in the educational field opposing reforms promoted by Mauricio Macri's national government and by authorities in the Province and City of Buenos Aires. In that context, between 2016 and 2018, the recognition of new BP was effectively frozen, further constraining expansion. Rather than reading FinEs only as an expanded right, we interpret it as a reconfiguration of the field in which the state neutralizes grassroots movements. In fact, even though it offers access to material sources, it also redefines legitimate formats and disciplinates movement autonomy through managerial and normative logics. Freire (2005) in this matter is illuminating, when states that: «estas formas asistencialistas, como instrumento de manipulación, sirven a la conquista. Funcionan como anestésico. Distraen a las masas populares desviándolas de las verdaderas causas de sus problemas, así como de la solución concreta

[17] In Argentina, CENS (*Centros Educativos de Nivel Secundario)* are public (formal) secondary education centers for young people and adults who did not complete high school in the regular school system. They offer an officially recognized pathway to obtain a secondary diploma, usually through evening schedules and flexible formats designed to accommodate work and family responsibilities.

de éstos. Fraccionan a las masas populares en grupos de individuos cuya única expectativa es la de 'recibir' más.» (p. 137)

Nowadays, even where officialization has been achieved, state recognition remains selective rather than comprehensive. Based on Wahren's (2020) systematization what tends to be recognized includes official diplomas, salaries for principals and teachers, student scholarships (only in the City of Buenos Aires), sporadic infrastructure subsidies and, in some cases, the ability of BP to choose their own teaching staff and leadership teams. However, the state has not recognized the full political-pedagogical autonomy of these schools. Full recognition would entail accepting movement-built curricula and didactics, legitimizing popular education pedagogies as such, funding pedagogical teams per course with corresponding wages and guaranteeing stable financing for the entire educational project (salaries for all educators, infrastructure, scholarships, equipment and more). And yet, as a broader balance of these years suggests, many BP have maintained substantial autonomy anchored in their territories despite processes of officialization. They continue to decide collectively on hiring and coordination roles, how salaries are distributed (when they exist), rules of coexistence, curricular priorities and the everyday management of school space through their own organizational logics. This persistence of self-management is the core of what makes the BP intelligible as actors that operates in between the broader frame of popular education.

This opens the next step of the chapter in which the analysis in this work will shift from the historical reconstruction of their emergence to a focused analysis of how their political-pedagogical organization works in practice and why their "school form" functions as a concrete site of dispute over what education is, who it serves and what it means to call education public.

Understanding the BP only as secondary schools for youth and adults would miss their defining feature: they were built as movement institutions that dispute, in practice, the bureaucratic and hierarchical architecture of conventional schooling. Their daily operation is therefore not a neutral educational matter but part of a broader political-pedagogical intervention.

> [BP] proponen una organización de sentido que cuestiona la visión del fracaso escolar y el abandono de los estudios como un problema individual y proponen otra organización de sentido: no se trata de sujetos que fallan sino que, en realidad, son excluidos del sistema escolar, e incluso de la trama social, por una estructura social que no los reconoce en su especificidad, que no

> considera sus historias de vida y que posee es casas estrategias para su retención. (Abritta in Rodríguez, 2013, p. 145)

A first and fundamental axis of this intervention concerns how decisions are made and how authority is organized. Rather than reproducing the vertical model that concentrates power in directors and management teams, many BP adopt criteria of grassroots democracy and collective governance, organizing assemblies of educators and students as the main space for deliberation and decision-making and choosing coordinators instead of principals. This organizational form expresses a different conception of what a school is and what it should do. This political dimension is visible not only in governance but also in the social composition and material positioning of the BP. Many are rooted in cooperative, community-based or movement infrastructures; none operate through private ownership structures, they are free of charge and they do not charge tuition. Furthermore, their territorial anchoring is not incidental: they are largely located in neighborhoods marked by socio-economic hardship and their student populations tend to be drawn from popular sectors (workers, unemployed people and groups historically excluded from educational opportunities) often living in conditions of educational vulnerability (Ampudia & Elisalde, 2015). In this context, the 'goal' of finishing secondary school is real and urgent, but it is never treated as a purely individual achievement. Educational completion is linked to collective needs and to the self-determination of marginalized individuals that through education may to better resist exclusionary neoliberal societies. In them,

> La práctica educativa se encuentra inscripta en un proyecto político más amplio, que tiene como horizonte de sentido, en el caso de los BP, la transformación social de las estructuras y mecanismos que generan la desigualdad y la injusticia social. Se promueve la formación de subjetividades reflexivas, críticas, participativas y transformadoras; se busca como último fin, la construcción de un sujeto popular consciente de su situación de exclusión y marginación, y protagonista en la transformación de su contexto social. (Abritta in Rodríguez, 2013, p. 147)

Moreover, BP articulate aims that exceed what formal schooling typically recognizes as the typical function of a school. Indeed, alongside academic formation they seek to promote the formation of political subjects, an aspiration articulated in the language and horizon of popular education in the first paragraph of this chapter. In many cases, this also includes an explicit effort to connect education to labor and livelihood alternatives, not through individual employability narratives but through practices oriented toward solidarity economies and community development. In other words, education is

positioned within a broader ecology of territorial life that includes work, culture, care and political organization. This does not mean that BP are identical to one another, nor that all projects pursue the same strategies; instead, it means that their school form tends to be embedded within movement infrastructures that treat education as one dimension of collective struggle and social transformation.

A particularly useful way to grasp the relationship between BP and the territories in which they are rooted is offered by Aguiló and Wahren's (2014) analysis. Their approach helps clarify why BP are not simply 'schools in poor neighborhoods' but political-pedagogical actors operating inside contested spaces where meaning and collective capacities are produced. To name this, the authors draw on the concept of "*campos de experimentación social*" (Santos in Aguilò & Wahren, 2014, p. 100), emphasizing that social movements do not only demand change from the outside but also attempt to enact, in the present, alternative forms of social organization. In this reading, BP appear as practical proposals through which movements reshape the kinds of relations and subjectivities that their political projects aspire to generalize. Treating BP as 'fields of social experimentation', in the authors view, means paying attention to the fact that their political-pedagogical practices are designed in explicit dispute with hegemonic logics of schooling. That dispute is not limited to curriculum content, but it extends to the organization of time, authority, evaluation and the distribution of voice within the school. Hence, the BP attempt to produce another educational relation that aligns with movement horizons of emancipation. At the same time, this prefigurative dimension cannot be understood without the territorial anchoring of the projects. For Aguiló and Wahren (2014), in fact, territory is not a neutral container where schools take place. For them, it is a space that is simultaneously geographic and symbolic and is traversed by tensions and conflicts, saturated with political meanings and shaped by histories of struggle.

In that framework, the notion of *territorios insurgentes* becomes central. The authors use this category to name territories practiced and produced in a preponderant way by social movements, territories where fields of social experimentation are built to move beyond the colonial-capitalist organization of space and life. These insurgent territories are shaped through the collective capacity of local actors to self-manage territory and resources and through relations with nature imagined around reciprocity rather than extractive appropriation. Consequently, BP are not external institutions "inserted" into

communities, but infrastructures that participate in producing the territory itself as a political space. If territory is a site where social relations and power are produced, BP operate inside that terrain by creating collective norms and decision-making arenas that strengthen movement projects and community capacities. Assemblies function not only as governance mechanisms but as training grounds for democratic participation; self-management becomes a practical pedagogy; and knowledge is organized around community needs rather than around standardized institutional mandates. In this sense, BP actively sustain and legitimize collective organization and connect education to broader struggles over dignity, work and rights.

What Aguiló and Wahren (2014) make visible, then, is the extent to which BP constitute a political-pedagogical infrastructure: they are spaces where social movements practice, in the present, the kinds of relations and institutions that would be required for a more democratic and egalitarian society. Their pedagogical radicality lies precisely here, in the fact that they seek to prefigure social change through concrete school practices.

This territorial and prefigurative reading also makes it possible to clarify why BP cannot be treated as detached from the social movements that build them. Unlike formal schools, which often establish a territoriality and institutional logic defined by state or private governance and can maintain a rigid "externality" in relation to the community, movement-built schools are immanent to the organizational networks and projects of their territories. Their daily functioning is shaped by the movement's forms of its collective decision-making and its political horizons. This proximity to territorial life is part of what allows BP to reconfigure the educational relation itself.

It is in this sense that BP differ not only in governance but also in what they aim to produce educationally, namely, what kind of subject education should form. In contested territories inhabited by exploited communities, movements seek to build the capacity to self-manage not only space and resources but also the conditions of social life: work, health, housing, education and collective safety. BP participate in that effort by creating spaces where people can "think-do" their world critically questioning hegemonic logics while also interrogating the roles presupposed within conventional schooling: who is teaching and how, how authority is exercised and how hierarchies become normalized inside the classroom.

At the level of pedagogy, BP enact shared orientations grounded in the popular education paradigm. Common features include dialogical processes between educators and students understood as an exchange of knowledges without fixed hierarchies; teaching pairs or pedagogical teams in each subject; curricula that combine official requirements with content collectively built within each BP; rules of coexistence negotiated between educators and students; and qualitative forms of assessment that prioritize learning processes over quantitative grades that merely "measure" content acquisition. (Wahren, 2020) Their pedagogy tends to be organized around problematizing social reality and forming critical students, explicitly orienting education toward social change.

Much of the literature frames these experiences as counter-hegemonic, emphasizing their anti-capitalist struggle practices and their emancipatory role (Ampudia & Elisalde, 2015). In the same line, Freirean conceptualizations are often mobilized to describe BP as 'schools as social organizations,' highlighting that their educational form is inseparable from collective life and political action. This is also why the pedagogical dimension of BP can be read as one of their most radical interventions into the educational field: building schools from the initiative of a social organization, explicitly defining the role and social function of schooling, directly contests the liberal-capitalist assumption that only the state "from above" or private enterprises can legitimately found schools. «Para los integrantes y responsables de los Bachilleratos Populares no hay proyecto pedagógico sin proyecto político antiburocrático, anticapitalista y que reivindica una democracia de base en el campo educativo.» (Ampudia & Elisalde, 2015, p. 169)

This dispute is visible even in something as apparently simple as naming. The names chosen for BP frequently refer to neighborhoods, localities, the organized world of work, political figures tied to struggle or union traditions. Naming becomes a way of inscribing the school into a territorial and political memory: it signals the *barrio* as lived place, the shared relations and meanings that structure community life, the marks and symbols of the territory and the recent histories of labor and rights struggles. In this way, space and time are re-signified through the school's immanence to the organization and the territory, through a particular way of inhabiting place and connecting education to broader histories of collective organization and action, including South American histories of mobilization around gender struggles and other emancipatory claims.

Because of this, the denomination of each BP is inseparable from political positioning: the state does not assign the name, the collective does. Insisting that the state recognize those names is experienced as part of the struggle to defend a pedagogical conception in which self-management and the protagonism of social movements are central. It functions as a reaffirmation of identity with explicitly emancipatory meaning and as a way of safeguarding the political-pedagogical horizon that gives the BP their distinctive role within Argentina's contemporary field of popular education.

If this chapter established that formal schools are sites where power normalizes subjects and regulates who can appear as a legitimate student, Chapter II asks what happens when recognizability, safety and access are mediated through a gender regime that presumes only two stable and coherent identities. The shift is therefore to the analysis of life conditions of *travesti*, trans and non-binary (TTNB) people in Argentina and their resistance. Building on this, we will examine how counter education is made possible under condition where misrecognition is structurally enforced through administrative and pedagogical norms and everyday institutional violence. The following chapter therefore extends the political pedagogy reconstructed here into the terrain of TTNB struggle over recognition, asking how popular education can function not only as an emancipatory horizon, but as a concrete infrastructure of survival within (and against) cis-binary institutional orders.

CHAPTER II – Against Cis-Binary Governance

2.1 TTNB political categories and contested regimes of recognition

Chapter I framed B*achilleratos Populares* (BP) as movement-built institutions that contest hierarchical schooling and rebuild education as a collective right. This chapter extends that argument by examining how cis-binary governance shapes who can appear as legitimate and safe within educational institutions and society in general.

Precisely because these projects operate within, and often against, institutional regimes that classify and render subjects recognizable, they provide a privileged lens for thinking about how gender and sexuality are governed in practice. As argued in the former sections, schooling operates through normative routines that distribute legitimacy. In TTNB contexts, these routines become explicit battlegrounds because recognizability is never neutral, it is a condition of access and safety. Considering the framework, the question of TTNB (T*ravesti*, Trans, and Non-Binary) subjectivities becomes of extreme importance: not as a homogeneous group, but as a set of historically produced categories, lived positions and political claims that are continuously negotiated in relation to schools, state institutions and social norms. To interpret why and how popular-educational settings may become key sites where gender dissidence is either silenced through binary norms or reclaimed through practices of collective struggle, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by TTNB, and how these terms have been theorized and contested in Argentina.

In the context of BP, these processes become particularly visible through the micro-politics of education: the taking of attendance using chosen names, the respect of pronouns and self-perceived gender in enrollment and documentation forms and the expression of identity in classrooms. These practices reproduce or contests institutional norms about who counts as a legitimate student and how bodies can appear within pedagogical space. A conceptual discussion of trans, *travesti* and non-binary subjectivities is therefore not an abstract preface detached from the fieldwork; rather, it provides the analytical vocabulary needed to understand how TTNB lives are rendered vulnerable through the enforcement of a binary gender order, and how, within popular-educational spaces, TTNB subjects may contest that order through demands for rights and dignity.

In what follows, we explore the theoretical and political meanings of trans, *travesti* and non-binary subjectivities, grounding the discussion in the work of Judith Butler, Josefina Fernández, and Lohana Berkins. Together, these authors provide tools to understand how gender-dissident bodies challenge the binarism of male/female and the presumed alignment of sex and gender that organize dominant institutions. In the Argentine case, these norms have operated as symbolic classifications and have historically enabled concrete forms of exclusion and violence.

A key point shared across these perspectives is that the dominant gender binary is not a neutral or objective scientific concept, but a cultural and political regime that is continuously produced and enforced. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1999) invites us to interrogate this assumption by asking «how does language itself produce the fiction construction of 'sex' that supports these various regimes of power?» (p. xxx) This question is not merely linguistic but ontological: it reveals that the validity of bodies depends on the reiteration of norms that naturalize social hierarchies. Those who fall outside these regimes, such as *travesti*, trans and non-binary people, are positioned as threatening, with direct consequences for their access to education, healthcare and other fundamental rights.

Butler's (1999) intervention destabilizes the traditional distinction between sex and gender, showing that «if sex is always a gendered sex, the distinction between the two turns out not to be a distinction at all.» (p. 11) This insight reveals that both sex and gender are already culturally produced and that the binary order rests on repetition rather than essence. The subject, consequently, is not a pre-existing unity but an effect of normative power. As Butler (1993) writes, «performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power.» (p. 225) This means that the institutional statements that classify subjects, calling a student by a registered name or assigning a gender marker, are not descriptive but constitutive; they make social reality.

Within Argentine feminist and sociological debates, Josefina Fernández (2004) builds a crucial bridge between Butler's propositions and the specific historical emergence of *travesti* activism. She observes that, «en los pocos casos en que travestismo y transexualidad constituirán un objeto de especulación para las feministas, serán considerados como fenómenos amenazantes para las mujeres o serán tema de una

antropología interesada en ellos como fenómenos transculturales.» (p. 21) This statement reflects how even progressive feminist spaces sometimes reproduced exclusionary logics that marked gender-dissident lives as "other." Fernández (2004) also situates gender variance within legal and criminological frameworks, noting that «los primeros registros existentes acerca de las llamadas 'desviaciones sexuales' pertenecen al campo de derecho penal y de la criminología» (p. 23), where sexual and gender nonconformity were considered "antisocial" and "linked to crime." This genealogy underscores that the stigmatization of TTNB people has deep institutional roots in the Argentina's context.

At the same time, Fernández emphasizes the political force of *travesti* existence for dismantling the binary order. She asserts that «la característica más destacada del travestismo es impugnar el paradigma de género binario y poner así al descubierto el carácter ficcional que vincula el sexo al género.» (p. 40) *Travesti* embodiment thus functions as a living critique: by making visible the discontinuity between biology, identity and social role, it reveals the cultural and political nature of "natural" difference. In a similar vein, Fernández draws on Roscoe to affirm that a multiple-gender paradigm has the potential to deconstruct the hierarchy that links sex to gender and to show that anatomy does not hold ontological primacy.

If Butler and Fernández expose the discursive and institutional dimensions of gender regulation, Lohana Berkins brings to the forefront the political praxis of *travesti* existence in Argentina. For Berkins, the right to name oneself and to appear in public as a *travesti* was a revolutionary act that transformed exclusion into political presence. Fernández recounts this moment, stating that «llegadas al Movimiento GLTT y B, las travestis inician su experiencia organizativa. Las palabras que las nombran, los sistemas de clasificación y las categorías de percepción son las apuestas de la lucha política del travestismo organizado.» (p. 74) This collective action, led by *travesti* activists, turned linguistic and bureaucratic categories into arenas of struggle. Indeed, Berkins repeatedly emphasized that being *travesti* is not a pathology but *una identidad política*, grounded in self-definition and community. Her work reclaims the term "*travesti*" as a space of pride and resistance, transforming what was used as a slur into a tool of struggle for dignity and recognition.

Understanding these contributions requires situating them within the broader matrix of colonial and Christian modernity that naturalized the male/female binary. Ideed, the

imposition of binary gender categories in South America was not universal prior to colonization: many Indigenous societies recognized gender plurality and non-heteronormative roles. The colonial encounter, however, introduced Christian doctrines that linked gender coherence to moral order, reproductive heteronormativity and patriarchal authority. These doctrines were institutionalized through law, religion and education, precisely the domains Butler identifies as producing and regulating "sex." Thus, as Fernández notes in dialogue with Butler, «las relaciones entre sexo y género en la conceptualización feminista se encuentran demasiado sobredeterminadas por el par naturaleza/cultura, demasiado pegadas al modelo jurídico del discurso productor de los cuerpos sexuados.» (p. 59)

The Argentine gender regime, therefore, must be understood as part of what María Lugones (2007) has described as the colonial/modern gender system, a structure that violently imposed European logics of sex, race, and religion upon colonized societies. Within this system, gender is a technology of power that produces categorized bodies and makes them governable. The naturalization of the binary sex/gender model and the erasure of precolonial gender multiplicities was centrally functional to establishing Western modernity's order. Thus, Butler's critique of the regulatory nature of discourse aligns with Lugones's analysis of coloniality: both reveal that the "truth" of sex is a political effect produced by intersecting regimes of religion, law and education.

This connects back to Chapter I's decolonial emphasis: the production of valid subjects in the modern society cannot be separated from historical regimes that produced a binary grammar of personhood.

Explaining this framework makes clear how TTNB subjectivities in Argentina can be understood as historically situated fields of struggle over recognition and the right to appear within public institutions. *Travesti*, trans, and non-binary people do not simply refuse the male/female dichotomy as personal choices; they expose how that dichotomy operates through coercive mechanisms. These points become particularly relevant in the context of the *Bachilleratos Populares* TTNB, where participation represents a concrete act of resistance to the violence of normative recognition. The capacity to say *presente* under one's chosen name, to be addressed through affirmed pronouns and to inhabit classrooms without fear of ridicule or expulsion are political acts that challenge the colonial cis-normative organization of society.

This framework has the aim to clarify the mechanisms through which Argentina's heteronormative and binary social order produces marginalization and material violence against TTNB bodies. Drawing on Berkins, Foucault, and contemporary statistical data, we will examine how the regulation of sexuality and gender through biopolitical and disciplinary mechanisms translates into police violence, social precarity and the criminalization of sex work. These dynamics explain how the colonial and patriarchal roots of the gender binary persist in shaping the life and death of T* people, and how spaces like the BP can offer possibilities of collective resistance.

The analysis now turns to the concrete manifestations of violence, exclusion and oppression that shape the everyday realities of *travesti*, trans and non-binary people in Argentina. Understanding this landscape is essential for interpreting how spaces such as the *Bachilleratos Populares* TTNB may intervene within it. Educational inclusion cannot be separated from the broader networks of social neglect that govern TTNB lives. Schools, police stations, hospitals and public offices function as overlapping sites of disciplinary power: spaces where gendered bodies are registered and controlled. The mechanisms that sustain these forms of violence form part of the same apparatus that historically has rendered TTNB existence precarious and disposable.

Michel Foucault's (1995) account of modern power remains a crucial entry point for analyzing these processes. As he wrote in Discipline and Punish, the body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.» (p. 25) The *travesti* and trans* body in Argentina has long been such a marked body: surveilled, classified and disciplined, its visibility constantly redefined as danger. In the Foucauldian sense, the state's power over life does not merely repress; it produces reality, generates categories and forms of knowledge that make certain lives governable and others expendable. Power «produces domains of objects and rituals of truth,» (p. 194), and the TTNB population has been one of those domains through which society defines its own moral boundaries.

This production of social exclusion and marginalization is historically visible in the regulation of public space. As reconstructed in *Con nombre propio*, «Travestis y trans, al lado de otros grupos de diversidad sexo-genérica, fueron consideradas parte de esa horda de extranjeres que había que controlar porque su peligrosidad podía erosionar los límites

de ese espacio público en el que se definía la comunidad. Todes elles formaban parte del cuadro de la mala vida.» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis[18], 2023a, p. 126) What was once managed by doctors and legal experts as a pathology was later taken over by the police through *edictos policiales,* «herramientas de control de esa comunidad de peligrosos/as que incitan u ofrecen el acto carnal en la vía pública o que llevan prendas correspondientes al sexo opuesto.» (p. 127) These edicts, formally administrative, yet applied with penal intensity, delegated to the police the authority to punish acts not codified in criminal law. As *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* recalls, «Creados en los albores del Estado-Nación, los edictos funcionan como un instrumento que delega en la policía, provincial o federal, la tarea de reprimir actos no previstos por el Código Penal de la Nación; no forman parte del derecho penal sino del derecho administrativo.» (Berkins & Fernández, 2005, p. 40) In practice, they produced a discretionary regime where the *travesti* body itself became evidence of transgression.

Although many of these edicts were revoked in the early 2000s, the logics that underpinned them persist through new contravention codes and police practices. One example is Article 71 of the Buenos Aires Contravention Code, which framed sex work as a disturbance to "public tranquility" and prohibited its practice near schools, churches and residential areas. In theory, the reform prohibited arbitrary detention; in practice, «la policía exigirá una coima.»[19] (p. 47) This persistence of informal punishment reflects what Foucault (1995) termed the success of disciplinary power: its ability to operate not through spectacular repression, but through normalized surveillance. «The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement […] a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish.» (p. 184) The police report, the hospital form and the school register all enact this ritualized examination; they make individuals visible and, through that visibility, subject to judgment.

Quantitative data produced by *travesti and* trans* movements and allied research has long documented that police abuse is not an exceptional excess but a routine mechanism through which gender dissidence is rendered governable. In *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*, one of the most cited findings states: «Cada 100 de nosotras, 86 hemos recibido algún

[18] Published by: Ministerio Público de la Defensa de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

[19] The term *coima* refers to a bribe, an illicit payment or "kickback" demanded or offered to a public official to obtain a service, avoid a sanction, prevent detention, or secure preferential treatment.

tipo de violencia policial.» (Berkins & Fernández, 2005, p. 39) The same source identifies the main settings in which aggression occurs: «Lugares de agresión: Comisaría 69,6%; En la calle 69,2%,» and details a repertoire of abuses that includes illegal detention (*Fuiste detenida ilegalmente:* 88%), beatings (F*uiste golpeada por personal policial:* 58,3%), demands for bribes (*Personal policial te exigió coimas:* 54,1%), sexual abuse (F*uiste abusada sexualmente por personal policial:* 36,7%), insults (F*uiste insultada por personal policial:* 31,7%"), and torture (F*uiste torturada por personal policial:* 15,4%) (p. 130). These figures do not simply enumerate harms; they describe a patterned institutional practice through which *travesti* and trans* bodies are repeatedly produced as suspect and available for coercion. At the same time, *travesti* writing insists that the meaning of these numbers cannot be exhausted by statistical description, because violence also accumulates affectively and corporeally over time. In *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, the text emphasizes the social asymmetry through which *travesti* lives are rendered visible primarily through abjection and criminalization: «Lo mismo nos ha sucedido a nosotras históricamente. Invisibles cuando nos vivimos en plenitud, cuando nos aman, nos sonrien, cuando creemos, creamos, cogemos y orgasmeamos; solo somos iluminadas cuando nos torturan, nos criminalizan o agonizamos. Somos utilizadas para infundirles terror, normatizarlos/as.» (Berkins et al., 2007, p. 53)

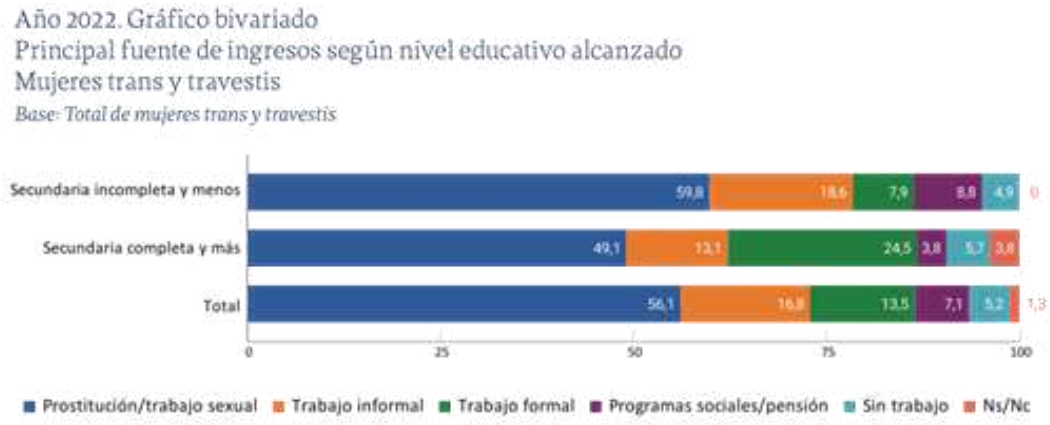
More recent data production in the orbit of TTNB organizations (*La Revolución de las Mariposas, Con Nombre Propio*) confirms both the persistence and the institutional diffusion of these patterns of violence. Rather than locating harm exclusively "in the street," these sources show that violence is frequently concentrated precisely within state institutions that nominally promise care or protection. As the data we present indicates, «en relación con los ámbitos donde se presentan las mayores situaciones de violencia para el grupo de personas no binarias, el hospital y la comisaría fueron los más nombrados en un 76% y 71%, respectivamente.» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 130) This data follows the same direction of the evidence showed by Berkins about the endurance of police abuse among trans women and *travestis*: «en efecto, el 66,5% de las mujeres trans y travestis manifestó haber sufrido este tipo de violencia.» (p. 130) To specify what these percentages are made of in everyday life, the following tables detail modalities of violence, including misnaming and denial of chosen identity, extortion/*coimas*, sexual violence, and other forms of institutional abuse.

		Lugar de agresión según rango de edad Base: total de casos que sufrieron agresión					
		Entre 13 y 21	Entre 22 y 31	Entre 32 y 41	Entre 42 y 51	52 y más	Total
Lugar de agresión(*)	En la calle	85,4%	74,3%	67,1%	75%	83,3%	74,2%
	Comisaría	61%	55,4%	52,9%	58,3%	33,3%	54,5%
	En el ámbito familiar	31,7%	29,7%	31,4%	8,3%	16,7%	29,2%
	En el vecindario	17,1%	18,8%	24,3%	33,3%	16,7%	21,5%
	En un boliche	22%	20,8%	20%	25%	0%	20,6%
	Escuela	39%	20,8%	11,4%	0%	16,7%	19,7%
	Hospital	4,9%	13,9%	20%	0%	0%	12,9%
	Oficinas Públicas	7,3%	14,9%	15,7%	0%	0%	12,4%
	Transporte pública	0%	6,9%	11,4%	8,3%	0%	6,9%
	Otros lugares	0%	2%	4,3%	0%	0%	2,1
	Total	42	101	70	12	6	231

(*) Respuesta múltiple. Tres Opciones de respuestas.

Tab 2.1 -, Berkins et al., *Cumbia, Copeteo y Lágrimas*, 2007, p. 129.

These findings become analytically legible only when read alongside the socio-economic conditions that structure TTNB survival. In particular, this bivariate graph shows that sex work/prostitution emerges as a primary source of income across age groups, revealing that in many cases it is a patterned outcome of cumulative exclusion from formal education and formal labor markets.



Tab 2.2 - Organización Civil Mocha Celis, *Con Nombre Propio*, 2023a, p. 23.

The age-of-entry data (p. 22) reinforces this point by indicating how early in the life course many TTNB people are pushed toward informal economies, often following school interruption, family rejection or/and institutional harassment. The analytical point to retain is therefore double. On the one hand, sex work functions as a crucial material resource: it provides an income stream within a context where discrimination restricts access to formal employment and where educational trajectories are frequently fractured.

On the other hand, sex work operates as a specific field of visibility: it is one of the few social spaces in which many *travestis* can appear without having to continuously negotiate binary respectability or suppress embodied gender expression. Yet this visibility is inseparable from heightened vulnerability. Precisely because sex work is practiced in public space and regulated through contravention and discretionary policing, it increases exposure to harassment, illegal detention and sexual violence.

These quantitative findings can be situated within a Butlerian account of institutional address. Butler's (1999) question «how language produces the fiction of "sex" that sustains power» (p. xxx) helps interpret why misrecognition is materially consequential and not merely symbolic. In fact, the repeated reporting of institutional violence in public spaces indicates that the struggle over recognition of gender identity is also a battle over access to safety and rights. In this sense, the statistics demonstrate that misnaming, humiliation and physical aggression are all situated on the same continuum: all are modalities through which the binary order is enforced and the consequence is a situation of constant precariousness.

In this text we argue that the production of validity extends beyond policing into the language of institutional bureaucracy. Indeed, even after the passage of the 2012 Gender Identity Law[20], administrative and police documents continue to describe trans and *travesti* people through a misgendering grammar that negates their self-definition. One specific report reads: «Por las cámaras de monitoreo urbano, se pudo observar un sujeto masculino travestido» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 154) The act of misnaming is not neutral; it reinstates the regulatory fiction of "sex" through which institutional power is reproduced. Through the authorized discourse of the state, TTNB identities are reabsorbed into the male/female dichotomy, rendered once again as deviations rather than subjects of law.

The consequences of this structural misrecognition are profound. In *La Revolución de las Mariposas*, Alicia Ruiz (2017) warns that statistics alone, while useful, are insufficient: «los datos proporcionan información útil pero insuficiente [...] debemos preguntarnos qué

[20] Argentina's 2012 Gender Identity Law (Ley 26.743) recognizes every person's right to have their self-perceived gender identity recognized and to be treated accordingly, including on identity documents. It lets people request a change of the registered gender marker on official records through an administrative procedure, and it explicitly says no surgery, hormone treatment, or medical/psychological diagnosis is required. It includes protections for dignified treatment, such as using a person's chosen name in public/private settings upon request.

hacer con ellos, sabiendo que las lecturas posibles son múltiples.» (p. 13) The challenge, then, is to interpret the data within the framework of power. In Foucauldian terms, the numbers that record TTNB mortality and police abuse are not external truths but effects of the same apparatus that governs bodies through knowledge. What they reveal, however, is shocking. According to national demographic data, life expectancy for cis women in Argentina is approximately 80 years and for cis men 74;[21] the average for the general population is 77. For trans* and *travesti* women in Buenos Aires, the estimated average age of death is only 32. (p. 95) These deaths are rarely natural. They result from «violencia y exclusión social, política y económica estructural y sistemática.» (p. 95) The absence of older *travesti* and trans* populations in public data further indicates how structural invisibility prevents the formulation of policies oriented to aging and health; in the words of the same report, «el ocultamiento detrás de la cisheteronormatividad de las estadísticas oficiales […] impide que las políticas públicas y los estudios gerontológicos estén orientados a lxs mayores travestis y trans.» (p. 96)

This structural exposure to death and neglect is conceptualized within Argentine *travesti* theory as *travesticidio social*. As Berkins in *La Revolución de las Mariposas* (2017) explains,

> El asesinato de Diana[22] es un travesticidio y hay que empezar a reconocer estos actos como crímenes de odio […] El crimen de Diana es un travesticidio porque se trata del asesinato de una persona cuya identidad de género autopercibida es la identidad travesti y constituye una forma específica de violencia de género que se enmarca en lo que denominamos travesticidio social, que es el mecanismo llevado adelante por el Estado y la sociedad a través de la discriminación, la violencia, la segregación, la represión y la violación sistemática de los Derechos Humanos. (p. 139)

The term *travesticidio social* therefore expands the meaning of state and social responsibility: death is not the sole indicator of violence, but its ultimate expression. The

[21] The life-expectancy figures cited here derive from Argentine national demographic statistics. As such, they are produced through state population registers and reporting categories that are structurally binary and cisnormative.

[22] Amancay Diana Sacayán (1975–2015) was a prominent *travesti* activist in Argentina and a key figure in the struggle for TTNB rights and anti-discrimination policies. She was found murdered in her home in Buenos Aires in October 2015. In June 2018, the *Tribunal Oral en lo Criminal y Correccional* N° 4 of the City of Buenos Aires convicted Gabriel David Marino and sentenced him to life imprisonment, characterizing the killing as an aggravated homicide motivated by transphobia; the ruling also marked a landmark moment because the court recognized the case, for the first time in Argentine jurisprudence, as a *travesticidio* rather than treating it as a generic homicide.

structural conditions, police abuse, precarious housing, exclusion from education and labor, form the continuum that culminates in lethal violence.

The field of sex work occupies a structurally produced position within this framework. As already mentioned, data from community surveys show that sex work is the primary source of income for the majority of *travesti* and trans respondents across all age groups. The street, unlike the office or the school, often allows for visibility, but that visibility comes at the cost of constant exposure to violence. As *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* (2023a) notes, «prostitutas y travestis no podrán alterar la tranquilidad pública […] se considerará que hay alteración cuando las personas que ejercen la prostitución provoquen ruidos o perturben el tránsito.» (p. 47) Such provisions transform the very act of existing visibly as a *travesti* into a potential violation. For this reason, police repression of sex work has historically been a key vector of *travesti* persecution, materializing the same disciplinary gaze that Foucault (1995) described as «a normalizing judgement […] a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish.» (p. 184)

Foucault's (1978) analysis of biopower offers a theoretical frame for interpreting this economy of exposure and control. In *The History of Sexuality*, he distinguishes between the anatomo-politics of the human body and the biopolitics of the population, the two poles around which power over life is organized. Modern governance, he argues, «lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power.» (Foucault, 1995, p. 197) Focusing on the Argentine case, the biopolitical ordering distributes recognition and protection unevenly: certain bodies are nurtured as social capital, while others are left to die. «We are in a society of sex, the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate […] to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate.» (Foucault, 1978, p. 147) In contrast, TTNB bodies, those deemed unproductive or resistant, are rendered killable within a system that preserves itself through their disposability.

Lohana Berkins (in *La Revolución de las Mariposas*, 2017) captured this existential horizon with characteristic lucidity: «Nuestra primera lucha era por nuestros derechos, ahora, estamos construyendo la ciudadanía travesti, es una lucha cotidiana […] Es muy difícil intentar salir de la exclusión. No se ven las marcas que va dejando. Muchas podemos transitar, reflexionar sobre ellas, pero será algo que va a convivir con nosotras

toda nuestra vida. Quien ha sido golpeada, maltratada, humillada, está marcada.» (p.22) The body carries the history of violence; exclusion is inscribed in flesh. The fight for citizenship is, therefore, not only legal or institutional but corporeal, a daily negotiation with the marks of past and present control.

Against this background, the irreverent humor of *travesti* narratives acquires a political dimension. In *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, Berkins and her collaborators (2007) write: «La irreverencia de nuestro humor ante la ficción hegemónica creada como muerte nos exorciza del pavor. Nos burlamos de cómo nos matan, mientras ustedes se aterran de cómo vivimos. Nos hacemos muertas de antemano.» (p. 52) This irony transforms fear into resistance: a refusal to be defined solely through death. Yet the passage also underlines the asymmetry of perception: *travestis* are invisible when they live and visible only when they are criminalized, tortured or killed.

The interplay of these narratives and data points to a coherent system of control, one that Foucault (1995) would describe as a "biopower" operating through both discipline and neglect. «Discipline 'makes' individuals […] it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.» (p. 170) Pointing out the Argentine state, we analyze how its institutional apparatuses have historically targeted TTNB individuals as both object and threat, whose bodies were to be corrected or erased. Many are the dimensions of the mechanisms of control: from the statistical reduction of life expectancy to the normalization of police violence and the precarious integration of TTNB people into informal economies.

Understanding this terrain of violence and survival is essential for interpreting the emancipatory potential of *Bachilleratos Populares* (BP). These educational spaces do not exist outside the structures described here. They are situated within them, sometimes reproducing, sometimes contesting the mechanisms of exclusion. In their best moments, the BP can sustain what might be read as counter-practices to normalization, meaning concrete pedagogical routines that allow TTNB students to inhabit classrooms as subjects of knowledge rather than objects of correction. Yet this analysis approaches education as inseparable from the broader material and institutional conditions that make learning possible and meaningful. This transition also echoes earlier insistence about the importance of intersectionality in popular educational projects. The question is not only how TTNB people are recognized in school, but whether the infrastructures of life make

it possible to remain in education at all. The following section therefore examines work, housing, and health as interdependent and complementary domains that co-produce TTNB educational trajectories, shaping both access to schooling and the capacity to remain within it, while also being reshaped by educational participation and collective organization. The section therefore relies mainly on writings, archives, and data generated by and for trans, *travesti*, and non-binary people, treating these contributions as analytical sources rather than as material to be filtered exclusively through external, cis-centred expertise.

2.2 Material conditions of educational trajectories

In Buenos Aires and in Argentina in general, like in many other nation-states, the conditions of TTNB life are not shaped only by explicit violence, but also through the infrastructures that determine whether survival is materially possible: the availability of stable work, the possibility of secure housing and access to non-violent healthcare. These domains function as key filters through which recognition is translated into life chances. They also make visible how exclusion is reproduced not only through direct acts of discrimination, but through eligibility rules, documentation requirements and administrative routines; these mechanisms that render TTNB pople's precariousness durable over time. The first chapter showed that *Bachilleratos Populares* (BP) emerged where the state failed to guarantee educational and basic rights under neoliberal restructuring. Especially, for TTNB communities, as for marginalized groups in general, the same failure is visible across multiple domains, making education inseparable from the broader ecology of survival.

In line with our thesis' overall approach, the discussion draws on statistical evidence collected by and for trans, *travesti* and non-binary people, while also integrating qualitative declarations, testimonies and narrative accounts. As explained in the introduction, this is not simply a matter of methodological balance: the same system that oppresses TTNB lives often reduces them to numbers, as if quantification were the only relevant register for inquiry, while at the same time refusing to change the binary analytic categories (man/woman) through which those numbers are routinely produced and managed. This means that bringing quantitative findings into conversation with lived

accounts is necessary to avoid reproducing the reduction and control that underpins institutional violence.

Work access in Buenos Aires has been historically structured by a double mechanism: exclusion from formal labor markets and the channelling of many *travesti* and trans* population's trajectories into informal economies under conditions where discrimination effectively restrict other options. As we have already mentioned, in *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* it appears that sex work is not a marginal phenomenon but the dominant income source for *travesti* lives. Even where the text does not reduce the issue to "lack of will" or "individual choice," the proportion indicates a labor structure in which access to legally protected employment is exceptional rather than widely available.

A decade later, *La Revolución de las Mariposas* (2017) confirms the persistence of this configuration while also allowing a longitudinal comparison across 2005 and 2016. In its «cuadro comparativo 2005/2016» on labor insertion, the report registers that sex work/prostitution remains the main income source (2016: 70.4%), while formal employment remains limited (2016: 9%) and informal work absorbs another segment (2016: 15%); the table also includes state subsidies/benefits as a non-negligible income source (2016: 3.6%) (p. 56). The same section adds a critical indicator of cumulative exclusion: 51.5% report having "never had a job," and 88% report never having had a formal job since revendicating their identity (p. 46). Read together, these figures point to a structural pattern: precarious insertion is life-course oriented, and labor exclusion is both produced by and productive of other forms of precariousness (housing instability, health vulnerability, exposure to policing).

Con Nombre Propio provides updated distributional data and, crucially, links labor insertion to policy mechanisms such as the *cupo laboral* (which will be further analyzed and explained later in this paragraph). In the 2022 survey, among trans and *travesti* population, sex work/prostitution remains the most frequently reported principal income source (56.1%), followed by informal work (16.8%), formal employment (13.5%), and remunerative state benefits (7.1%) (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 21). This is not a simple "improvement narrative" relative to 2016: it indicates a partial diversification of income sources while maintaining sex work as a majority-reported livelihood among trans and *travesti* people. The same section makes visible how formal employment, when it occurs, is increasingly mediated by policy instruments rather than

by “open” labor markets: among the 13.5% who report formal employment as their main income, 76.19% entered through the *Ley de Cupo Laboral Travesti*, *Trans* (p. 27). The *cupo* many times is just a marginal add-on to a non-functioning labor market; however, it can also be the gateways through which formal employment becomes attainable at all for a subset of the population. The *cupo* functions like an institutional recognition mechanism that partially redistributes access without transforming the structure. It creates entry points while leaving intact the same oppressive system through which marginalization is reproduced.

This is the reason why the *cupo laboral* requires careful explanation and critical evaluation. The relevant legislative framework is the Ley N° 27.636 (“Diana Sacayán–Lohana Berkins”), which establishes a labor quota for *travesti*/trans/non-binary people in the national public administration and introduces additional measures (registries of applicants, incentives for private sector inclusion, and procurement preferences tied to TTNB hiring). *Con Nombre Propio* outlines the law’s operational components, particularly the creation of a *Registro Único de Aspirantes* managed by the Ministry, and documents both awareness and access gaps: almost 80% of respondents know the law, but only 45% of trans and *travesti* population who know it registered in some applicant registry; among those who did not register, 55% report not having done so, and 41.6% of that group cite not knowing the registry existed or not knowing how to register (p. 26).

Perchivale and Ansardi’s (2023) policy brief *Identidades Informadas,* provides a quantitative benchmark that clarifies why the “1%” quota cannot be treated as a sufficient response to structurally produced labor exclusion. It states explicitly: «El Cupo Laboral Travesti, Trans y No Binarie (TTNB) del 1% equivale a la incorporación de 5551 personas en la Administración Pública Nacional.» (p. 8) It then notes that by the first year of implementation (9 July 2022) «se contrataron un total de 313 personas » i.e., less than 6% of what the law determines, rising to 8.6% by September 2022 according to the Ministry’s monitoring; the law sets a two-year maximum for progressive incorporation (p. 8). Even if implementation accelerated the quota is set at a insufficient 1% of a specific segment (national public administration), while the population affected by labor exclusion is broader, and much of the exclusion occurs in the private labor market and in informal employment circuits where quota compliance is not structurally enforced.

A critical evaluation of the *cupo* therefore has to be two-layered. First, the *cupo* is useful as a corrective mechanism in a labor field that, left to taken-for-granted market functioning, has historically reproduced exclusion. *Con Nombre Propio* includes testimonies that show the affective and practical dimension of this gateway. One respondent narrates: «Cuando se abrió el registro por cupo laboral, Mala Junta me ayudó a cargar los CV y yo hice el mío, pero, en realidad, nunca pensé que me llamarían. Me llamaron del área de Recursos Humanos de Vialidad Nacional» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 27). This kind of account matters because it shows that the *cupo* is not merely a distributive rule but reorganizes anticipations of possibility and repositions TTNB subjects from "inadmissible" applicants to institutional candidates.

Second, precisely because the *cupo* is a gateway for some, it also risks becoming a narrative substitute for structural transformation if treated as a comprehensive solution. In fact, a policy that targets a small fraction of public posts cannot, by design, absorb the scale of labor exclusion documented across two decades. Moreover, it does not automatically resolve the conditions that shape employability. In other words, the *cupo* is best understood as a necessary but non-sufficient intervention since it produces entry points, but it cannot on its own dismantle the labor structure that makes sex work the default livelihood for many and formal work the exception.

This becomes even clearer when labor is analyzed alongside housing. *Con Nombre Propio'*s housing chapter shows how "access to a roof" is not merely a private sphere issue but a domain regulated by eligibility rules and documentation requirements. The report notes that mainstream housing policies in CABA (for example mortgage credit programs) impose requirements that are «de muy difícil cumplimiento» for TTNB people because of economic precariousness and instability (p. 102). It then describes how emergency housing infrastructures can themselves reproduce gender violence: *paradores* (shelters) often do not respect gender identity; in "female" shelters, trans women may be discriminated against and even expelled by other cis women who perceive them as a "danger".

Taking into consideration the same housing section we motive how it links precarious housing directly to age and income source. Among trans women and *travesti* aged 18–29, 82.4% live in precarious arrangements such as hotel rooms or occupied buildings (*casa o edificio tomado o no tomado*), making this the group with the worst housing

conditions (p. 105). When income source is cross-tabulated with housing type, the report shows that those with formal work mostly access a house or apartment owned or rented (57.1%), whereas for those whose income depends on a plan or pension, the dominant housing option is a room in a hotel/pension or an occupied building (63.6%) (p. 109). This data explains clearly that labor insertion is not just "income," but a gatekeeper to housing forms that require contracts and proof of income.

Health access must be read through the same lens: not simply as "service utilization," but as a structure of access shaped by discrimination. Both 2016 and 2022 data show heavy reliance on the public health system, which is analytically important because it ties health access to other domains (territory, documentation, exposure to public institutions). In the same text, 64.3% of trans women and *travestis* report using the public health system as their most used site of care; the report also notes the growing role of *Fundación Huésped* (37.8%), particularly for hormonal treatments and follow-up, and a smaller fraction using private care or *obra social* (11.2%). For trans men, the distribution is similar in direction: 54.8% public system, 38.7% private/*obra social*, and 12.9% *Fundación Huésped*. For non-binary respondents, the report indicates that public providers remain primary, with a notable share also using private/*obra social*. (pp. 45, 46)

This reliance on public systems should not be interpreted as evidence of "successful inclusion" on its own, because the same sources document how institutional forms and classificatory regimes actively limit and produce barriers. A testimony in *La Revolución de las Mariposas* captures this mechanism concretely through bureaucratic forms that presuppose binary categories and fold sexuality into simplified checkboxes: «Cuando yo me fui a atender, lo que me pasó es que la chica que me atendió, cuando le dije que era una chica trans, no supo cómo llenar el formulario […] Porque viste que dice si mantenés relaciones homosexuales o si sos hombre o mujer. Y como que son muy limitadas las respuestas» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2017, p. 76). As already showed, *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* (2005) already stresses how health is one of the main arenas in which discrimination is experienced, underscoring that "access" is continuously mediated by stigma and the conditions under which TTNB bodies become valid or not into the care systems.

This clarifies why health access, along with other services necessary to live a life of dignity, is not reducible to "having a hospital or a structure nearby." Being considered

valid in the cis-hetero system, through categories and by institutional routines, conditions the possibility of being treated without harm. *Con Nombre Propio* (2023a*)* notes that, regarding hormone treatments guaranteed by the law, there are not "relevant differences" between 2005 and the present for trans people. This is a reminder that formal legal guarantees do not automatically translate into non-discriminatory access.

Across work, housing, health and education the claim is that these dimensions co-produce one another as a system of constraints. Labor exclusion increases reliance on informal economies and reduces access to contractual housing; precarious housing undermines continuity in health care and medication; health barriers limit employability and stability; and all together they are filtered through institutional regimes that demand documentation and stable addresses. This is why the policy significance of the *cupo laboral* is very limited: it can re-route some trajectories into formal employment, but it cannot on its own transform the intersectional structure that reproduces precarity.

These interdependencies also clarify the transition back to the educational field. Indeed, educational participation is shaped by work schedules, housing instability, health interruptions, and the bureaucratic regimes that determine who can be enrolled and named.

Education is a decisive pillar within the same institutional ecology that structures TTNB life chances through work, housing and health. Schooling determines whether marginalization becomes materially durable across the life course, by shaping access to credentials, by distributing legitimacy and "respectability" in a neoliberal labor market, and by producing (or denying) the forms of social recognition that mediate entry into other infrastructures of survival. At the same time, educational institutions are themselves sites where TTNB bodies are administratively controlled and pedagogically disciplined: where norms of appearance are enforced and dissenting expressions are sanctioned. In this sense, the educational field condenses the broader dynamic already traced. The production of recognizability through routines that can seem login and expected but in reality have cumulative consequences for life trajectories.

La Revolución de las Mariposas describes how «el mundo y la ciencia necesitan categorizar y clasificar todo el tiempo» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2017, p.18) and how, when numbers are exhausted, institutions return to the impulse to label what cannot be counted.

Quantitative evidence across the Buenos Aires based sources indicates that educational exclusion has been structurally patterned rather than episodic. *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* already foregrounds discrimination in the school as a central site where exclusion is produced, alongside health services, and connects these experiences to the institutionalized policing of gender nonconformity. The book *La Revolución de las Mariposas* also underscores how early gender expression can become a trigger for educational truncation, reporting that 69% of trans women who recognized their identity before age 13 did not finish primary school. (p. 87) Rather than supporting an individualized reading, these data are repeatedly framed as the predictable result of institutions organized around a universalized, binary model of childhood and adolescence. A model that considers gender dissidence as a disturbance to be corrected rather than a life to be recognized. This is precisely where the empirical record resonates with Freire's critique of "banking" education: a model in which students are positioned as receptacles to be filled, rather than subjects whose knowledge and experience can transform the pedagogical encounter.

Con Nombre Propio analyses in depth the mechanism with an analytic distinction between *expulsión directa* (for example, denying admission because «la escuela no está preparada» and *expulsión indirecta*, where prejudices and routine discrimination make continued attendance untenable (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a).

This logic appears particularly clear in testimonies that describe the violence of school life: misnaming, ridicule and the constant pressure to fit a binary gender order treated as natural and pedagogically non-negotiable. Florencia Guimaraes García (in Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a) recounts being called by the name in her DNI «ese nombre asignado […] impuesto al nacer» and describes how this produced «burlas, risas,» not only from peers but also from teachers, concluding that «la escuela ha sido un espacio expulsivo y muy violento.» In another passage, she recalls «la pedagogía de la crueldad» and quotes a teacher's humiliating address «¿qué, es marica, usted?» (p. 87) as a crystallization of how authority can weaponize language to violently punish gender nonconformity. These accounts matter because they make visible how microaggressions operate as slow violence: not necessarily spectacular in any single instance, but cumulatively producing silence, absence, and eventual exit.

School routines materialize expulsion through infrastructures like bathrooms. Flor explains: «Yo no pude ir al baño de primero a séptimo grado […] Te empuja a abandonar el colegio automáticamente» (p. 93) and the report's own survey data on bathroom use in schools highlights the institutional conflict: only 34.5% use the bathroom they choose, while others are routed to a bathroom they were not comfortable going. "Inclusive" bathrooms, or staff/disabled bathrooms, are ways that the school used to «codificar y expulsar las diferencias.» (p. 93) "Inclusion" cannot be reduced to formal admission: the possibility of being comfortable in the space is materially governed by infrastructures of access, like schools' bathrooms. If Flor's testimony shows the cumulative force of interpersonal and pedagogical cruelty, the bathroom regime shows how exclusion is also built into the school's material and architecture, where "neutral" routines distribute vulnerability.

At this point, bell hooks is analytically useful because her critique names the pedagogical form that TTNB testimonies repeatedly describe. hooks (1994) argues that «to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential,» (p. 13) and insists that educators must be committed to their own "self-actualization" if the classroom is to become a space of freedom rather than domination. She frames engaged pedagogy as a practice that enables students to think critically, to take creative risks, to openly express their thoughts and feelings. Read alongside Flor's accounts of ridicule, misnaming and institutional hostility, hooks' point is not abstract: where pedagogy is cruel, vertical and discriminating, schooling becomes a site of epistemic and affective injury that reproduces exclusion even before any formal "dropout."

This becomes even more evident when the analysis turns to Sexual Education. In principle, ESI[23] is a rights-based policy intended to democratize knowledge about bodies, sexuality and relationships; in practice, ESI often reproduces the same binary analytic regime that renders TTNB bodies unrecognized. *Con Nombre Propio* is explicit: it notes that the 2006 ESI law (Ley 26.150) does not include articles that explicitly guarantee the

[23] *Educación Sexual Integral* (ESI) refers to Argentina's comprehensive sexuality education framework established by Law No. 26.150 (2006), which recognises the right of all students to receive sexuality education in all public and private schools across the country and defines ESI as an approach that articulates biological, psychological, social, affective, and ethical dimensions of sexuality. The law also created the National Programme for Comprehensive Sexuality Education within the Ministry of Education and mandates implementation across educational levels and modalities. In curricular terms, the Federal Council of Education approved national "*Lineamientos Curriculares*" as a common, obligatory baseline for ESI in all jurisdictions.

inclusion of *travesti*, trans people, and gender-diverse populations, and the report connects this omission to educational desertion from spaces where TTNB lives are erased or treated as exceptional. The document also links the struggle over ESI to institutional refusal of identity recognition, recalling the 2018 case in which, even after a student's suicide, a school denied «a este chico trans su derecho a la identidad,» while graffiti outside demanded: «¡Exigimos ESI con perspectiva de género!» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 91)

Importantly, the problem is not only omission, but it is also framing. The sources repeatedly show that institutional knowledge is organized through restrictive forms that reduce lived realities to checkbox categories and, in doing so, produce harm. While this is documented with particular clarity in healthcare bureaucracies, the mechanism is the same to schooling and ESI delivery: when institutions cannot "place" TTNB lives within their categories, they treat the subject as a problem of form-filling rather than as a subject of rights and knowledge.

What becomes directly relevant is hooks' insistence that learners are not empty receptacles. In adult education and popular education settings, TTNB students, especially those returning after expulsion, arrive with complex bodies of knowledge produced through survival in hostile institutions. *Travar el saber* makes this claim explicit by insisting that the question is not only how we study but also how we know, and by locating knowledge in lived experience that must be taken seriously as theory-bearing (Martinez & Vidal-Ortiz, 2018). This is not merely an alternative teaching style; it is a refusal of the hierarchy that has historically positioned *travesti* and trans people as objects of study rather than subjects of knowledge; exactly the critique hooks advances when she rejects educational domination and insists on pedagogies grounded in reciprocity and the recognition of lived experience.

The sources used in this chapter make clear that the consequences of educational inclusion or exclusion are materially high in a neoliberal-capitalist context: schooling functions as a pathway that leads to more stable labour insertion and to the bureaucratic competencies required to navigate housing and health systems. *Con Nombre Propio* explicitly frames exclusion from school as life-shaping: «A partir de ahí, no hubo proyecto, no existió nada más que la prostitución» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 87), not to moralize sex work, but to show how institutional expulsion organizes horizons of possibility under

conditions of limited choice. When educational trajectories are interrupted early, exclusion from formal employment is not an accidental secondary consequence; it is one of the predictable outputs of a system that sorts populations into differential life chances. In this sense, guaranteeing the right to study is not a symbolic concession. It is a necessary condition for giving people possibilities beyond the narrow survival economies to which TTNB people have been historically channeled.

Furthermore, it is fundamental to make a explicit that expanding access to education cannot be framed as a "solution" that places the burden of adaptation on TTNB people; an implicit expectation that "all the *travas* should go to school" in order to become eligible for dignity. Such a narrative would reproduce neoliberal responsibilization: shifting structural injustice into individualized projects of self-improvement. What the evidence instead suggests is the need for a transformation of the educational system itself: away from discriminatory and binary pedagogies and toward practices that actively undo institutional invisibilization. This includes basic but decisive changes (names in registers, pronouns in interaction, bathroom access), as well as deeper pedagogical shifts toward an «educación como practica de la libertad» (Freire, 1967).

Within this framework the question if *Bachilleratos Populares* can function as a tool of resistance of an oppressive system becomes concrete. If mainstream schooling has functioned as a mechanism of direct and indirect expulsion, the pedagogical promise of popular-educational spaces is not simply that they "include" TTNB students, but that they can contest the terms of inclusion by changing the routines through which binary legibility is enforced. In hooks' (1994) terms, they can be sites where education becomes the "practice of freedom," through everyday classroom practices that refuse the reduction of TTNB students to objects of correction and instead recognize them as subjects who co-produce knowledge. In Freirean terms, they can move from banking education to dialogic education, treating learners' experience as a starting point for critical reflection and collective transformation.

The point is not to idealize education as a singular resistance route, but to show why the right to study remains necessary within a broader struggle against structural exclusion and why the form of education matter. What is at stake is not only whether TTNB people can enter educational institutions, but whether educational institutions can be remade so

that TTNB lives do not have to be translated into binary terms in order to be allowed to learn.

2.3 Education as a practice of freedom

The previous paragraph established that inclusion, within the horizon of critical pedagogies, is not reducible to "access" understood as mere physical entry into a classroom. Rather, it concerns the transformation of the conditions under which subjects can become legitimate knowers and rights-bearing people. In this sense, education is at the same time subjective and structural since it unfolds as an intimate reconfiguration of self-perception, while also requiring an institutional reorganization of what counts as knowledge, whose bodies are presumed to belong in educational spaces and which forms of life are rendered livable through schooling. bell hooks condenses this political stake by insisting that «the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.» (hooks, 1994, p.12) Read as a claim about power, this statement helps illuminate why education becomes a terrain of struggle for *travesti*, trans and non-binary (TTNB) communities: schooling is one of the principal sites where gender is normalized, where social hierarchies are reproduced through everyday interaction, and where the "insider versus outsider" boundary is often predetermined.

However, the emancipatory promise of education depends on pedagogical and institutional arrangements capable of interrupting the ordinary operations of exclusion, including misgendering, the policing of appearance, the pathologization of dissident bodies, the bureaucratic violence of registries and "legal names," the tacit curriculum of shame and silence. hooks' proposition that liberating education requires a holistic presence of "mind, body, and spirit" is useful precisely because it makes explicit what dominant schooling tends to deny that learning is embodied, that the classroom is affectively charged and that the demand for participation can become coercive when it is not paired with reciprocal vulnerability and care. In contexts where TTNB students have historically encountered schooling as a space of correction and expulsion, a pedagogy that acknowledges the body as a legitimate site of knowledge is not optional but a condition of possibility for educational justice.

This double movement, education as liberation for TTNB people and education as a field that must be radically transformed for society as a whole, becomes particularly visible in

the Argentine experience of BP, and most notably in those created from and for TTNB communities without being exclusive or exclusionary. The *Bachillerato Popular Travesti, Trans y No Binarie* "Mocha Celis", inaugurated on 11 November 2011, is presented in *Travar el Saber* as a popular public highschool «no exclusiva, ni excluyente,» (Perchivale & Ansardi, 2018, p.32) explicitly shaped by an integral perspective on citizenship, rights and human development and conceived as a critical response to the *histórica exclusión of travesti* and trans people from education, work, health and housing. This formulation frames schooling as a rights-based intervention against a multi-dimensional regime of oppression, and it locates educational exclusion within a broader architecture of social abandonment rather than within individual "failure." "Mocha Celis" is also situated as part of a wider genealogy of «instituciones educativas autogestionadas por organizaciones de la sociedad civil» (p. 167)

Bachilleratos Populares TTNB respond to the specific mechanisms through which binary gender operates as an apparatus of exclusion. When an educational institution presumes only two stable genders, it does not merely "fail to include" TTNB subjects but it actively produces them as anomalies or disruptions to order. By contrast, spaces like "Mocha Celis" and other TTNB educational networks are described as schools that *abracen y contengan* gender and sexual diversity, foregrounding dignity and recognition. Moreover, these experiences challenge the broader educational system by exposing how binary gender norms harm everyone: they enforce a narrow regime of understanding, they police bodies and emotions and they naturalize hierarchies through everyday pedagogical routines. In that regard, the deconstruction of binarism is a structural intervention into the school as a disciplinary institution. Hooks' (1994) insistence that genuine empowerment «cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks» (p. 21) offers one way to conceptualize this shift: a non-coercive pedagogy is one that dismantles unilateral authority and replaces it with accountable, relational forms of power.

Testimonies compiled in *Travar el Saber* render this liberatory dimension concrete by naming education as a lived experience of recognition and collective strength. One participant's attachment to "Mocha" is described not as mere gratitude for schooling, but as a claim about meaning and belonging: «solamente se trata de que la gente conozca la Mocha. Pero tienen que amarla como yo la amo […] Esta escuela le puede enseñar a otras

escuelas sobre la fuerza que tiene estar de pie cuando todo te hace falta. Yo creo que si la Mocha no tuviera piernas igual estaría de pie.» (Perchivale & Ansardi, 2018, p. 163) The passage explicitly links schooling to affect (*amarla*), to endurance (*estar de pie*), and to pedagogical reversibility: the "marginal" institution becomes a teacher for mainstream schools. Liberation here is not represented as an individual escape from exclusion, but as the collective creation of a space where people can rebuild self-knowledge through relationships that refuse abandonment: «tenemos que conocerla, cada uno de nosotros nos tenemos que conocer a nosotros mismos» (p.164). Such statements are analytically relevant because they show how TTNB educational spaces intervene at the level of subject formation allowing students to imagine themselves otherwise, not by disembodying their histories of violence, but by converting those histories into shared understanding.

The concept of integral accompaniment is crucial to understanding why these experiences are liberating beyond the classroom. In *Travar el Sabe*r, "Mocha Celis" is characterized by «una fuerte perspectiva integral» (p.167), indicating that the school's mission exceeds curricular delivery and instead addresses the interdependence of rights (education, work, health, housing) systematically denied to TTNB people. This is present also in the federal discussions consolidated through the *Encuentro Federal de Educación Travesti Trans* [24] (EFETT), where the problem of *terminalidad educativa* is linked to broader policies and to the conditions enabling students to remain alive, housed and fed while studying. The point is not rhetorical: recommendations emerging from the EFETT 2021 process explicitly include material supports such as «bolsones de alimentos y viandas,» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2021, p. 91) Furthermore, it is stressed that special attention is given to students who are migrants, in street situations or engaged in sex work, indicating that educational rights cannot be secured through classrooms alone. In this

[24] The *Encuentro Federal de Educación Travesti-Trans* is a national gathering convened to articulate a collective agenda on education from TTNB perspectives. The first EFETT was held virtually in July 2021 and was organized by the *Bachillerato Popular Travesti-Trans y no-binarix Mocha Celis*, with participation from national authorities and civil-society actors. Rather than functioning as a conventional academic conference, EFETT is structured as a series of participatory working sessions oriented toward (i) exchanging experiences among educational projects, teachers and students, (ii) systematizing needs and barriers faced by TTNB people across educational trajectories, and (iii) producing proposals for public policy aimed at non-discrimination and educational inclusion, comprehending the conditions for educational completion and teacher training.

framework, liberation is infrastructural: it requires social reproduction to be collectively organized, especially for those most exposed to precarization.

"Mocha Celis" operationalizes this "integral approach" (*abordaje integral*) through a set of interlinked programs that treat educational permanence as inseparable from material subsistence, psychosocial well-being, legal recognition and access to employment. The clearest example is *Teje Solidario*, which emerged in the first days of the COVID-19 mobility restrictions as an emergency network of mutual aid: through a volunteer-based territorial map, donations were transformed into groceries purchased and delivered to TTNB people who could not guarantee a plate of food in the absence of formal employment, while the same material support functioned as an affective containment network in a context of generalized uncertainty and subjective distress. In parallel, Mocha's rights-oriented support work extends to health and legal needs through structures that exceed the pedagogical sphere: Mocha's practices are made possible by multidisciplinary professionals (including social workers, psychopedagogues, medical staff and lawyers) that assists students in navigating health services and institutional procedures and in responding to problems that "exceed" schooling narrowly defined. This same integral logic is reflected in the development of an employment-insertion area, oriented to improve employability and facilitate links with labor-market opportunities through coordinated initiatives and partnerships, thereby confronting the structural links between educational exclusion and labor precariousness.

Con Nombre Propio conceptualizes educational practice itself as weaving: liberatory education is not only what happens in a lesson; it is what happens when knowledge is collectively produced as a resource for life (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023a, p. 80). This resonates with hooks' insistence that teaching must create conditions where learning can "begin" at the deepest level through care for students. If mainstream schooling tends to compartmentalize the student as a cognitive subject abstracted from material vulnerability, *Bachilleratos Populares* TTNB reorganize education as a social ecology, thereby politicizing the very boundaries of what schooling is presumed to be.

From this perspective, it becomes possible to understand why "Mocha Celis" operates not as an isolated "exception," but as a generative precedent. The EFETT reports explicitly position the federal encounter as an instrument for making TTNB educational experiences visible, articulating them, and producing shared proposals for transformation. In its 2021

edition, EFETT's aim is defined at rethinking education «desde las pedagogías feministas y transfeministas con perspectiva de garantía de derechos para las personas travestis, trans y no binarias» and systematizing «necesidades, reclamos y propuestas» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2022, p. 1) across institutions, educators, and students. The 2023 report reiterates EFETT as a space of collective reflection carried out through working tables, oriented to dialogue and rethinking education from critical feminist and transfeminist pedagogies with a rights-guarantee perspective. These definitions matter because they show that the liberatory horizon is explicitly twofold: the strengthening of TTNB-focused spaces and the transformation of education for everyone which the 2022 report states directly when it insists that TTNB educational experiences are «claves para la transformación social y la educación de todas las personas.» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2023b, p. 6)

The EFETT process also documents how "Mocha Celis" pioneering role expanded into a heterogeneous landscape of experiences across Argentina. The 2022 report lists eighteen participating educational spaces, including, among others, CETRANS Tucumán (San Miguel de Tucumán), the non-exclusionary terminality center "Maite Amaya" (Córdoba), the trans-*travesti* school "Shirley la Bombón" (La Plata), an Espacio Educativo Secundario Travesti/Trans (Santa Fe), and multiple programs in CABA and Buenos Aires Province, alongside the Asociación Civil Mocha Celis itself. The 2022 report also mentions a wide set of participating spaces, such as the Univesity UNDAV, underscoring that TTNB education is simultaneously community-based and increasingly connected to public institutions through negotiated articulations.

A point important to stress is that these experiences are not replicas of the *Bachillerato* Mocha Celis. They are adaptations shaped by territory, local governance and distinct assemblages of activism and institutional negotiation. The 2023 report, for instance, describe the "Espacios Educativos Trans de la Ciudad de Reconquista (Aula Trans)" as emerging through a pilot experience initiated during the pandemic, in a context where «Educación tiene una especie de resistencia a pensar cómo acompañar a las personas con identidades diversas,» (p. 16) thus naming state institutions simultaneously as potential allies and as sources of inertia. The same account emphasizes accompaniment through bureaucratic procedures and rights access (medical appointments, migration paperwork, human rights-related processes) presenting the school as «lugar de encuentro, ayuda y

compañerismo» (p. 16) rather than as a purely academic service. Such descriptions reinforce the thesis that liberation in TTNB education is relational and infrastructural: educational spaces become hubs for restoring social rights precisely where the state's guarantee is uneven or absent.

Direct student testimonies in the EFETT materials further demonstrate how inclusive education is experienced as a reorientation of life trajectories. In the 2023 report, the voice of Pilar, representing the student center of "Mocha Celis", states: «maduré y crecí como persona. Ahora busco seguir estudiando. Aprendí a relacionarme con otras personas y quiero enseñarles a les demás, poder guiarles por un mejor camino. Mi sueño es ser tripulanta de cabina.» (p. 21) The content of this testimony is not limited to "academic success." It speaks of sociality, future orientation and the desire to accompany others, dimensions often denied to TTNB subjects through the combined effects of stigma, poverty and institutional violence. In the same section, demands for material support inside educational spaces make explicit that inclusion is materially conditioned and that education cannot be liberating if it is disconnected from the necessities of survival: «Necesitamos un merendero o comedor dentro de los espacios educativos. Muchas compañeras vienen a veces sin haber comido nada.» (p. 20) When read alongside EFETT's recommendations for food support and for improving conditions for TTNB communities in the interior to avoid forced migration to Buenos Aires, these testimonies clarify that "inclusive education" is a concrete politics of redistribution and collective care.

At the same time, the EFETT documents insist on a strategic tension that is central to the dual analysis required here. On the one hand, TTNB-focused spaces are recognized as necessary «para responder a las urgencias de la comunidad.» (Organización Civil Mocha Celis, 2022, p. 91) On the other hand, there is an explicit insistence that «es urgente que las instituciones trabajen estos temas por sí mismas para incluir a la comunidad TTNB» (p. 91), so that inclusion does not remain delegated to exceptional spaces alone. This claim connects with hooks' critique of educational domination: if structural exclusions are left intact, "inclusive" practices risk becoming containment strategies that do not alter the normative core of schooling. Which means that the political horizon is not the creation of a parallel system that substitutes the state, but the construction of a networked ecology

of educational spaces that simultaneously shelters those most targeted by violence and pressures society toward transformation.

This networked dimension is not merely descriptive; it is articulated as an explicit strategy against oppressive state formations and against the unevenness of rights implementation. EFETT is presented as an «espacio federal de elaboración de acciones posibles» intended to place «terminalidad educativa» (p. 6) on the public agenda, linked to the effective implementation of laws and to a historical moment opened by the National Law 27.636 on *travesti*-trans labor quota and inclusion. The encounter's federal character, its inclusion of multiple provinces and even regional presences, signals an understanding that TTNB educational justice cannot be centralized without reproducing territorial inequalities. The recommendations also include «acompañamiento entre bachilleratos y compañeres para seguir siendo parte del sistema educativo,» (p. 90) which frames solidarity among institutions not as goodwill but as a mechanism of persistence under hostile conditions. At the same time, the insistence on adjusting administrative records to self-perceived identity and on preventing institutional violence through protocols and TTNB-led trainings demonstrates that structural change must be understood as both cultural and bureaucratic.

TTNB *Bachilleratos Populares* in Argentina can be liberatory infrastructures because they reconfigure education as a collective right sustained through community governance, integral accompaniment and recognition of dissident bodies. They are liberating for TTNB students insofar as they undo the binary and punitive logics that have historically expelled them, enabling new narratives of selfhood and aspiration, as seen in testimonies that connect schooling to love, struggle and social change. At the same time, these experiences expose how the mainstream educational system must be transformed: the deconstruction of binarism is framed as a change into the very criteria of who education is "for," and into the institutional practices that silently reproduce gendered hierarchies. hooks' insistence on the classroom as a radical space offers a critical language to interpret why such transformation is ethically and politically necessary beyond TTNB communities alone.

Next, Chapter III shifts from the broader theoretical discussion to a situated case study of the *Bachillerato Popular* "Mocha Celis" in Buenos Aires, grounded in our three-month curricular internship (August–November 2025). Drawing on semi-structured interviews

and close-range participation in everyday school life, the chapter reads “Mocha Celis” as a political-pedagogical project that makes education livable through an approach of integral accompaniment, where schooling is inseparable from care, mediation and the material conditions of attendance and belonging. It reconstructs the school’s genealogy and activist roots, then turns to daily practices of teaching and support, while also registering the tensions and contradictions of sustaining a transformative project within unequal institutional and resource landscapes.

CHAPTER III – Mocha Celis and its Political Struggle for the TTNB Community

This chapter is devoted to the *Bachillerato Popular* "Mocha Celis", a school for youth and adults based in Buenos Aires (Argentina), where the authors carried out a three-month curricular internship (from August to November 2025). Consistently with what was anticipated in the introduction, the empirical material used in this section draws primarily on qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted during the last month of fieldwork. The interviewees occupy heterogeneous positions within the institution, starting from teachers, members of the leadership team, administrative staff, students, as well as coordinators and reference people from other programs and operational areas of the civil association that sustains the school.

A central focus of the chapter is the approach of *abordaje integral*, understood here as a set of practices and forms of accompaniment aimed at supporting the people who move through "Mocha Celis" (mostly trans, *travesti* and non-binary people) in a perspective that is not confined to education in a narrow sense, but extended to the material needs that emerge in the everyday lives of these subjectivities. As will be argued in the pages that follow, this dimension constitutes a structural component of the school's political-pedagogical project and represents one of the chapter's main analytical nodes. In other words, the question guiding this part of the thesis, which stems from the first two more theoretical chapters, is not simply how "Mocha Celis" teaches, but how it organizes the conditions that make attendance, resistance and struggle possible in the first place.

Compared to the previous sections, this chapter also features a more explicit first-person narrative component, in the wake of a form of 'auto-ethnography' that we considered useful to include (together with the supervisor) within the broader architecture of the thesis. In fact, the authors' continuous presence in the school spaces, for several hours a day throughout the internship, enabled close-range observation of internal dynamics, educational relationships and the everyday functioning of the institution. This proximity made it possible to articulate the analysis not only through the discourses collected via interviews, but also through direct experience of the context, accounting for both the practices of care and the (extra)ordinary work that sustains the school, and for the tensions, contradictions and limits that surface in the concrete implementation of the project. For this reason, it seems important to clarify that the material presented here

emerges from an interweaving of roles and forms of engagement that, throughout the internship, rendered the boundaries between observation and collaboration porous. This hybrid positioning shaped the entire research trajectory and thesis redaction. The approach was conceived as a collaborative mode of working and, insofar as possible, as restitutive toward the hosting institution and the TTNB community, with the aim of letting the outsiders know what this project is like for TTNB's lives and the broader political struggle in Argentina in the attempt to return something meaningful to the community that made the research possible.

At the same time, we recognize that our position as subjects external to the organization and from another country may have influenced what information was shared and the ways in which it was articulated. Yet this relative distance also allowed us to sustain an analytical and critical gaze on specific aspects of the school's functioning and practices, including those that might be harder to name from within. However, rather than treating this tension as a methodological problem to be resolved, we reinforce that the research relationship is not neutral and the knowledge produced here is inseparable from the situated conditions under which it was generated. Finally, the chapter integrates visual materials gathered from different sources, including photographers working inside "Mocha Celis" and content published on the school's Instagram page. A map locating the school is also included to provide a spatial sense of the project, in line with the theoretical foregrounding of territory developed in Chapter I.

3.1 The making of the first trans* school in the world

Since the consolidation of the modern Argentine nation-state, and in ways that resonate with other contexts shaped by colonial histories, schooling has operated as a key apparatus for producing and reproducing sociocultural hegemony. Far from being neutral, the school institution has long sustained projects that regulate bodies and the terms of legitimate identity. Within this broader horizon, the reproduction of the gender binary and the disciplining of bodies that do not align with cisheterosexual norms have functioned, and still function, as everyday techniques of governance.

For *travesti*, trans and non-binary people (TTNB), school is often remembered less as a site of learning and more as a terrain where symbolic and material violence accumulates. Self-identification is denied, gender expression is sanctioned and knowledge about bodies

and sexuality are erased or treated as deviance. Access to basic rights becomes conditional, fragile or simply unavailable. Then, the result is not an individual failure, but educational trajectories frequently marked by expulsion and interruption. Argentine activist and writer Val Flores (2015) names this in terms of bodily damage inside formal classrooms. In her chapter *Afectos, pedagogías, infancias, y heternormatividad: Reflexiones sobre el daño*, she proposes a reading of harm that speaks to the normalization of certain ways of inhabiting the body and to the effects this has on teaching practices and school culture reformulating harm not only in a biological sense, but also «en términos de normas que tenemos naturalizadas acerca de los modelos legítimos para vivir los cuerpos, tal como opera la heteronormatividad, y que produce efectos en nuestras prácticas áulicas y en la cultura escolar […]» (p. 17).

At the normative level, Argentina has legal frameworks that recognize the right to identity and impose obligations on the education system. The Gender Identity Law (*Ley 26.743*) affirms the right of all people to the free development and lived experience of their self-perceived gender identity. This includes the rectification of name, sex and image in the national identity document, access to bodily modification processes (hormonal treatments and surgical procedures) and, more broadly, the freedom to express gender through ways of dressing, speaking and occupying public space. In parallel, the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Law (*Ley 26.150, ESI*) establishes that schools must guarantee knowledge and tools for an integral understanding of sexuality, the body, rights and diversity.

Yet the distance between formal recognition and institutional practice remains striking: across many experiences, the formal school system does not effectively enable that free and self-perceived development. When knowledge about gender and sexuality is hidden, silenced, or treated through a pathologizing lens, schooling reinforces binary logics and disciplines students' bodies. Rights are undermined in very concrete ways, and the impact is often sharper for gender non-conforming students. This gap matters for what follows in the chapter, because many people who arrive at the BP "Mocha Celis" do so after carrying the traces of that earlier schooling exclusion and humiliation. Those experiences shape what "returning to school" can mean and what kinds of supports become necessary for permanence.

It is within this field of tensions, between juridical-political gains and persistent disciplinary dynamics in everyday school life, that the *Bachillerato Popular Travesti Trans y no binario* "Mocha Celis" emerges. Founded in 2012, it presents itself as the first trans* B*achillerato Popular* (BP) in the world. It was promoted from within the *travesti*-trans community with the explicit aim of building an educational space where these bodies are not corrected or pushed out but recognized as subjects of rights and supported in living their identity freely. "Mocha Celis" offers free secondary education to young people and adults, many of whom self-identify as *travesti* or trans*. The project is also defined as non-exclusionary, since it is not restricted only to TTNB students, even though TTNB experience is at its core. For many participants, schooling has been interrupted in the formal system, yet the desire to return and complete secondary education remains strong. Furthermore, over time the educational project has also expanded. In 2025, the *Escuela Primaria* "Flavia Flores" opened to support primary-level completion, widening the horizon of accompaniment and signaling a further consolidation of the institutional proposal.

In a way that recalls how many BP have been connected to the movement of recovered factories, "Mocha Celis" can be read as a product of the *travesti* and transgender movement of the last two decades in Argentina. It is rooted in struggles against multiple institutions that have historically produced exclusion. Lohana Berkins (2003) describes this landscape of struggle in terms that make the accumulation of obstacles visible:

> lucha contra nuestras familias, que nos expulsan a temprana edad…lucha contra las instituciones escolares, que nos cierran las puertas…lucha contra el sistema médico, que nos considera una execrable patología…lucha contra los empleadores, que se desmayan cuando el DNI contraviene la imagen que tienen ante los ojos…lucha contra los poderosos medios de comunicación, que…fortaleciendo un estereotipo cada vez más alejado de lo que somos. (p. 65)

"Mocha Celis" speaks to this history acknowledging the damage that trans* and *travesti* bodies have survived and treating those bodies as political agents with the capacity to fight for their own rights and to produce knowledge from lived experience.

In continuity with the previous chapters, this chapter wants to trace the effects of centering *travesti* life within an educational project and from a popular pedagogy point of view. The point is not limited to the benefits for TTNB students themselves, although those are decisive. It is also about what happens to popular education when *travesti* and trans* experience becomes a starting point for rethinking what counts as knowledge, whose

histories are taught and how everyday schooling is organized. In fact, a *travesti*-centered curriculum is not reducible to a single content block on sexuality education. It demands a broader reorientation: coursework is revisited through the question of how specific issues, theories and events shape TTNB lives at personal, institutional and systemic levels. Over time, this produces shifts in the assumptions that cisheteronormativity installs as "common sense" in schooling, and it opens a different horizon for what education can do.

To begin with, Mocha Celis' genealogy is directly embedded in the political organizing trajectories of *travesti*-trans activism in Argentina, particularly from the 1990s onward. In that period, activism began to articulate collective demands around identity recognition, denunciations of police harassment and the contestation of punitive practices that violently defined which "assigned places" *travestis* could occupy within the social order. This process of politicization did more than make vulnerability publicly visible. It also enabled the construction of collective identities and a re-signification of *travesti* existence as a political subject.

As Berkins (2003) reconstructs, an early milestone took place in 1991, when *travestis* first contacted Carlos Jáuregui (*Gays por los Derechos Civiles*) to ask for support after an arbitrary police detention. In that context, Jáuregui insisted on the need to organise, stressing that '*ésta era la pata que le faltaba al movimiento*'. Another relevant moment, also narrated by Berkins (2003, p. 62), unfolded through meetings promoted by the magazine 'Gay NX' to debate issues affecting sexual minorities. There, personal testimonies shared by trans *compañerxs* produced a collective shock that led to the organization of the *1º Encuentro Nacional Gay, Lésbico, Travesti, Transexual y Bisexual in Rosario (Santa Fe*). It became a turning point for the articulation of shared demands.

In fact, the accumulation of these struggles opened the way, years later, to legislative advances and new forms of political incidence. In 2010, the Gender Identity Law bill was presented in Congress. To push for its approval, in 2011 the *Frente Nacional por la Identidad de Género* was formed, bringing together *travesti*-trans, lesbian, intersex, bisexual and gay organizations and activists. Its members included the *Movimiento Antidiscriminatorio de Liberación* (M.A.L.) led by the *travesti* activist Diana Sacayán.[25]

[25] Look at: *Acto de lanzamiento del Frente Nacional por la Ley de Identidad de Género*, Comunidad Homosexual Argentina, 2 de mayo de 2011.

This cycle of visibility and insurgency in public space created concrete spaces able to repair trajectories marked by school expulsion to enable the material conditions for a dignified life.

It is in this context that the idea of a B*achillerato Popular* oriented specifically to the TTNB community takes shape, offering the possibility of returning to and completing secondary education within a space experienced as safe and non-pathologizing, while remaining politically situated. In our interviews, one founder (and former teacher) and the current director and head of institutional relations (also among the founders) described "Mocha Celis" as a response to the absence of the State when it comes to guaranteeing formal education free from discrimination. They framed it as a wager on an educational project that could truly embrace the TTNB community. In their accounts, the initiative is closely linked to central figures such as Lohana Berkins and Diana Sacayán, alongside other activists. The intention was to test a different pedagogy, with the ambition that it might be replicable in other contexts. Nonetheless, the project was not improvised since it is inserted within a dense socio-political conjuncture shaped by long-term organizing; in fact «la Mocha nace a 30 años del movimiento travesti y a 10 de los BP» (Interview 02, founding member and actual director).

The construction of the pedagogical and institutional project, however, was not linear and it was never free of tensions. Founders described an initial phase marked by internal debates sustained over years. Lohana Berkins, Marlene Wayar and other activists, together with allied teachers, met repeatedly to define political meaning, organizational forms and the everyday functioning of the school. These discussions took place within a particularly complex institutional landscape: as noted in Chapter 1, there was an unclear normative setting around the status and recognition of BP in the City of Buenos Aires during those years. So, their legal framing oscillated between private and public management without a stable set of rules. One founder recalled it plainly: «Había un gris normativo, al principio los Bachilleratos Populares estaban relegados a la gestión privada y después pública; no había normativa» (Interview 01, founding member). That uncertainty pushed the collective to rely on precarious arrangements and survival strategies to keep the B*achillerato* open; for a period, another BP even lent its administrative code so Mocha could function while recognition was being negotiated.

At the same time, a decisive debate concerned the character of the space itself: should it be exclusive to the *travesti*-trans community, or should it remain open and non-exclusive? The final choice was a non-exclusionary model that kept a T* political centrality while not closing access to others. However, this decision unfolded in a hostile climate: some media framed the project as *un ghetto* or even as *una escuela para ser travesti*. Those framings are revealing, because they show how strong the regime of stigma was at the moment the school emerged. Even so, the early years also coincided with a relatively favorable policy cycle linked to progressive reforms during the *kirchnerista* period. Key laws were approved in those years, including marriage equality, ESI and later the Gender Identity Law. In the words of one founder, «La construcción de la escuela se llevó a cabo en un período de euforia por las nuevas leyes» (Interview 02). It is important to underscore what this "favorable" conjuncture actually means: it was the outcome of struggle by gender dissidence movements that opened conditions of possibility for projects such as "Mocha Celis" to be imagined, made and, over time, sustainable.

Material support from the State became more visible from 2013 onward. Interviewees mentioned assistance from the city administration for acquiring and building resources and infrastructure (teaching materials, classrooms, library, furniture). They also recalled the start of a deliberate effort to incorporate more trans* teachers. Still, they emphasized the precarious conditions of the first location and the gradual, contested character of institutional strengthening.

A later and particularly conflictual phase concerned official recognition by the State. As discussed in Chapter I, the relationship with the State often becomes one of the most controversial points for BP*,* because it touches debates about autonomy, political independence and control over the pedagogical project. In the case of "Mocha Celis", interviews describe an internal rupture that led to the departure of some people and the decision, sustained by others, to advance a strategy of institutional negotiation. One founder summarized this stance through a phrase that returned several times in our conversations: «al Estado hay que exigirle, pero se trabaja con el Estado» (interview 01). This path culminated in formal recognition as U.G.E.E. and in the assignment of a permanent building (the current site). That shift made it possible to stabilize space and consolidate working arrangements. However, the implications of such decisions and their effects on autonomy and on the political-pedagogical horizon will be taken up later in the

chapter, and also in dialogue with Chapter III of Silvia's thesis, in order to analyze how different positions toward the State produce very concrete consequences for popular organizations struggling for basic rights for historically marginalized communities.

Founders also located new frictions around decision-making methodologies, especially questions about how much decisional power students should hold and how to make assembly practices effective in everyday life. Another conflict concerned the possibility of "federalizing" the project through an articulation with a national LGBT organization. Although this was read as a risk to independence and autonomy, according to the accounts we collected, the collective ultimately decided not to move in that direction, in part due to the impulse and position sustained by Lohana Berkins.

The choice of the school's name is another step that deserves attention, particularly from a popular education perspective. As Chapter I argues, naming is never a neutral label in a BP. A name functions as a political marker, an act of memory and a claim about belonging. It tells a story about where the project comes from and who it answers to. It can also work as an ethical demand placed on the institution: it obliges the school to remain accountable to a collective history rather than to an abstract mission statement. In this sense, choosing "Mocha Celis" is part of the project itself.

Mocha was a *travesti* person from Tucumán (see Image 3.1), *compañera* of the *travesti* activist Lohana Berkins in the neighborhood of *Flores* in the City of Buenos Aires. She was killed by police gunshots and did not complete secondary school. Her story is presented as continuous with the trajectories that the institution seeks to address, while being the same as that of many *travesti*, trans and non-binary people.

Image 3.1 - Mocha Celis in a daily activity. Source: *Archivo de la Memoria Trans Argentina*.

In sum, it is analytically relevant to attend to the discursive and conflictual processes that accompanied the creation and development of "Mocha Celis", because they make visible, at a situated scale, structural tensions that also run through the history of *Bachilleratos Populares.* Questions of autonomy, ideological positioning, pedagogical definitions and relationships with the State appear here in concrete form. At the same time, these processes show an early proximity to the philosophy of popular education, particularly through the centrality of dialogic practices as tools for collective construction. The school does not emerge as a finished design. It appears as an institution constantly in articulation, sustained by debate, partial agreements and organizational practices that are themselves part of its political-pedagogical wager.

3.2 Within popular pedagogy and beyond formal schooling

I will never forget my first day at "Mocha Celis": the feeling of stepping into a safe and welcoming space, inhabited mostly by gender non-conforming people who were simply exercising one of the most basic rights: studying. Very quickly, though, it becomes clear that Mocha is far more than a secondary school. You sense that density as soon as the gate opens and you reach the outer *patio*. During breaks, students and teachers of different ages, backgrounds and life trajectories meet there, talking and sharing *mate* between one class and the next. A particular atmosphere takes shape in that everyday scene. It is a space where the freedom to name oneself, to express oneself and to self-determine does not appear as a concession granted from above, but functions as an ordinary rule, sustained through collective respect.

"Mocha Celis" was born from concrete needs within the *travesti*-trans and non-binary community, and it was deliberately built around those needs. As the director puts it, «la construcción del bachillerato fue llevada a cabo de manera colectiva preguntando a las compañeras que tipo de escuela necesitaban» (interview 02). This premise keeps operating as an organizing criterion that cuts across institutional decisions, pedagogy, the rhythm of school time and the politics of care. Indeed, one of the first issues that had to be confronted was the schedule. The director explains that «los Bachilleratos Populares estaban pensados para hijxs de trabajadorxs, entonces un primer problema era la hora que no se ajustaba a las necesidades del colectivo. Entonces se eligió la tarde y la escuela empezó a poblarse de alumnxs» (Interview 02). Choosing an afternoon schedule then,

was a political choice about accessibility. In fact, many people who pass through the school sustain their lives through sex work or prostitution, often with predominantly night-time working hours, hence a "classic" morning schedule would have reproduced a barrier at the very entrance. Operating from 14:00 onward reshapes school time so that it becomes compatible with the material reality of the community the school is meant to serve.

Food is another node, closely tied to attendance but also to survival. For a collective shaped by early family expulsions, precarious labor trajectories, multiple forms of violence and, in some cases, experiences of homelessness, school rarely becomes a priority if minimum conditions of support are absent. The institution's early response, during the initial phase of development, was direct and practical: «entonces lxs docentes primero cocinaban y luego daban clase» (interview 02). Over time, as the project became more formalized and could count on resources and infrastructure, a kitchen space was set up, and the preparation of meals stabilized as part of school life. Today, Tuti (a long-standing *travesti compañera*) cooks lunch for students every Tuesday and Thursday. From our own experience accompanying that preparation, among pots and *mates*, it becomes evident that food is lived here as a concrete technology of collective care, supporting the very possibility of studying, day after day.

This logic of accompaniment also appears in decisions that, from the standpoint of common-sense schooling, might be labelled "extraordinary", yet in "Mocha" they follow the project's horizon. The director recalls that, in the early days, those building the initiative would go to the *zona roja*[26] to circulate information about the school. Later, pedagogical outings with students were organized in those same territories. In that context, one statement becomes especially meaningful: «El uso del espacio público cambió para las travestis cuando tomaron los colectivos para salir a hacer salidas pedagógicas en vez de tomar taxis para desplazarse para ejercer trabajo sexual.» (interview 02) This passage condenses something central: the school reorganizes routines and, with them, ways of inhabiting the city. For many *travesti* and trans* people, daytime can mean greater exposure to hostile looks and harassment; moving through the city during the day may be constrained by fear, stigma or violence. Returning to the *zona roja*

[26] In Buenos Aires, *zona roja* refers to an area of the city commonly known as a street-based sex work district, where prostitution is visible in public space and where many sex workers, including trans* and travesti, work and circulate, especially at night.

as a student, rather than as a sex worker, produces a symbolic and practical rupture, opening other itineraries and forms of social positioning. In this sense, “Mocha” operates as more than a device for educational completion. It intervenes in the social place assigned to the TTNB community and it makes room for a different kind of everyday life.

The school’s relationship with territory reinforces this reading though. Mocha is located in a strategically accessible area, close to zones of sex work, central within the city and well connected by public transport (See Image 3.2).

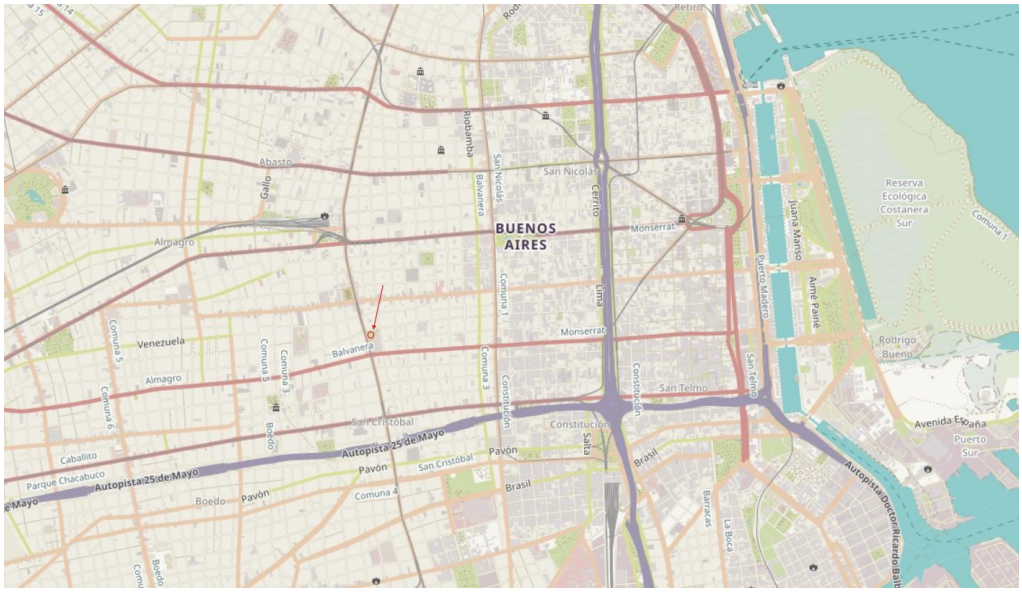


Image 3.2 - Location of the school (red arrow and circle). Source: author’s elaboration.

Yet the bond with the neighborhood exceeds geography. It is a dialogic insertion that involves cohabitation, circulation and the production of community. As the director says: «Ocupar la calle para el Mocha Fest[27] y llevar la escuela a la calle son actos de reivindicación del espacio público y de visibilización de nuestro proyecto» (interview 02). Taking the school into the street resonates with what the previous chapters discussed in relation to territoriality, social movement and popular education. Territory is not simply where a project is placed, but it is a field where recognition and legitimacy are disputed and built.

[27] Mocha Fest is a public street event organized by “Mocha Celis”, where the school “takes itself to the street” through performances, music, food, and community activities. It functions as a collective celebration and a political act of visibility, claiming public space for TTNB lives and making the school’s project visible beyond its walls.

From this perspective, “Mocha Celis” appears as a space that seeks to unsettle gender binarism while also challenging a meritocratic and performative understanding of education associated with the banking model. The aim is not limited to offering classes but to accompany life trajectories in their integral dimension. The director also draws a contrast with other *Bachilleratos Populares*, arguing that «en ellos hay una perpetuación de la cis hetero norma por la falta de una conciencia especifica» (interview 02). On the contrary, in Mocha a trans-transfeminist and LGBTQIANB+ perspective structures everyday decisions, from practices of care to how space is distributed. The bathroom is one emblematic example: «El baño sin género es una decisión muy fuerte para que se liberaran los cuerpos» (Interview 02). In everyday school, rather than an “infrastructure detail” it is read as an institutional message: bodies do not have to justify themselves, hide or adjust to be allowed into school. A transfeminist and queer pedagogy takes seriously that the body is present in the classroom before any lesson begins.

Image 3.3 - Mocha Fest. Acknowledgment: Senra, F.

This also becomes visible through students’ testimonies, especially when they describe being able to loosen the stigmas imposed both by society and, at times, by normative expectations that can circulate within TTNB communities themselves. One student told

us: «He aprendido que la masculinidad trans no necesariamente tiene que tener una expresión de genero masculina. En la marcha del orgullo por primera vez he usado ropas que de chico me forzaban a usar y ahora que soy yo en elegirlo, lo he sentido bien. Estar aquí es la única manera de seguir subsistiendo» (Interview 10, student 1). What this account brings into focus is a double movement. On one side, Mocha supports material survival and educational permanence. On the other, it offers a space where trans* identity is not reduced to a binary script, as if a transmasculine person had to reproduce cis man codes in clothing, attitude and social position to be recognized as legitimate. The school enables experimentation and ambivalence, and it makes room for forms of gender expression that do not conform to the demand to "pass" as a coherent binary category. In that sense, liberation is not only about being protected from external violence. It also concerns the possibility of inhabiting one's gender without the constant pressure to fit a single intelligible mold.

The same logic appears in how the building itself is imagined as a site of material support. Alongside schedule and food, the institution has showers and washing machines. This decision relates to the fact that the space is oriented not only to formally enrolled students, but also to people from the community facing vulnerability, including experiences of homelessness. Having a shower, access to clean clothes and a safe place to keep belongings during the day constitutes a sharp break with formal schooling, which typically limits responsibility to the classroom and the timetable. Coherently, at the entrance there is also a *perchero solidario*, where clothing is left so others can take it. This everyday device of redistribution materializes an ethics of care. As the director notes: «En el perchero solidario en la mocha la ropa esta toda mezclada, no está dividido [ed. Note: por expresión de genero binaria]» (Interview 02). Even there, in the organization of donated clothing, the politics of space becomes visible. A student described the effect in very simple terms: «Nos hacen sentir como somos, sin prejuicio» (interview 10.2). It matters, too, that while around half of the students self-identify as *travesti*, trans or non-binary, the *Bachillerato* is not exclusive. Single mothers, cis women, migrants, Afro-descendant, racialized and people from the wider LGBQIAP+ community also enroll.

This material infrastructure connects to a pedagogical proposal that explicitly draws on principles of popular education, in content and in form. The student completion coordinator emphasized, and we could see it in daily practice, that teaching materials are

produced and distributed in ways meant to guarantee real access. On one occasion we helped print materials for all subjects so they could be offered free of charge to students, a measure that responds to technological and economic inequality (Interview 07, Student Completion Coordinator). What matters most, though, is the political orientation of the curriculum, described as having a «perspectiva de género, diversidad y Derechos Humanos en todos en los contenidos» (interview 04, Academic Secretary). In fact, «hay algo en la enseñanza que está muy relacionado con Derechos Humanos y justicia social: Con la secretaria académica se ha trabajado mucho en politizar y revisar los contenidos para que estén adecuados y para que no sean cis-hetero normados. La idea es también entregar herramientas a lxs estudiantes para que puedan desarrollarse por si mismxs» (interview 08, Popular Economy's teacher and '*empleo trans*' Coordinator). Often in lectures teachers ask students to think and reflect about their own experiences of labor precariousness and systemic oppression. This reflexive component is representative of Freire's problematized education, which was introduced by his *pedagogía del orpimido*. Content selection is discussed collectively by the academic secretariat with teachers and with student representation, raising questions about which memories, which historical narratives and which genealogies become teachable. As the academic secretary explains:

> lo que importa es que selección de literatura se hace […]. En la asignatura de Historia, por ejemplo, elegir qué línea de tiempo se analiza y desde que perspectiva es muy político: simbólicamente nosotrxs tratamos también la biografía de Lohana Berkins y sus propios recorridos vitales para conectarlos con las vivencias de lxs estudiantes. Nos enfocamos mucho en la historia de la comunidad, que siga existiendo al lado de todo el resto. Siempre en la asignatura de historia este año hemos entrevistado las madres de plaza de mayo. En matemáticas, lxs alumnxs han colaborado en la redacción de las estadísticas de "con nombre propio", "revolución de las mariposas." etc. también analizamos los procesos migratorios en relación con la vida de lxs estudiantes, muches de ellxs migrantes (interview 04)

This excerpt shows that the school contests banking education through more than a change in methods. It treats the choice of content as a political act. It positions the TTNB community as a historical and epistemic subject, not simply as an object of assistance or a category of victimhood.

In line with this, the institution recognizes that students have «margen de decisión en como y que estudiar» (interview 04), which points to a flexible pedagogy that takes material living conditions and heterogeneous trajectories seriously. The same orientation appears in an «ESI no binaria y transfeminista» (Interview 04) that does not limit itself to

gender-based violence framed through a binary lens, but addresses processes of *hormonización,* surgical interventions, queer relationships, sexual health and access to situated information. Through pedagogical strategies such as the ESI project, *travesti* and trans* students begin to access knowledge about their own bodies and identities that typical schools previously concealed.

Memory is also treated as a living practice. It is not only memory of the dictatorship, but memory of the TTNB community, sustained through actions such as «celebrar el cumpleaños de Lohana Berkins y preservar y construir memoria colectiva. ¡Queremos celebrar la vida y no la muerte!» (interview 04) One student told us: «No sabía que existían muchas cosas, es muy diferente del curriculum educativo de otros colegios. Aquí enseñan cosas que no sabía y que necesito realmente, que de verdad me interesan» (interview 10.3). In these accounts, the curriculum becomes a form of repair. It offers language and reference points that allow students to situate themselves within histories that are often erased in formal schooling.

Image 3.4 - 3rd year students interviewing the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* – Source: Mochas' Instagram.

This way of understanding education is completed by a productive dimension. The school imagines itself as a place where the community produces knowledge for itself, resisting

extractivist logics. As the academic secretary says: «preferimos el desarrollo de proyectos que vuelvan a la comunidad, que lxs estudiantes sean sujetos de conocimiento y sentido» (interview 04). Concretely, especially in third year, students develop projects of research, systematization and knowledge production with community return, including written materials that also form part of this thesis' bibliography. Classroom work also foregrounds health from an integral perspective, through medical visits and workshops on HIV, mental health, prostitution and sex work (interview 04). The separation between "learning" and "life" does not hold easily here. A teacher described this in blunt terms: «En todas las materias se intenta bajar todos los contenidos en la realidad del día a día, sin que se quede solamente en lo abstracto. La Mocha no trabaja para formar travesti filosofas: hace el trabajo que nadie ha querido hacer que es apoyar concretamente las travestis» (interview 08) Even within specific subjects, this orientation produces differences that are easy to notice. Biology classes, for instance, do not treat the body as stable and unchangeable. Instead, the body is approached as something that can be modified, negotiated and reworked through social and medical technologies. In dialogue with perspectives such as Preciado's[28], the classroom can become a place where bodily autonomy and gender expression are discussed without moral panic, and where students can access tools for thinking about their own transitions beyond pathologizing frames. In this sense, "Mocha Celis" also functions as a site where TTNB students encounter embodied technologies of resistance that support the free development of gender identity. At this point, it makes sense to shift the focus to those who sustain teaching on an everyday basis. The pedagogical practices described so far do not exist on their own, they depend on concrete people who embody them, adapt them and negotiate them in the classroom. We interviewed several *travesti** teachers who reflected on what it means to teach at Mocha. One of them (interview 05) stressed that her own training is rooted in popular and critical education and therefore aligns with the BP's overall framework. Yet what she emphasizes is not a cognitively oriented idea of learning. She returns instead to the social and symbolic weight of the educational fact itself: « El contexto en el que aprende [ed note: lx estudiante], cual es la realidad de la persona. Entender lo simbólico del educativo, que representa para esta persona estudiar» (interview 05, teacher 1). In her

[28] Cfr. Preciado, Preciado, P. B. (2002). *Manifiesto contra-sexual.* Editorial Opera Prima and Preciado, P. B. (2008). *Testo Yonqui.* Espasa Calpe, S. A.

view, students «Entran con sus saberes y recorridos» and it becomes central to recognize the «individualidad de la persona en su contexto completo». From there, evaluation and performance lose their centrality as classificatory devices: «No tiene que ver con el contenido y la nota, sino es importante el proceso» (interview 05). This shift resonates strongly with the Freirean principles discussed in previous chapters. Education is treated as relational, situated and potentially transformative. Knowledge is not deposited but built through the relationship.

The same teacher also describes an explicit effort to bring students closer to tools of knowledge production and to a critical epistemological stance. She explains:

> Acercar a lxs estudiantes a conceptos de terciario como llevar a cabo una investigación social o redactar una tesis. Explorar que es el conocimiento, remarcar que las ciencias pueden ser criticadas y abordar una epistemología queer; para que las personas de la comunidad puedan generar nuevos saberes. Este año trabajamos desde la antropología: lxs estudiantes realizaron tres entrevistas a tres referentes travesti, sobre tres temas de interés de lxs estudiantes como moda, identidades y la creación de un archivo histórico y fotográfico de Mocha Celis. Queremos generar un proyecto de archivo, que deje vivencias y experiencias documentadas; ¡y no solamente como víctimas! También queremos hacer un fanzine el próximo año ya que lo estético siempre fue una resistencia, donde hicimos trinchera las travestis (interview 05).

This passage is especially important because it shows that teaching at "Mocha" is not limited to delivering content. It opens devices of self-representation and collective memory: an archive, a fanzine, aesthetics, then, can be understood as resistance. The classroom becomes a site of cultural and political production where the community narrates itself in the first person and disputes the frames that have historically made it intelligible only through the figure of the victim. The stress on documenting life, on leaving traces, also speaks to a long history of erasure. It implies that studying is also to claim the right to be recorded as a subject of history. Interviews with teachers also register tensions and challenges. Working with adult trans students who are dealing with multiple daily problems can generate frustration and conflict in class. Our own presence in the school allowed us to observe moments of tension where the classroom is crossed by material urgencies, anguish and exhaustion. When *travesti*-trans* students arrive at the BP Trans* Mocha Celis, their bodies have already survived social harm produced by biological families and childhood friendships. This is not only true for students. It also holds for many teachers and staff members who carry their own histories of exclusion. In this sense, one analytically interesting point raised by a teacher concerns the way some

students, in certain situations, seek to reconstruct a teacher-student hierarchy. She suggests that this happens because institutions have left them outside: «buscan institucionalización, porque las instituciones lxs han dejado por fuera. La jerarquía se establece para hacerse cargo de esta posición distinta [Ed. Note: de profe] y permite ser más honesta, ya que este cargo tiene otras responsabilidades. […] en el aula tengo un rol.» (Interview 05). This observation complicates simplistic readings of horizontality and resonates with Puiggrós vision in the first chapter. Even within a popular education project, dialogic practices can coexist with a demand for a more institutional structure. This can be especially true when past experiences of formal schooling were marked by expulsion. The pedagogical relationship is negotiated. Authority does not disappear. It is made explicit, attached to responsibilities and oriented toward care.

Image 3.5 - Virginia Silveira, former professor at “Mocha Celis”. Source: Mocha Celis.

This flexibility becomes even clearer when we compare that account with the perspective of another teacher, who describes her pedagogical approach as

> una enseñanza no jerárquica sino horizontal, colectiva y comunitaria. Lx docente es como unx par: la misma persona que da clase se te cruza en los ambientes de maricas y travestí a fuera de las aulas. Todo esto en un ambiente muy complejo y diverso: hay travas que estuvieron presas, otras que tuvieron que adecuar su cuerpo con silicona y hay adolescentes no binarixs que fluyen en su autoidentificación (interview 08).

Compared to a traditional school where teachers are expected to maintain distance and a carefully performed professionalism, we observed a different affective register at Mocha. Teachers and students talk, tease each other and share jokes with a familiarity that often continues outside the classroom. The educational bond extends beyond the lesson and beyond the timetable. Along the same lines, another teacher emphasizes flexibility as a political principle: «cualquier cosa que se estudia se puede adaptar; hacerlo es político, ensenar es un acto. vamos todxs juntxs» (interview 06, teacher 02). Classroom coexistence is supported through collective care agreements. One especially meaningful detail is that one of the teachers interviewed is a former "Mocha" graduate. The same is true for institutional reference figures such as the actual president of the association (and ex student and teacher), Virginia Silveira (in Image 3.5). This circulation from student to teacher or to leadership roles shows that the project does not only support educational completion. It also opens concrete future horizons including pathways into paid work and institutional participation for people from the community.

A comparison made by one teacher helps to illuminate what "Mocha" enables. When they speaks about their parallel work in a formal school, they describes the constant surveillance over what can be said, shaped by families' pressure and school rules. They also points to the experience of being the only *travesti* teacher within a cis and binary framework. Against that background, "Mocha" appears as a space of collective appropriation: «es un lugar donde se discute y es habitado por cuerpos no hegemónicos. Aqui el aula es nuestro, en la Mocha todxs pueden nombrarse.» (interview 06) The sentence condenses a key dimension: the classroom becomes a territory where the right to speak, to name oneself and to exist is materially protected.

For that reason, it is analytically important to treat teachers' gender non-conforming identities not as an anecdotal feature but as part of the material conditions that make a space of care possible. This applies to students and to those who teach. One teacher formulates it clearly: «es una alegría enseñar aquí y formar parte del proyecto. Unx Prof travesti hablando a pibes travesti, la Mocha es una realidad concreta. Es muy reparador, no hay muchas enseñantes travestis en la educación; y es un privilegio poder hablar el mismo lenguaje de lxs estudiantes, aunque a veces es un desafío» (interview 05). Another teacher adds a bodily and energetic dimension to this repair: «poder utilizar la ropa que quieres cuando trabajas es algo increíble. El cuerpo puede estar descansando en la Mocha

ya que siempre estamos alerta en la vida cotidiana y es algo que es desgastante a nivel energético» (interview 06). Both quotations show that "Mocha" does not function as a refuge only for TTNB students. It is also a place where workers and teachers find a pause from the permanent alertness imposed by everyday transphobia. This idea becomes even more concrete in the interview with the person responsible for student completion support (interview 07), who accompanies trajectories to sustain permanence, helps students recover pending subjects and reconnects those who have moved away. Her testimony shows that the school is configured as a space of repair in relation to violences experienced in formal education. This applies not only to students but also to those who work there. The person interviewed told us that "Mocha" operated as a refuge for her after having been a target of transphobic aggressions in previous educational experiences. Being welcomed by "Mocha" became a form of containment and repair, in ways similar to what many students describe.

Image 3.6 - *Olla popular* in a public square. Source: Mocha Celis.

From her perspective, the main obstacle for students in the *Bachillerato* cannot be reduced to a lack of will. It is tied to a long history of devaluation: «el principal problema es la autoestima, ya que somos poblaciones explotadas que no pueden visualizarse. Nos hacen

pensar que nada es lo nuestro, te enseñan que sos burrx. También hay situaciones materiales como desalojamientos, violencia, limitaciones tecnológicas. En 14 años de mocha 150 personas aún deben materias. Hay personas que tienen 10 años que rendir una materia» (interview 07). The quote shows how educational trajectories are interrupted through a combination of factors. Housing precarity, violence and technological barriers matter, but so does accumulated subjective harm produced by institutions that teach people not to imagine themselves as capable subjects. Another staff member frames the issue in terms of continuity and attendance: «Lo más difícil es que lxs estudiantes asistan a clase, porque hay muchas situaciones de salud mental y de prioridad al trabajo. Eso dificulta que el proceso sea constante y continuo. La Mocha intenta ayudar, por ejemplo, proveyendo comida, psicólogxs» (interview 08)

In this same line, the person responsible for completion support defines education through an explicitly relational register: «La educación es aceptación, es ternura; especialmente en un contexto de enfermedades de transmisión sexual, personas fallecidas, adicciones, personas totalmente rotas. Mocha es como un centro de atención del estado ya que atendemos alrededor de 500 personas al mes.» (interview 07) Her formulation is forceful, yet it clarifies how "Mocha" takes on functions that the State and formal schooling often abandon: containment, orientation, care and articulation with resources that sustain life. Finally, her account makes explicit that accompaniment does not move in a single direction. The school also transforms those who work within it. «La Mocha cambia la vida a las personas, empiezan a entender que tienen derechos. Hay personas que trabajan en la Mocha que necesitan también contención y recuperación. Es para un lado y para el otro. Por ejemplo, en cuanto a silicona y hormonas, las compas explican que significa, enseñan, me están también educando, dando herramientas para entender por primera vez que tienen una familia no enemiga.» (interview 07). What appears here is reciprocity, knowledge and care. The community becomes an affective and political network that undoes earlier experiences of social hostility. A teacher and staff member captures this with a sentence that returns the discussion to the foundation of the project: «el punto de partida de la Mocha en cualquiera de sus proyectos es crear un espacio seguro: en la clase, en empleo trans y en todo lo demás. Sin espacio seguro no hay nada. Y yo misma soy una más que necesita este espacio. Crear espacio de cuidado, de escucha, de respeto.» (interview 08) "Mocha" recognizes the harm *travesti*-trans bodies have experienced. It

treats them as sources of knowledge and it mobilizes, to use Paul Preciado's (2020) term, "*tecnologías de resistencia*" that put the gender binary into question.

Taken together, these first observations suggest that "Mocha Celis" cannot be approached only as an alternative educational institution. What appears on the ground is a political pedagogical infrastructure that links access to schooling with material conditions for permanence, transfeminist practices of care and an explicit project of shifting the social place historically assigned to the TTNB community. In everyday practice, these elements are gathered under the notion of *abordaje integral*. The term signals a simple premise: education for a marginalized and oppressed population such as TTNB cannot be reduced to classrooms and to "the educational" in a narrow formal sense. It must engage in the concrete conditions that shape people's lives. Beyond the kitchen and the snacks already mentioned, living in "Mocha" for three months and speaking with those responsible for implementing this integral approach made something clear to us. In many respects, "Mocha" resembles a welfare hub more than a school designed only for secondary completion, and since this year also primary completion, for youth and adults.

One of the clearest expressions of this is the program *Teje Solidario*. It began during the pandemic, when many *travestis* were confined at home and the school organized food deliveries. From there, it gradually grew into a large system of coordination across private and public entities that provide donations, to provide a monthly weekend distribution where many trans* people can pick up a box of food and essential goods. This is supported by volunteers from many parts of the world. The scale matters because it shows how "the school" is continually stretched to meet needs that are not external to education but decisive for educational continuity.

A second area is labor access. Starting from a shared diagnosis, the school acts on several fronts. Material conditions make it extremely difficult for TTNB people to enter the formal labor market under the same terms as cis people. Secondary education alone rarely breaks that barrier. At the policy level, the *cupo laboral trans* has been implemented in a very limited way. In this landscape, "Mocha" first guides and funds those who want to pursue tertiary education, which requires active articulation with universities. As emerges in the interview with the person responsible for this area, "Mocha" is unusually safe in terms of care and protection and leaving that environment to enter a university that lacks a similar approach often requires continuous accompaniment. Alongside this, "Mocha"

also supports formal labor insertion for graduates through a dedicated office where four people work (*empleo trans).* They reported that «El año pasado hubieron 90 inserciones laborales» (interview 08), despite the fact that around 900 trans* people are currently seeking employment through these services. Their work includes accompanying «a las empresas que quieren emplear personas trans, haciendo sensibilización para crear un ambiente laboral adecuado y seguro. Ayudamos en la selección de lxs candidatxs. Hacemos formaciones y capacitaciones en forma de servicios en ventas para empresas para sensibilizar los equipos de trabajo y también armamos cursos gratuitos cuatrimestrales para que las empresas tengan más herramientas» (interview 08). The rationale is tied to stigma and to the narrow range of jobs socially deemed "appropriate" for trans* people. In their words, «hay una labor de romper el estigma que las personas trans puedan solamente trabajar con el sexo, en la peluquería o en lo artístico. Entonces un objetivo es romper con esto y ampliar las opciones de salida laboral, lo que posibilita que las personas travestis puedan autodeterminarse» (interview 08).

Image 3.7 - Students selling their self-produced art crafts at Mocha Fest. Source: Mocha Celis.

This is also where the limits of public responsibility become stark. The same interview stresses that «considerando el crecimiento en la cantidad de personas que acuden a estos servicios, la mocha acaba ocupándose de tareas y erogación de servicios que deberían ser

responsabilidad del Estado y no de una ONG» (interview 08). In practice, this often pushes the school to work mainly with private companies. Pathways into public employment remain unstable and difficult, with fewer viable mechanisms and weaker enforcement. Work on labor insertion also involves another delicate task: accompanying TTNB people themselves through a transition that is not only professional but existential. As we have already noted, low self-esteem and the deep internalization of exclusion can undermine the possibility of imagining oneself in a formal job. There are also practical difficulties in routine regulation, especially for those who have long worked at night and struggle with the demands of daytime schedules. Psychological accompaniment becomes relevant here, because entering a 'common' work environment can be difficult at first for someone who has lived at the margins for years. In other words, employment is not a simple outcome of "training", but becomes a process that requires time, support and protection.

Image 3.8 - Digital alphabetization workshop. Source: Mocha Celis.

And the integral approach does not stop there. The school also counts on mental health professionals and medical staff for the management of problematic consumption, among other issues. It also offers a wide range of workshops designed to provide TTNB people with practical tools for navigating formal work. These include digital skills, economic

management, language courses (this year English and Portuguese), digital marketing, microenterprise workshops and cooking courses to support food-based entrepreneurship. There were also makeup workshops this year, which, for the *travesti** collective, can function as embodied tools for everyday "technologies of resistance". In addition, the school has a legal team that accompanies processes such as name and registry changes, migration regularization and related procedures. It is difficult for this thesis to fully convey how far "Mocha" reformulates education by drawing from popular education and extending it into a form of 360-degree accompaniment. At the same time, "Mocha Celis" is not a governmental institution. It is a B*achillerato Popular* and a civil association. Its survival, and its capacity to accompany TTNB people, then, depends on donations of money and supplies and on the presence of volunteers. And yet, in many cases this is still not enough. Many of those who work at "Mocha" do not receive a salary, and they are volunteers themselves. This matters because many of them also belong to the TTNB community, which does not grant structural privileges that would make volunteering a sustainable primary occupation. Several interviewees underlined that for them «Mocha es militancia, más en el sentido de activismo, no que no sea partidario, ¡pero el trabajo acá es militancia!» (interview 09, hall monitor). Our own observations made the weight of this commitment visible. The effort invested in care for the community tends to exceed the school's walls and it often remains present 24/7 in the lives of workers. There is also a strong emotional involvement, precisely because many workers share the pain they are responding to. As one person puts it, «trabajar en la Mocha no solamente es trabajo, sino que es también activismo: significa estar expuestx emocionalmente a situaciones muy tristes y es un trabajo muy complejo» (intervies 08,). They continue: «Hay gestión de personas en situación de calle, otras que han sido échadas de casa y otras asesinadas. Eso lleva a que sea un trabajo sumamente complejo y emotivamente cansante. El gestionar situaciones tan difíciles, es un desafío y a veces terminamos normalizándolo.» (interview 08,) These testimonies situate "Mocha" within a form of radical activism against LGBTQIANB+ oppression that is enacted through daily work, not only through public discourse.

Image 3.9 – English language workshop. Source: Mocha Celis.

Looking at everyday roles makes this even more concrete. Consider the hall monitor (*preceptor*). In formal schools, we were told that they «nomás se ocupa de la asistencia de lxs estudiantes» (interview 09). In "Mocha", the role becomes demanding and expands into tasks that should not, in principle, fall on one person. The hall monitor takes charge «de la documentación de lxs estudiantes, del legajo estudiantil, ayudar lxs docentes para las clases, apoyo estudiantil, nexo entre estudiantes y docentes, revisar los correos. también actuar si hay peleas o tensiones y hacer los boletos estudiantiles.» (interview 09) What is visible here is the extent to which the school is forced to fill gaps left elsewhere, while also building an internal apparatus capable of keeping a large and heterogeneous community together. Another striking feature is "Mocha's" explicit political positioning in the empowerment of its students. One recurring element, in observation and in interviews, is that many people describe themselves as activists or militants, and that activism enters classrooms and curricula. It moved us to see entire classes leave the building during school hours to join marches demanding rights, in a context of a sharp rightward political turn in Argentina that participants often narrated in openly antifascist terms. "Mocha", in this sense, does not only provide educational completion. It aims to politicize students and to help them become active political subjects within broader struggles. The project encourages participation, especially around activism tied to sex-

gender diversity demands, including among students who did not previously have knowledge of or interest in these issues before arriving at the *Bachillerato*.

Image 3.10 - Students and teachers at a protest. Source: Mochas' Instagram page.

This chapter has shown "Mocha Celis" as a space of radical rupture and, at the same time, as a project that does not fully reject "school form". In several respects it remains closer to traditional schooling than the most assembly-based imaginaries of popular education described in Chapter I. That hybridity is not a contradiction to be solved. It is part of how "Mocha" has become sustainable on a scale. The administrative structure is extensive and relatively institutional. Coordination is visible. Some lines of decision making are vertical. These features distinguish "Mocha" from other *Bachilleratos Populares* and they also help explain how it can run a broad set of programs beyond secondary education.

This institutional consolidation has also been linked to negotiation with the State. It does not cancel "Mocha's" positioning within popular education, yet it shapes what becomes possible. Here the comparison with Silvia's analysis of TTNB *Bachilleratos* outside Buenos Aires becomes useful. Many of those experiences relate to the State in less institutionalized ways and, precisely because of that, may be able to adopt more openly oppositional stances. "Mocha", by contrast, likely would not be what it is today without

having negotiated recognition, resources and space. The point is not to rank models, but to trace consequences. Different relationships with the State produce different capacities and different vulnerabilities.

The chapter has also complicated a simple opposition between horizontality and hierarchy. In “Mocha”, the teacher-student relationship can be intimate and dialogic, and yet some moments demand clearer roles and responsibilities. One interviewee captured this tension by noting: «Hay quien pensa que la educación popular es asamblearia, pero en la Mocha las aulas son más parecidas a las comunes ya que adoptaron algo de la educación formal» (interview 09). Decision making shows a similar pattern. The school continues to describe itself as collective, while also moving toward a more professionalized structure of coordination. As one account puts it, «la Mocha es un espacio que se construye comunitariamente y ahora se está trabajando en mejorar los canales de comunicación y en general se está intentando profesionalizar la estructura para que haya coordinadorxs, cada unx con su equipo de trabajo.» (interview 08). Another interview frames the organizational architecture in these terms: «la Mocha tiene una comisión directiva y la ejecución se aborda a través de coordinaciones entre los diferentes sectores de la mocha» (interview 02). In this logic, priorities follow population needs and the alliances built to meet them: «las decisiones se toman en función de las necesidades de la población y las alianzas que se crean.» (interview 02)

Finally, the chapter also points to an open horizon and to emerging tensions. Looking forward, one aim is to strengthen university pathways: «un objetivo es crear convenios con las universidades para que puedan poder acceder a ellas» (interview 08). Another is internal and urgent: care for those who provide care, framed through the question «quien cuida a las que cuidan? En la Mocha se está trabajando en intentar cuidar lxs trabajadorxs.» (interview 08) At the same time, interviews indicate growing friction with institutional authorities: «ahora hay tensión con el ministerio, porque hasta ahora no pedía demonstraciones de que se enseña y ahora quizás sí y se pueden presentar disputas mientras tengamos que defender nuestra forma de enseñar» (interview 04). These tensions resonate with the broader political climate described by participants and they may reshape the room for manoeuvre that popular educational projects have. Beyond the national frame, the chapter also registers a future-oriented effort to build regional articulations: «en el próximo EFETT se plantean fortalecer los espacios educativos en Latinoamérica y

acompañarlos» (interview 02). In that sense, “Mocha” appears both as a situated response to local abandonment and as a node within wider networks of TTNB popular education that are still being built.

Conclusions

This thesis began with a demanding question. What kinds of alternative educational pathways in Argentina can actually work for marginalized communities, specifically *travesti*, trans and non-binary people (TTNB), when the dominant school system is itself one of the infrastructures that excludes and harms them. Put differently, can an educational framework be built that does not reproduce the violence, abandonment and conditional recognition that formal schooling has historically distributed. Across the three chapters, we have answered this question by arguing that TTNB movement-built schooling does work, operating as a political and material infrastructure of survival and resistance. It works when it is grounded in collective governance, in situated knowledge, in recognition that is not conditional on conformity and in forms of accompaniment that exceed the classroom.

Chapter I established that popular education cannot be reduced to a method or a stable model. It is a contested political field shaped by struggle and its core intuition is that education is never neutral. It is always implicated in how power selects knowledge, disciplines bodies and distributes legitimacy. From Freire onward, popular education names a refusal of "banking" schooling. It names a practice of dialogue that reorders who can speak, what counts as knowledge and what education is for. This chapter also showed why *Bachilleratos Populares* matter for our overall argument. In fact, they are not simply alternative schools. They are movement-built institutions that prefigure different social relations in the present. They territorialize education and tie learning to collective needs, while also revealing a permanent tension that runs throughout the thesis. The tension is between autonomy and recognition. It is between institutionalization and the desire not to be absorbed by the very logic these projects contest.

Chapter II shifted the focus from popular pedagogy in general to the specific regime that structures TTNB educational exclusion. Cis-binary governance does not appear only through explicit discrimination, but it operates through mundane institutional devices. It is reproduced in documentation systems, registers, enrollment forms, classroom interactions and everyday policing of appearance and recognizability. This chapter insisted that the question of schooling cannot be detached from the conditions of life. For TTNB people in Argentina, educational trajectories are shaped by labor exclusion, precarious housing, health inequities, early expulsions from family networks and

exposure to violence. Under these conditions, “access” to school is never just a matter of entering a classroom. It is a matter of whether the material infrastructures that make continuity possible exist at all. This is why TTNB popular education becomes legible as a practice of freedom and as a practice of survival at the same time. It is freedom because it reworks knowledge, voice and recognition. It is survival because it builds concrete support against abandonment.

Chapter III grounded these arguments in the case study of *Bachillerato Popular* “Mocha Celis”. It showed “Mocha Celis” as a pedagogical project, a civil association and a political response rooted in *travesti* and trans* organizing. “Mocha” emerges within a landscape where legal recognition, such as the Gender Identity Law, coexists with persistent institutional violence. In that gap, “Mocha” is not only an educational service. Rather, it is a collective strategy that creates a space where being a student is not made contingent on being readable within cis norms. It builds pedagogical relations in which gender dissidence is not treated as a disruption, but as part of the social fabric of the school. It also performs what many interviewees framed as a reorientation of life possibilities.

A central finding of Chapter III is that “Mocha’s” political strength is inseparable from its approach of integral accompaniment. In fact, education is treated as something that cannot be separated from food, documentation support, health and mental health referrals, social mediation, community networks and everyday care. Programs like *Teje Solidario* make this visible. So do labor insertion efforts, workshops and the wide ecology of support that surrounds the *Bachillerato*. In “Mocha”, pedagogy is not confined to curriculum: it is the creation of a space where continuity becomes possible under conditions that structurally produce discontinuity.

At the same time, the “Mocha” case also complicated a romantic image of popular education as purely assembly-based, purely horizontal and purely outside formal schooling. Rather, we could say that “Mocha” is hybrid. It has an extensive administrative structure and some lines of decision-making are more vertical than the imaginaries that dominate parts of the popular education literature. Nonetheless, this hybridity is not a failure of popular education, but it is part of how “Mocha” became durable and capable of operating at this scale. It also clarifies a broader point that the thesis keeps returning to. Every counter-educational project must negotiate with institutions, resources,

recognition regimes and material constraints. Those negotiations are not external to politics, since they shape what becomes possible. They produce capacities, and they also produce vulnerabilities. In “Mocha”, this is visible in the relationship with the State, in processes of recognition, in the need to secure resources and in emerging tensions with ministerial authorities over curriculum control and proof of what is taught.

Taken together, the thesis supports the double hypothesis stated at the beginning. First, TTNB movement-built schooling can be liberatory for TTNB people because it creates conditions of recognizability, safety and collective struggle that formal schools often deny. It politicizes knowledge by grounding it in lived experience. It reworks the teacher-student relation by challenging the monopoly of the teacher over meaning. It produces spaces where learning does not require the erasure of self. Second, these projects matter beyond TTNB communities because they expose the limits of cis-binary schooling as a supposedly neutral institution. They show that what is often called “neutral education” is already a gender regime. It is also already a classed and racialized distribution of whose lives are treated as compatible with the school. TTNB popular education therefore functions as a critique of the educational system as a whole. Moreover, it functions as a proposal: if dismantling binary logics expands who can appear, speak, learn and be recognized, then TTNB counter-education is a horizon for reimagining education as a collective right.

This is also where the thesis speaks back to the field of human rights. A key lesson from the Argentine case is that rights cannot be evaluated only at the level of legal recognition. Formal rights exist, yet implementation remains uneven. Institutions can recognize identities while continuing to organize daily life through exclusion. In that context, rights are also produced from below. They are produced through movement infrastructures that turn abandonment into collective support. They are produced through the territorial and relational work of organizations that build the conditions under which a right becomes enjoyable.

This thesis also makes a methodological argument. If the object of study is a set of political pedagogies that contest what counts as knowledge, then research practice must be consistent with that contestation. This is why we treated interviews as conversations rather than extraction. This is why we make positionality visible rather than hiding behind neutrality. This is also why we integrated visual and materials produced within “Mocha

Celis". In fact, these are part of how the school narrates itself, stores memory, builds political imagination and circulates situated knowledge.

Yet, here are also some limitations. Fieldwork was concentrated in a specific time window and was shaped by our position as visitors and interns. Some interview recordings were lost, which required relying on written notes and reconstruction. Finally, the thesis is also centered on one key case study in this version, even if it is in dialogue with the broader national landscape discussed through Silvia's (2026)0 companion thesis.

Future research

Several research paths emerge directly from the findings of this thesis. One priority is comparative work. Comparative, because TTNB popular educational experiences outside Buenos Aires face different institutional ecologies, different conservative pressures and different resource landscapes.

A second path concerns governance and sustainability. Future research could map how different funding arrangements, recognition routes and relationships with ministries shape both autonomy and vulnerability. It could also analyze what happens when political climates shift. It could examine how projects defend their pedagogies when faced with curricular standardization, auditing, or demands for proof that risk reintroducing disciplinary control.

Finally, the thesis already registered tensions around professionalization, coordination and the limits of horizontality. Future research could ask how collectives manage conflict, burnout, care for workers and the reproduction of leadership. It could also examine how intergenerational dynamics, new cohorts of students and changing movement priorities reshape what the school is.

Closing remarks

This thesis sets out to understand whether an educational framework can be built that does not reproduce institutional violence and abandonment for TTNB people. The answer that emerges is yes, but only if we stop thinking of education as a bounded institution. TTNB popular education works when it becomes infrastructure. It is built through governance, care and pedagogy. It produces dignity in the present, not as a promise deferred to a future inclusion that may never arrive. It also forces a larger question onto the educational

system. If a school must be remade to become livable for those most expelled, then schooling as such must be questioned. The lesson of “Mocha Celis” and of TTNB *Bachilleratos* is not only that another school is possible. It is that education, if it is to be a right, must be reorganized around the conditions that make lives of dignity..

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