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Original

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**Conversation series | Pursuing Tenant International:
Learning from struggles for home in Abya-Yala | Part III
Edited by Ana Vilenica**

Norita is the first of many self-managed community neighbourhoods to come: A conversation with organizers and residents of Barrio Norita Cortiñas in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area (Part I)

Organizers and residents

Barrio Comunitario Norita Cortiñas in Buenos Aires metropolitan area

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Abstract

These two conversations with organizers and residents of Barrio Comunitario Norita Cortiñas in Buenos Aires reflect the ongoing struggle for housing rights in Argentina. The discussions detail the development of the self-managed community, which emerged from land occupations in Guernica during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants highlight the collective efforts to secure land through self-organization and assembly-based decision-making, ultimately purchasing land to establish a neighbourhood for 62 families. The conversations explore the obstacles faced, including government repression, real estate speculation, and economic challenges, while also emphasizing the critical role of feminist leadership and multisectoral collaboration in their fight for land and housing rights. Additionally, the residents connect their local struggle to broader national and international movements for land reclamation and workers' rights. This underscores the urgency of solidarity and collective action in confronting neoliberal policies and housing precarity.

Keywords

Housing, occupation, evictions, Argentina, Latin America

Barrio Comunitario Norita Cortiñas is a self-managed community in Guernica, south of Greater Buenos Aires, that emerged from land occupations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The residents organized through assemblies, purchasing land to establish their neighborhood while facing challenges such as government repression and real estate speculation. **Ana Vilenica** is a feminist, no border and urban activist and organizer from Serbia currently living in Italy. She is a member of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab, the Radical Housing Journal Editorial collective and the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC research). **Moisés Quiroz** is a historian, urban planner, specialist in social development and PhD candidate on Urban and environmental studies at El Colegio de México. He is an activist for social and cooperative housing in Mexico City. **Contact:** ana.vilenica@polito.it

In the popular camp, we say that when we don't know where to go, when we are almost lost, look at where Norita stands because she has coherence.

Compañerxs from Norita

Introduction

In January 2024, we met people organizing at Barrio Comunitario Norita Cortiñas for the first time during the official inauguration of the neighbourhood. We helped prepare and build a memory tree with images of the struggle of the people from Norita. The special guest of the day was Norita Cortiñas, a well-known fighter and mother from the Plaza de Mayo whose name the neighbourhood carries. On this special occasion, people talked about how important this project is for them and how it came to be. There were laughs and tears, and songs were sung together.

Norita Cortiñas passed away on May 30th 2024. Her activism was sparked by the 1977 disappearance of her son, Gustavo Cortiñas, a member of the Montoneros organization, during Argentina's military dictatorship. From that moment, Norita dedicated her life to seeking justice for the 30,000 victims of forced disappearances and tirelessly advocated for human rights, both in Argentina and internationally. As an academic, she explored the connections between the dictatorship, Argentina's foreign debt, and its economic crises while also supporting feminist causes like the movement Ni Una Menos.

A few weeks later, we gathered with *compañerxs* in Norita Cortiñas' neighbourhood for the second time to assist in clearing the terrain and engage in discussions regarding their project. Before what we offer here, we reflected on the neighbourhood's welcoming signpost crafted by *compañerxs* from the cooperative in La Plata, known for their mural work. "Land for dwelling and cultivation epitomizes our ethos," they proclaimed. Our conversations

Figure 1

Neighborhood sign.
Image: Ana Vilenica



extended to a call for a street mobilization scheduled for January 24, 2024, in front of Congress—a demonstration against the DNU, omnibus law, and the challenges posed by the multifaceted nature of the legislation. They deliberated on establishing working groups to scrutinize the law through environmental, labour, and gender lenses. Particularly concerning was an article proposing to delegate legislative authority to the president and diminish the role of Congress. Their diagnosis was: “The country is in a state of emergency.”

Moisés: We would like to start by asking you to introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your organization and how you came together in Guernica and now in Norita.

Compañerx(s): Ten years ago, we occupied a piece of land in Guernica because we were in the fight against mosquito fumigation. Our struggle for land more or less started at this time. It was not with the intention to produce housing. Soon, we learned that the need for housing was also important. We supported people in the Guernica occupation, and we stayed there. We became part of the Assembly for Land and Housing. And we are here now.

This is Norita. El Norita is a community neighbourhood made up of various organizations; it is a multi-sectoral project. At this place, land could be bought at a reasonably cheap rate compared to the capitalist real estate market. We organized ourselves to buy the land so that each person who participated in the struggle for land could have access to a piece of land and housing.

Compañerx(s): Hello, I’m from the Frente de Organizaciones de Lucha (FOL). We in the organization have been fighting for access to land and housing for some time. In some cases, we have occupied some spaces. My first one was Gernika. Many of you are aware of what happened. We accompanied this struggle, and it turned out there was no possibility of accessing the land. We were thinking about the need for the struggle to be more multi-sectoral so different families could have a little piece of land.

Ana: When and how did the struggle start?

Compañerx(s): The struggle started during the pandemic in 2020. Many were made redundant, without work or the possibility of going out on the street to do their work. Then, rents became a problem. People were forced to occupy the land; 100 hectares were occupied in Guernica. Families organized themselves to gain access to this land, obviously with obstacles from the government. This struggle has been going on for more than three years.

Starting from there, we begin to think about more accessible and a more collective purchase, so to speak. We wanted to provide the opportunity for more working-class people who can't afford to buy, because of real estate agencies, to be able to build their homes. That's why we started thinking about organizing an assembly where people could come together and systematize experiences from the struggle in Guernica and knowledge about different possibilities for land purchase.

Figure 2

Norita Cortiñas with
people of the
neighbourhood.
Image: Ana Vilenica



It was quite a long process. It was imagined as a self-managed process, and it isn't easy to do self-management collectively. The purchase of land was one of several projects that were presented to the government. The government obviously rejected us. When these doors closed, our only option was to set up a common fund and buy these two hectares of land. That is our Cortiñas community neighbourhood today. It is self-managed and collective, too, and there are 62 families with a plot of land.

Moisés: Guernica precedes Norita. Who was organizing there?

Compañerx(s): Hi, I'm a teacher, an educator, and an organizer in the neighbourhood. As *compañera* was saying, the people, the workers, the occupied workers in Argentina, cannot have access to land and housing. Wages are below the price of real estate and land. In fact, Guernica was a place where, a decade ago, many workers had access to their first piece of land to build a house.

But land became less accessible. In fact, the current prices of the real estate market mean that we can't even access the furthest outskirts of the capital, not even the second and third cordons. The workers want to be close to the capital because it is the place where there are more services and more work. We joined the Norita neighbourhood because we will not make it individually as teachers. There also needs to be a united organization of teachers.

Compañerx(s): Hola. I'm also a teacher. I'm *compañera's* partner. I would like to add something. Although there is no organization behind us, we are teachers who have built organizational ties with the different organizations participating in Norita. Also, those who participated in previous struggles, including teachers' struggles, have been building organizational ties with us. This relationship gives us the confidence to make this neighbourhood. We always said that everyone who comes here should have a certain level of agreement on what we want to build collectively.

The growth of country houses and municipalities, enhanced by laws, has benefited the purchase of land for private neighbourhoods or places that are inaccessible to the working class. They are building a motorway designed for those who live in country houses to go faster to the capital, causing flooding in the neighbourhoods. In reality, the city is increasingly intended for wealthy people who want to leave the capital to relax, and our living conditions are getting poorer and poorer. It is also making life more expensive in every sense for those of us who can't afford land. And on top of that, we have to rent in what used to be our own neighbourhoods. That is to say, we have been renting since we knew each other, and my family lost their house in the 1990s through credits. Since I was four or five years old, we have been renting as a family in different places, rotating around the conurbation to survive.

Compañerx(s): I am from the FOL. We have different experiences of land occupations that we started in 2000. There were more or less two periods. The first was the reoccupation of the Cultural Space; after that, more reoccupations followed. In Almirante Brown, on the other side of the district, we took the land of four blocks, and today we have another place with the land. We have already experienced the occupation of the 14 de Febrero neighbourhood. In 2009, we took over the land of Santa Manzana, where 23 very large facilities are inhabited today. About 600 families inhabit the space of abandoned landfills. Today we also have a cultural centre.

The biggest occupation took place during the pandemic, as *compañera* said. The occupation was repressed in a very savage way. We have constantly fought for the land, not only for the land but to live on the land and to produce on behalf of the land. We have been on the move. Most of the people here have experienced land occupation. This is a tool of the reserved working class. When we manage to organize ourselves, we end up demonstrating life. But it is not simple. On Saturday the 23rd, we had Norita here. She saw the land and learned why we chose her name for our neighbourhood. She represents good for the people of Norita.

Ana: Can you tell us more about 23 December, how was the celebration?

Compañerx(s): Hola. I'm from the FOL. I come from the El Galpón Cultural neighbourhood that was just mentioned, which was the first occupied neighbourhood. There, we have a garden project, the soup kitchens. Well, then, I was involved in the vegetable garden, and I also had a housing need. After the significant occupation of Guernica, comrades told me I should join Norita Cortiñas' assembly. And from the first assembly I was in.

Compañerx(s): Hi. I am also from the FOL. It's going to be 15 years since we have been living in the 14 de Febrero neighbourhood, which has been a land reclamation project since 2009. The FOL currently has two cultural centers with canteens and community gardens there. From my personal experience, well, renting and all that and being able to participate in land recuperations and having our own land, being able to build your own

Figure 3

Norita Cortiñas at the opening.
Image: Ana Vilenica



house, have your own gardens, and for your *compas* to be able to do the same. It feels good, and here in the Norita neighbourhood, many people can also enjoy and have their own land.

Moisés: What are the obstacles, and what kind of labour is involved in this cooperative? We would also like to ask you a little about how a cooperative is set up. This is a housing cooperative, right? What difficulties exist, what achievements have they had, and what is the legal path you followed?

Compañerx(s): On Saturday, it was a culmination of something we had been working on for a long time. We started in March 2021 with an assembly so that at some point, if there were land to take over somewhere, some purchase, some project, we would have people organized. In Guernica, the *compañeros* and *compañeras* were left in fear because the repression was very strong and very savage, so many were left in fear. What we did was to start organizing ourselves in that assembly. Once a month, we had meetings where we had two activities to do: one was the assembly, and the other was an activity to make ourselves visible. We were always accompanying *compañeras* who were in eviction situations; we were always doing assemblies on land and housing, inviting tenants, people who had experience with that. So once a month, at the Obelisk (square), we had an assembly. That was our activity every month. We didn't have the land, but we already had everything organized for when we did have the land. That was more or less the beginning. At that time, we used to take projects to the National Ministry of Habitat in the province, march at the Obelisk, and go around there with our comrades. Our idea was always to aim for the project to be a worker's neighbourhood, a communal neighbourhood.

Access to land is one thing, but it is also about changing our way of living. This is a community neighbourhood; it's another way. It differs from the neighbourhoods outside, where everyone has their own house and does their own thing. No, this is not like that. We were creating criteria and discussing them in the assemblies. Working commissions were set up. There is a coordination group, we are the ones who have been there from the beginning. Then, we had a coordination group where we prepared our actions. For example, we contacted the MOP (Movimiento Obrero Peronista) and the Movimiento Territorial Liberación (MTL) groups, working on access to housing and land.

The coordination assembly was important because the rest of the general group was not as active and also because they were working within their own organizations and had jobs. Those of us who could get more involved took care of that. In 2022, we had the opportunity to present a project called *The Acciones para el Repoblamiento Comunitario de la Argentina* (ARCA) for land in Almirante Brown, which is very close to where we are. It was a project for around 200 families. We did everything within the law, which we were not required to do; everything went well until the problem became a political problem. In Almirante Brown, they told us there was a decree, not an ordinance, which did not allow this type of neighbourhood we were presenting.

Although the State and the Secretaría de Integración Socio Urbana (SISU), which was in charge of these projects, had given us the OK to continue when we went to negotiate with the people from the municipality, they told us that there was this ordinance. Our analysis was that they didn't want a *piquetero* worker's neighbourhood there. We were two signatures away from it coming through, but we couldn't do it.

Then, we went to look for a piece of land that was free in Almirante Brown to propose it to the municipality. In fact, the municipality had given us a list of supposed lands that we could go to. These plots were supposedly authorized to build our neighbourhood. In that search, we realized that the municipality controlled all the unoccupied land. Everything

Figure 4

Group photo.
Image: Ana Vilenica



was about the real estate business behind it, which we needed to know. We had made a deposit of \$1,000, and everything was ready. We had the SISU requirements, and we understood that the municipality would guarantee the purchase of that land. And then they ended up telling us: “No”.

It was then that we realized that obtaining land from the state in Almirante Brown was impossible. The SISU and the ARCA didn't give the *guita* (money). When we realized this was impossible and couldn't do it in Almirante Brown, we went a little further and arrived in Guernica.

Compañerx(s): ARCA is a project. Now, I don't remember well, but it was financed by SISU, which is the State Secretariat for Socio-Urban Integration, involved in all these land issues. When we had that flooding in Almirante Brown, it made them very upset. That was in the first days of December. It was very sad; we were there with nothing and had to contain it. I don't know when we had our first assembly again, but a lot of people left. It was a shock. You're all well-organized, and all of a sudden, nothing.

Compañerx(s): We are going a bit back and forth because we need to get the details straight.

Compañerx(s): Once again, we were defeated. The comrades said, “No, I cannot do it anymore; I'm getting out.” It won't be possible because they are always lying to us.

There are examples of other neighbourhoods that are more or less similar to ours, with less organization and more disorganization. There are 100 families in Moreno, in the northwest, deep in the Greater Buenos Aires. There, they were able to reach an agreement with the state regarding the ARCA project. However, with no assemblies or the creation of a coordination that could predict possible conflicts, there would be no organizations, which meant that many things have been stolen today. I was with Beatriz Pedro yesterday, and we looked at issues in Moreno. There is constant conflict, and that is due to the lack of organization. We were able to solve these problems because we were able to find a space, a political space so that every Sunday, the *compas* could meet to discuss the project. The experience of getting to know the neighbours is important to us. We now know a little bit of everyone's history; we know about the needs they have.

And now we have another problem. We can foresee many things, but often, we plan and say, “Where are we going to get the money?” This is causing us a lot of problems, mainly because the economic crisis means that every *compañerx* has to build its own house with its resources, and in reality, we are all living almost to the day.

Compañerx(s): Those who had a little money already put it into buying land. However, it is very difficult to build during an economic crisis. We are looking into how we can save ourselves collectively. We are trying to hold lotteries to be able to pay for community things. When the Christmas bonus comes, for example, we put money together to be able to make the electrical and water supply installations. Now, a group of *compañeras* is participating in forming the cooperative to see if we can think about an additional resource. But the reality is that it will be difficult in the Argentinean context today with the cuts.

Figure 5

Norita Cortiñas with people of the neighbourhood. Image: Ana Vilenica



One of the options is to form a housing cooperative. But the process was the other way around. It's not that we set up the housing cooperative; from that, the land was bought, and from that, the assembly was generated. In reality, the first thing was the need for the neighbours to get together and organize themselves in the processes of struggle. Once we got to the last instance, we said, "Well, let's put the money together and buy with a political decision by the participating organizations plus some *compañerx* who were joining in. From there, we are only now seeing the need to become a cooperative. It's not that we know the need, but that we see that we have an opportunity. We set up the cooperative to see what we can get out of it. It is not that the cooperative contains us; it is at the very end of the neighbourhood. And the neighbourhood is the neighbourhood assembly and self-organization; in other words, the cooperative will be more of a legal tool to continue with the project. It might also give relief to the *compañerx*.

If we are going to have a cooperative, we will ask for a sanitary block, kitchens, and bathrooms for everyone, for all the plots, for every family. That makes it a lot easier. As *compañera* said, they are thinking about building a smaller house because it is very difficult financially nowadays.

Compañerx(s): The situation continuously played against us. We bought this land and signed the papers that gave us the deed with internal logistics. When we signed, we already knew that we could enter the next day on our land. We were afraid that the mayor herself might issue a complaint about the takeover of the land in the name of a civil association. The documents are not in the name of individual people. We decided that a group of *compas* would sign. We signed on a stormy Friday night, and that meant that the police

came later. We entered at 7 in the evening on a rainy day with a wagon, with mattresses, with sheet metal, to take the land and built sheds.

We took the political decision to say that first we will settle on the land, we will secure the families that came the first, and then we will go public when we are more secure. We needed a legal signature saying that we had done it right. For the people who have to put the hook in, the signature costs a lot of money. We are talking about 1 million pesos one or two years ago. Today, it is even more expensive. We contribute \$500 every month, we generate a raffle, or we try to do something to raise money to be able to do things that are for everyone, like water, electricity, and fencing. We also try to help families who don't have a penny. So we also accompany the processes of the organizations for social programs or by encouraging the families themselves to make a saving pot or a raffle, and we contribute products for that raffle. We also try to help the families so that they can get the land. Some people can't rent anymore, and they have to move here. We want this to turn into something other than a settlement-type neighbourhood where they come and put up four sheets of metal and an awning. That's why we are also looking for other ways to plan together with architects.

What possibilities are there in construction if you can't build in concrete? We could build it in wood, making the cost a bit less. We want every *compa* to be able to live in a safe space. We are not the lazy *piqueteros* that come and take over. We want to be seen as hardworking people. That gives legitimacy to the neighbourhood. If something happens here, we want the neighbours themselves to say we know these people, and they are right to be here.

After the repression in Guernica, the important thing was to stay organized based on the concrete need for access to housing in the conurbation. This struggle has particular forms in other places in our country; there are different struggles. This means that disputes with real estate businesses are handled hand in hand or coordinated by the municipal government. The same people who have the real estate business are those people in the Municipal Deliberative Council. That took us to the Land and Housing Assembly. The conurbation has particular characteristics. When we think about how we can access housing through struggle also with a social guarantee, we have to count on possible evictions. Unfortunately, in our society, the idea of private property is defended from *piqueteros*. To take land is considered as something bad. The issue in Norita was how to go ahead with the government. Everything in these two hectares seems small to me; everything has been done with the help of all the 72 people who are part of the Assembly: dividing the plots, building the landmarks, and using very precarious tools. With the real estate agent, you buy a piece of land or a house or whatever, put the money in, and that's it. Then you have a few more installments, and you are done. It only costs three times as much. The government doesn't want us to organize. That is why they always look for ways to divide us.

What happened with the 100 hectares in Guernica? They were bought during the dictatorship, and then an alleged owner appeared. It was not real. They were never there before, nor did the papers exist. As always, there were a lot of lies. Also, the media, in all

Figure 6

Building a memory tree.
Image: Ana Vilenica



its forms, always tried to make *Piqueteros* the bad guy. What we are demanding is a right. Decent housing is the same as health security, education, and work.

The disastrous housing schemes offered by the government are inaccessible to the workers. For *compas*, who are teachers, it is impossible to access a public housing program, which is supposed to be accessible for workers. And then it is like playing the deck: you pay when you can, and then after years, you can't pay anymore, you pay half, and then the state confiscates the house and sells it. That's another story.

You trust the government; they offer something, and then things that are never mentioned happen. You end up paying three times more. That's why it is important to always look for collective solutions. To establish ourselves and take ownership of our land beyond one neighbourhood is to accompany other struggles for land, too. We need to organize on a bigger scale. This is the way we can take over.

It is important to have an objective that is bigger than the issues of families that live here. We need to understand how to replicate it further. We need to learn from all the experiences and mistakes we have made to see how not to make them again and to continue replicating the same seeds. We were saying that Norita is the first experience, and from here, we are going to replicate it; we are going to continue and take this experience to other places. Norita is the first of many self-managed community neighbourhoods to come.

Moisés: You came from another neighbourhood. We want to ask you how your experience was different.

Compañerx(s): I live in a neighbourhood taken over 15 years ago in the 14th district. My family and I were already participating in the FOL, and a few of our comrades were, too. They told us the land was being taken over in Almirante Brown, specifically Longchamps. It's a locality there. We came with comrades and families; we were there from the first day. The land recuperation usually involves tents on the ground. We spent about three or

four months on the ground with tents. And then they came to evict us. They tried several times to evict us. After several months on the ground, we were able to enter the lots. And we started to build houses. The Cultural Centre, Por la Igualdad, 14 de Febrero, was built. After a few years, another cultural center was built called Sin Fronteras, Las Lilas, which is between 14 and Las Lilas. There are about 600 families with land. This is a land recuperation recognized by the state. This neighbourhood became part of a Villa, which means that it is a poor neighbourhood that lacks resources. By being recognized by the state, they were able to ask for a subsidy and make construction work in the house.

Compañerx(s): The State allocates money for improvements. Now, they are also making squares.

Moisés: Is this about the National Registry of Popular Neighborhoods?

Compañerx(s): Yes

(Ana takes a sketch of the neighbourhood and asks about the project.)

Compañerx(s): In Norita, for instance, the project was done in free workshops for the neighbourhood. According to the municipal regulations on which we have to act, we need to have a project. The quality of the photocopy is not the best, but I think it's pretty understandable. This would be the design of the neighbourhood. We would be more or less here. We have to respect the municipal regulations.

Ana: Could you tell us a bit about how the free workshop works?

Compañerx(s): The Taller Libre de Proyecto Social (TLPS) is part of it. They also took part in the takeover of Guernica, and from that moment on, they were in contact with the Land Assembly. A small group proposed that we start to think about what house we wanted. This was the proposal of the architect's workshop. It was like, well, how do we want the house? What are the possibilities? What can we do in our dreams, but also reality? They designed it, and from that, we could see what we can achieve in reality, in construction, with all the complexities. When we start building our houses, it will be in stages; it will be something that is okay. Workshops were a way of optimizing the few resources we have. For all of us who participated in this workshop, the exercise of dreaming about a house was a lot. It is because the system is dehumanizing us so much that it even prevents us from dreaming about a house.

Moisés: Does anyone want to add anything to this?

Compañerx(s): The group of architects was from the TLP. It was useful so that the *compas* don't just come and put up four pieces of wood and a tarp and that's the house. Some compas are in different situations, some who have already paid for the land, others who are paying, and also those who are having a hard time. There are three families that build the bases of houses, and others who cannot do it yet. This is where the assembly is looking at who has the most needs. Then we see how we can contribute, in the form of a contribution, not on the side that we are giving things to each other; we all need to contribute to each other. That's why it's communal.

Compañerx(s): Can I add something about the free workshop? They are not only thinking about individual situations but also about the community spaces. For example, we are now in the process of thinking about the square. In the square, there will be a cultural center, the Casa de la Niñez y la Juventud, one of the participating organizations. Now we are also planning with the free workshop, the construction of bathrooms, which is what the *compas* were talking about so that we can have them for the Cultural Centre but also so that we can use them while our homes are built.

Ana: How did you choose the name for the neighbourhood? And what does being a feminist neighbourhood mean for you?

Compañerx(s): We are bringing in some of what happened at the Guernica land takeover. In Guernica, many women were organizing also in relation to gender-based violence. Those are *piquetera compañeras*; the trans *compañerx* were also organized; we learnt a lot from there. It is the same here; *compañeras* are leading the struggle, and they will manage their land. We decided that the neighbourhood had to have a feminist position. We decided on the name Norita in 2022. I think someone also proposed Che Guevara and Santiago Maldonado too. We voted, and Norita won. You must have noticed the emotion the other day that those of us who know who she is had. It also came about because of the fact that although the other names are strong names of the struggle, it is a more pacifist name. It is more of an active struggle than Che Guevara.

Compañerx(s): There is a phrase that several comrades always mention, “when we don't know which way to shoot, we have to look at where Norita is.” Norita maintains a level of coherence and of political independence in all the governments. Even though she accompanies the struggle of mothers and the struggle of Grandmothers from the Plaza de Mayo, Norita is one of the few human rights activists who maintained autonomy during the process of co-optation that Kirchnerism brought to many organizations. Hebe de Bonafini, the other leader of mothers, for example, although she vindicates all the struggles she had been questioned at a time when Cristina named Cesar Milani military chief, who was a repressor, she came out to vindicate Milani. Norita differentiated herself from those things. So, in the popular camp, we say that when we don't know where to go when we are almost lost, look at where Norita stands because she has coherence. Yesterday, in the middle of the march, there were a lot of comrades, and Norita was there next to us fighting.

To add just one more thing. In Argentina, feminism is very prominent within the political and social organizations, but also at a more general level, with the different struggles that have taken place in recent years, such as the legalization of abortion and the right to decide about our own bodies. Feminism implies not only recognizing inequality in access to land and housing but also recognizing those who are most denied and those who are women. Feminism also aims to break with violence. And it is also how we imagine our neighbourhood.

Ana: I would like to suggest two more topics. The first one is how the project is situated in a broader struggle for land and rights to housing and the city in Argentina. How do you

relate to other organizations that are in the same struggle? Are there formal networks? The other is how this struggle is situated in the international context among other international struggles.

Compañerx(s): Of course we are involved. At the meeting that took place in Córdoba about the land, we saw that there are people organizing in neighborhoods in different parts of Argentina. There were people from Río Negro, people from Córdoba, *compas* in Jujuy, *compas* linked to the socio-environmental struggle in La Rioja. These struggles for land and environmental issues go hand in hand. Access to land also has to do with the environment. Land can't be polluted, and they can't extract lithium and pollute the water. We also did a course on renewable energies, and we also saw the people from Patagonia talking about the neighbourhood they have built close to their work where there is pollution all the time.

We were weaving a network with these neighborhoods that are also forming and part of us. The idea is the same: to replicate this experience here in Norita elsewhere. Internationally, we are connected to struggles in Brazil, the indigenous struggle in Ecuador, and the struggle in Chile. We have been listening to these struggles and learning from these experiences. We also learned about assembly methods. We are connected but still need an alliance or an international network.

Compañerx(s): We are trying to build on past experience. In the 1980s, land relations began to develop more. We had San Francisco. There were a lot of neighbourhoods. The first neighbourhoods were more prominent because the Federal Capital began to exclude the

Figure 7

Building a memory three.
Image: Ana Vilenica



poorer classes. In these years of our struggle for land and housing, we were trying to learn from their experiences.

Compañerx(s): The government does not favour the organized people and the workers. We have to share the different struggles to be able to articulate ourselves. Sometimes it's a bit difficult because we don't have enough time. But it is also about dividing forces to see where we can go, who we can accompany, what we can support, to speak from the different spaces of the various organizations. We want to continue supporting each other.

Compañerx(s): My family lives in Patagonia. There is an increase in land grabs near where they live. People took over several community neighbourhoods. Also, the Izquierda Socialista and other organized people partake in self-organized neighbours. It is a very expensive city. It is dollarized, and it is also an island. You have nowhere to go.

Compañerx(s): I wanted to add to what compañera was saying. We came from a dictatorship. There was a lot of displacement. There were slums in the villas in the capital. People had to go and organize themselves here because they couldn't be there anymore. The dictatorship also had much to do with the context we are in today.

Also, I wanted to add something on coordination with others and with other spaces. For most of us in Norita, this is our first experience in the struggle for land, particularly those of us who come from the worker's unions. We see Norita as an experience of what we can call the independent left or the New Left. We are building on the experience of what compañera said, of the organizations that fought against the dictatorship outside of what is the Trotskyist tradition in Argentina. This New Left has two important characteristics. The first one is prefiguration, that is, not waiting for the government to make changes but building the changes in our daily lives and living as close as possible to what we would like to live. I think that Norita has a bit of that experience.

The second characteristic is its multisectorial nature. We saw Norita's potential to recover workers unions. We decided to use the unions to do this form of community purchasing, resembling the workers' neighbourhoods in the 1930s and 1920s when the conurbation began to be populated. Also, housing is very divided from workers' struggles. In reality, these struggles are connected. Most of us who are teachers rent, and most of the public sector workers rent. We proposed that trade unions come and see the experience here to be able to transfer their struggle from daily life to the struggle for land. This was done at UNPI, the Piquetero University. The workshops were made to build relationships with other experiences. In other words, we started to get to know each other.

Compañerx(s): At this stage, we are relating to organizations such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is the one that invited us to participate in this meeting in Cordoba, OPSUR, which is the Southern Petroleum Observatory. This enables us to come together and get to know other experiences. We also participated in a meeting of community neighbourhoods or recovered spaces that took place in the Manzana de las Luces in the city of Buenos Aires. Well, we are starting to build connections to different spaces and organizations and that enables us to meet with others.

Compañerx(s): We also had the meeting with ATE, Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado, which is the Electricity Union of Uruguay. We learned about trade union cooperatives. This is the most international thing we have done so far.

Ana: In DNU, the Law Against the People, there is a new regulation for selling land. The foreigners will be allowed to buy big plots of land. This regulation also pegs the rents to dollars. How will this affect the struggle? What do you expect to happen? What do you fear? And how do you organize against that?

Compañerx(s): We decided to build these community toilets here because we see it coming. *Compañeros* and *compañeras* who have their land here and intend to move in in two years might now decide to come here next week or month. The rents will double, triple in dollars. That's why we decided to set up projects on how to build shacks in a self-managed way. We made a budget for cheap huts, but they had to comply with security measures. This was decided because of the situation we are in. In other words, everything started to accelerate.

Compañerx(s): And on the other hand, what *compañera* mentioned, which has been discussed, is that we are going to have to reactivate the Land Assembly, which was the nucleus of Norita because there are going to be a lot of people who are going to start needing houses as well. The reality is that the other things might also happen. If we don't have funding, it will be difficult to start building.

Compañerx(s): First the DNU comes out, and now this new Omnibus Law. This means that the market should regulate itself and that the state will not be present. So those who don't own the property, those who rent, will be nothing. The owners will be able to set the price, which means that many of our people, as *compañero* was saying, who were planning to come and build in three years' time, will probably have to be here in February.

There's not going to be any other way to go. And if we continue with organizing, it's very important to know what's going to happen, what to do and what not to do. This is what is coming. If we don't manage to stop this DNU and the mega law they are imposing, it won't be easy. Those of us who came from the struggles in the 1990s and the 2000s already know what it's all about.

Compañerx(s): The housing crisis is surely going to explode in the next few months. This has to do not only with the liberalization of rents and land prices in general but also with the decrease in wages. For a family that is renting a house, 50-60% of their salary is going for rent. This is going to increase, but in addition to all that, they are going to have to pay for services, as subsidies for energy and transport are also going to be cut. So, for a worker and their family, it is going to be almost impossible to pay rent.

Compañerx(s): We hadn't been doing well for a while. We saw this coming. It is going to be much uglier. We must be prepared to work territorially, not only with those who are organized but also with our neighbours and with our own families. We also need to encourage community gardens to produce food.

We need to begin working collectively outwards and territorially in a conjunctural way and generate more awareness of what this political context will be like. The idea that collective solutions are based on solidarity also means looking at how we can help each other and put an end to this individualism, which is always very difficult from a human perspective. The working-class sector is going to be hit harder every day. This is a historic juncture that makes our daily lives much more complex.

Compañerx(s): The salaries are frozen. There is not going to be an increase, but inflation is going up.

Compañerx(s): A section of society is coming out to demand rights. It is good that the CGT wants to call for a general strike in January. We are also celebrating the fact that society is waking up.

Compañerx(s): Norita has a space for a community garden. At least it won't cost us so much for the vegetables. In spite of everything, there is something, and we know that we are going to have to start making soup kitchens like we did during the pandemic. We were the organizations that supported the people who didn't have enough to eat. And those of us who came from the whole process of 2001, after they killed Darío and Maxi, after that, we also did a lot of organizing work. The point has already been made: we need to go to the neighbourhoods. And, here we are. We are starting the vegetable garden project, which, in principle, will be for the people who live here as this is the task. We know that we have to make a popular pot. We know that when everything is bad, we are the ones who go out to support people. This is what compañera was saying. We are not even

Figure 8

Building a memory tree.
Image: Ana Vilenica



thinking about holidays because we know what is coming. My organization is in a state of alert. Meetings are called every day. At 10 pm at night, we call each other and get together because we have to do something important the next day.

Compañerx(s): What is happening in Argentina is a downturn for the whole region.

Compañerx(s): Under Macrismo, the previous government, workers' wages have already decreased by about 10%. 15% that will never be recuperated. But what this implies, in addition to liberalization, is a very repressive character of the state. This is also, in my view, a novelty in these 40 years of democracy.

Compañerx(s): For the state to legally seek to criminalize protest, to prohibit it, to ban meetings, that is a novelty.

Compañerx(s): It is terrible for our society.

Compañerx(s): The privatization is coming in health and education. We're going to fight this fight. It's a moment when you say turn off the TV because it's impressive how they fry your brain.

Compañerx(s): They arrested the comrade from Unidad Popular, but on TV, you couldn't see anyone facing the repression.

Compañerx(s): There is still a big consensus; a lot of people are saying we have to wait and see what happens.

Compañerx(s): They are increasing the transport costs. People take a bus to the train station and another bus to get to work. It is going to be a heavy burden. They will increase prices in January. That's why I am saying that you will see the reflection of all this in January.

Compañerx(s): Those who had a little money already put it into buying land. However, it is very difficult to build during an economic crisis. We are looking into how we can save ourselves collectively. We are trying to hold lotteries to be able to pay for community things. When the Christmas bonus comes, for example, we put money together to be able

About this Conversation's participants

Community Neighborhood Norita Cortiñas are families facing housing precarity organizing to practice the right to housing.

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