"The House of Young People": The Role of Cultural Rights and Agency within Human Rights Intervention

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Over the past several decades Argentina has experienced increased human rights interventions from state and non-profit organizations that seek to address the economic and social consequences of collective trauma caused by a repressive dictatorship and extreme economic uncertainty (Brysk, 1993; Roniger & Sznajder, 1999). In Argentina human rights efforts have not focused exclusively on addressing abuses of individuals' human rights, but also on repairing the damage done to social cohesion caused by a climate of fear and insecurity. I employ narrative analysis to explore the experiences of participants and employees in one state cultural center in order to analyze how state programs work to promote cultural rights as an alternative treatment to collective social trauma. Institutional efforts to promote human rights can enact limited changes in youths' lives, but interventions may be constrained in their efforts to change individuals' circumstances if they are not aligned with the culturally and developmentally specific notions of agency that participants hold, and will continue to have limited success without greater investment in improving the material conditions of youths' lives.

So what good is a right if you can't use it, then? How can a person get a job if they say 'no, I'm in front of a pharmacy, sleeping in the streets?' They can't say that. Because society is created like that, you get it? ... It's all a chain. If I have a house and food, I can go to school, or work. But if you have nothing, what do you do? I can come here and make art, play for a while, but after that? Because life is a chain, it's all a chain.

- Melina[1], a "child in a street situation"[2] in Buenos Aires

Since the end of World War II, the human rights movement has played an increasingly important role in processes of recovery following periods of conflict, and today the human rights movement plays an indelible role in the global legal, political and moral landscape (Steiner, Alston & Goodman, 2008). Recently, however, a number of scholars have critically examined the international human rights movement, calling attention to the fact that while the concept of universal rights is meant to reflect the values of an abstract global community, these idealized representations of social relationships change as they are embedded within particular social realities, and can conflict with the cultural values and perspectives of particular groups (Doise, 2002; Okin, 1999; Shweder, Minow, & Markus,

[1] All names have been changed to protect the identity of participants.
[2] "Chico/a en situación de calle""

2002). The political and moral aspects of the movement are re-interpreted when expressed through states' constitution, laws, and practices, and critical appraisal is needed to understand how the principles of the human rights movement work in context (Shell-Duncan, 2008; Steiner, Alston & Goodman, 2008).

Over time the international dialog surrounding human rights has expanded to particularly support the rights of certain populations, and has grown in the range of rights that it aims to guarantee. For example, the notion that children possess specific rights is considered to be of relatively recent origin, and while the child's rights movement initially focused on providing children with rights of protection, there has been a growing concern about children's rights to self-determination and social integration (Takanishi, 1978; Hawes, 1991). However, particular notions of agency are implicit within such rights as the 'right to self-determination'. In this paper, I will argue that institutional efforts to promote human rights will be constrained in their ability to effectively change individual's circumstances if they are not aligned with the specific notions of agency that participants hold. However, the human rights philosophy may provide some support to marginalized individuals by appreciating their potential and promoting a greater social recognition of their value as people. I will support this claim by analyzing a particularly active discourse of human rights following collective trauma, in Argentina, using a narrative approach to examine individual processes of engagement with dominant narratives about agency.

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND THE RISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS INTERVENTIONS IN ARGENTINA

The human rights movement has grown dramatically in Argentina in an attempt to repair the disastrous social and economic consequences of several decades of human rights abuses perpetrated by the government. The current populist government was elected on a platform of human rights promotion, claiming that, "the promotion of human rights, individual and collective, is tied to the recuperation of legitimacy of institutions and the confidence of the population in the democratic system" (Government of Argentina, 2015). In the 1970's and 80's Argentine citizens were compelled to seriously doubt the legitimacy of institutions when a political dictatorship disseminated terror among citizens by kidnapping over 30,000 citizens targeted as 'subversives'. The tragic death of many of the country's young political leaders and activists was all the more traumatic as the government employed an insidious strategy of 'disappearing' victims, spreading uncertainty and mistrust within the population. The regime's strategy of domination left its mark; many Argentines lament the harm that this reign of fear caused to community relationships, as suspicion and social withdrawal became strategies of survival (Lorenz, 2007).

After the fall of the dictatorship, the provisional government neglected to investigate the crimes of the preceding government, and initiated a wave of privatization of state industries. In the 1990's many countries within Latin America struggled to attain economic

stability as they adopted neoliberal economic policies, but Argentina experienced a "decline without parallel" as a result of these reforms (The Economist, 2002). In the early 90's the economic gains of privatization flooded the country with foreign capital, but the bubble popped in 2001, resulting in an economic crash that caused widespread unemployment and homelessness, riots, the fall of the provisional government, a default on the country's foreign debt, and the rise of alternative currencies, drastically altering the sociopolitical landscape.

In the wake of a repressive dictatorship and extreme economic uncertainty, Argentine citizens have experienced increased institutional intervention from state and non-profit organizations that seek to address the economic and social consequences of collective trauma through human rights promotion (Brysk, 1993; Roniger & Sznajder, 1999). A populist government came to power in 2003, winning on a platform of governmental accountability and transparency. The promotion of human rights is central to these efforts, and in 2009 the UN Convention of Human Rights was incorporated into the national constitution. In Argentina, human rights efforts have not focused exclusively on addressing abuses of individuals' human rights, but also on repairing the damage done to community ties and social cohesion caused by a climate of fear and insecurity (Roniger & Sznajder, 1999. In order to foster community relationships, the Argentine state has both established government institutions to promote human rights, and has provided funding for growing non-profit organizations that seek to promote human rights. Particularly, the government has sought to shape collective cultural identity and social cohesion by increasing funding to community-based organizations that promote the inclusion of every citizens' right to "freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts" (The United Nations, 1948).

Thus the discourse of human rights has not only shaped legal definitions of citizenship, but also influences how communities engage with the arts and cultural expression. The incorporation of cultural and artistic expression into the pantheon of human rights represents the expansion of the human rights discourse, which has resulted in new forms of institutional intervention in the realm of cultural expression[3]. In Latin America particularly, nation states have focused on re-constructing and promoting particular versions of national culture in the push towards modernization (Canclini, 2005). However, as national ethnic cultures are combined with metropolitan institutions and practices, the hybridization of the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, generates confrontations and contradictions. By supporting the human right to cultural life, the state has sought to reconstruct collective cultural identity through programs that provide arts and culture classes to citizens of all socioeconomic backgrounds, especially working to increase the social integration of marginalized groups. This research will analyze one example of cultural intervention in order to highlight how these interventions function in

[3] 'Cultural expression' as it is conceptualized by the Argentine state, is "arts and artesanal activities that serve as modes of personal expression" (Canclini, 1999).

the lives of participants, specifically analyzing how competing conceptions of agency affect the outcomes of intervention.

A FOCUS ON THE MARGINS: YOUTH OF THE STREET

By aiming to provide all citizens with access to universal human rights, the government proposes to guarantee public security and social cohesion; however, certain types of subjects are identified as citizens who are 'marginalized' and need to be 'secured' in order to guarantee collective access to human rights (Goldstein,, 2015). Human rights policies are applied incongruously in order to especially focus on intervention and compliance at the margins of society, often concentrating on the poor (Goldstein, 2015; Staerkle & Spini, 2015). Youth are also seen as particularly important actors in this process, as they represent opportunities to construct and adopt new cultural attitudes and new forms of citizenship (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Dewey, 1922). In Argentina, youth are particularly important to the national process of recovery; in the dictatorship the vast majority of victims were young political activists, and so in order to achieve collective '*memoria y reconciliacion'* [4] the youth are cast as the political forerunners of the future of a rights-based society (Longo, 2004; Palermo, 2004).

Dewey (1922) discusses this tendency for people to hold an "abiding idealization of childhood" that is based in the notion that "there is in the unformed activities of childhood and youth the possibilities of a better life for the community as well as for individuals here and there. Imagining a future heaven in which we too shall respond freshly and generously to each incident of life"(p.99). Youth are often discussed as privileged agents in a linear progression towards the future, and thus are privileged sites for intervention in the present moment (e.g. Dewey, 1922; Morrow & Torres, 1995). Education of the young, then, is seen to be a central activity to a collective construction of present and future cultural identity, and specific pedagogical strategies reflect cultural values and attitudes (Bourdieu, 1973; Morrow & Torres, 1995).

AGENCIES WITHIN INTERVENTION

Human rights interventions in Argentina particularly focus on youth as agents of cultural change; youth are seen as a source of potential to create and sustain a collective '*memoria y reconciliación'*. State and non-profit youth programming are infused with human rights-related themes in order to empower youth to enact ideal models of citizenship and to facilitate collective healing (Tibbitts, 2002; Jelin, 2005). Because these interventions cast youth as particular types of agents, in order to understand how the framework of human rights is being implemented in context we must analyze collective and individual narratives that illustrate conceptions of agency.

[4] "Memory and reconciliation"; a phrase that often accompanies educational projects that promote historical memory to actively prevent a repetition of the traumatic abuses by the dictatorship.

The role of human agency[5] within culture, social structure and history has been highly contested as social scientists debate the accuracy of different theoretical models of the self (Goffman, 1959; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mead, 1964). There is much evidence to support the notion that although the self is often privileged in discussions of agency, the locus of agency is not exclusively situated within the self (De Certeau, 1984; Latour, 2005; Strathern, 1988). In fact, action is often motivated by external conditions, and agency might be better defined in relation to "systems of objective potentialities inscribed in the present" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.77). Common simplifications of agency persist, however, as many studies tend to examine different personhoods and subjectivities while ignoring the possibilities for different forms of agency, acting "as if agency was an essential unchanging given" (Desjarlais, 1996, p.4; see also Clay, 1992, Drewal, 1992). There is a need for a deeper understanding of different narratives of agency, in order to in order to understand how these distinct narratives affect how individuals act (Latour, 2005). My research addresses this need by examining different individual and collective narratives about agency, exploring how agency is defined by different actors, how it is enacted, and how specific individual's narratives differ from collective narratives.

FIELD SITE AND METHODS

In order to address cultural psychology's commitment to the discovery and documentation of psychological diversity (Shweder, 1990), this paper will examine the variability *within* cultural communities by focusing on individual processes of engagement with their sociocultural environment. This study focuses on the relationship between master narratives and personal narratives of agency in order to better understand processes of social reproduction and change (Hammack, 2008). I use ethnographic methods to document how individuals make meaning of their cultural surroundings through interactions with master narratives, a concept which aligns with theories of "dominant discourses" (see Bamberg, 2004; Thorne, 2004; Foucault, 1978). My research focuses on one particular site of intervention, *La Casa de los Jóvenes* [6] to examine how the dominant discourse of human rights is implemented on a day to day basis, and how multiple forms of agency are invoked and employed in the dialogic encounters that work to shape the individual narratives of young participants. I chose *La Casa de los Jóvenes* as my primary field site because of its strong dependency on government funding to promote human rights and its wide range of services.

I conducted ethnographic research within *La Casa*, attending employee meetings, cultural workshops, and accompanying youth while they walked around their neighborhood. I also explored the political and social context of various cultural centers in the area in order to

[5] I use the definition of agent proposed by Karp (1986): "Agent refers to persons engaged in the exercise of power in its primary sense of the 'bringing about of effects,' that is, engaged in action that is constitutive. Agency implies the idea of 'causal power'" (p.137, n. 1)

[6] "The house of the young people" (name has been changed to protect the identity of the institution)

interact with and observe a wide range of actors involved in intervention programs, while developing relationships and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of one specific program.

La Casa de los Jóvenes is situated in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, within the municipality of Morón. Among the urban municipalities, Morón is recognized for its progressive politics and active civil society, which has facilitated the development of a strong network of public recreational and cultural resources. The municipality is also characterized by high diversity in residents' social status; while most residents belong to middle class and upper class families, the area is surrounded by a fringe of slums. Cultural institutions like *La Cas*a are situated on the edge of these slums, and represent the attempts of the government to promote social integration between classes and assuage tensions associated with the large income disparity between residents.

The mission statement of *La Casa* proclaims:

> *We have as our general objective to reinforce and promote social inclusion and the development of young people in vulnerable situations within Morón. We aim* ***to favor their social integration*** *and* ***to guarantee the plain exercise of their rights****, of which we emphasize* ***the right to education, health, laboral insertion, culture, social ascent****, the* ***prevention of violence*** *and* ***social participation***.[7]

About 10 *operadores*[8]*,* ages 22 to 33, are charged with working towards this mission by providing services to about 100 youth per week. Many of these youth experience high residential instability, and *La Casa* is oriented towards providing support for the large population of homeless children in the area. Groups of youth often arrive together, with children as young as toddlers arriving on the hips of older siblings or parents, young adults in their early twenties. *La Casa* hosts many workshops dedicated to cultural expression; radio, folkloric dance and photography are some of the most popular workshops. *La Casa* receives much of their funding to promote cultural participation through these workshops, but also offers GED courses and a labor rights training that gives youth an overview of labor rights and regulations, taxes, and the law.

DOMINANT NARRATIVE OF INTERNAL AGENCY

La Casa de los Jóvenes provides arts and culture workshops to underprivileged youth, so that they can exercise their right to culture and social integration, and thus foster their potential as agents within a future rights-based society. While the program does not provide resources such as housing or food, the intervention intends to empower youth to

7 Emphasis added.

[8]Staff bear the title of "operators" of intervention

access collective resources by facilitating youths' social integration and sense of agency through cultural workshops. But the purpose of the intervention is not only to empower youth by providing them access to their cultural rights, but also to shape their developmental trajectory, based on a dominant narrative that presents youth as potential agents of self-directed development.

One *operador* described the incremental process through which they engage street youth, and begin to shape their sense of agency:

> *We go accompanying them to get a national ID, their documents, to improve their health, things they need, and we go deepening a bond with them through the cultural workshops, they are all excuses to develop a link with the kid, to accompany them in their track and to generate strategies oriented towards the future, change, to generate their potential towards solutions*.

The dominant narrative that shapes the intervention emphasizes the value of future-oriented habits, so the youth can successfully save the collective future by directing their own futures. By attempting to teach youth to accept the importance of owning a national ID, for example, they seek to socialize homeless youth into the cultural infrastructure of the dominant society. The intervention works to gradually shift youth's sense of belonging by progressively modifying their behavior to fit ideal models of citizenship, which in turn is expected to grant them the economic stability that is associated with 'productive citizens'. As Bourdieu describes, this form of pedagogic reasoning works to gradually "obtain respect for form and forms of respect which constitute the most visible and at the same time the best-hidden (because most 'natural') manifestation of submission to the established order" (Bourdieu, 1973, p.95). While *La Casa*'s cultural intervention proposes to teach youth cultural expression in the form of the arts, these interventions ultimately aim to teach youth culturally acceptable forms of citizenship, and the socially constructed bounds of appropriate behavior within an institutional context.

The intervention program also strategically situates concrete resources to reinforce educational objectives, encouraging consistent levels of participation by offering stipends to youth that maintain good attendance. *Operadores* regularly described consistent participation as the form through which internal motivation towards long-term goals and a sense of collective social belonging could be inspired:

> *When we're doing the photography workshop, the truth is that the idea isn't to make the kid the best photographer possible, it's to give the kid something that will motivate him/her, that they will like... The idea is that they come every week to do whatever, they dedicate themselves to working on a skill, and become part of something*.

Within the institutional vision of action, it is believed that youth simply need models to teach them how to adopt productive habits, which will enable them to calibrate the course of their actions to achieve their long-term goals. While the *operadores* and the state both ostensibly recognize the contextual factors that influence street youth's behavior, by outlining intervention strategies that seek to transform the habits of youth, they implicitly attribute agency to the disposition of the agent. The intervention is meant to inculcate this voluntaristic[9] form of agency within young participants, seeking to show to the youth that they can exercise agency to direct outcomes that influence their lives by providing youth with opportunities to reach long-term objectives within the cultural workshops. *Operadores* hope to teach youth to "value themselves" based on their gradual progression along a socially appropriate trajectory, as Javier describes:

> *It starts small, to show them a routine that can work for them, to give them an opportunity to feel like they're able to learn something. That we value their lives, that it's important to us what happens to them, so they can move forward. But it's not something you can give. It has to develop within*.

In this quote, the underlying logic of the intervention is revealed: if youth experience agentic power through small successes, they will begin to recognize their worth and thus feel capable of pursuing their rights. Ultimately, the promotion of rights within this programming is an intervention to reshape youth's sense of agency, as *operadores* hope to convince kids of their value as rights-bearing individuals, and their potential to direct their own fate. *Operadores* recognize the constraints of youths' impoverished circumstances, but they hope to help kids cope with the risks they face by trying to help youth "move forward". However, in order to do this, *operadores* must also work to combat another conflicting dominant narrative, that of the inherent threat that the poor and homeless pose to ordinary citizens.

Apart from the strain of growing up in dangerous circumstances, homeless youth also experience strain from the social stigma they face from 'ordinary citizens', and they shared how this environment impacted their perception of themselves and their own sense of agency. Melina relates:

> *Because pride doesn't help you, you lose it... You have to lift food off the floor, clean it and eat it. But they make you mad because you live in the street, and you see that people look at you with disgust, with disdain, with anger, as if you*

[9] A voluntaristic theory of action views actors as goal-seeking individuals who are possession of alternative means to achieve their goals. Action involves actors making subjective decisions about the means to achieve goals, all of which are constrained by ideas and perceptions of situational conditions (Parsons, 1937).

> *were trash. They treat you like trash. You go to them, and they practically give you trash to eat.*

Youth within *La Casa* regularly discussed how they are made to feel worthless by others, and how the weight of negative social expectations influences their own sense of agency. Javier described his lifestyle growing up, focusing on the role of circumstances in shaping his future expectations:

> *I went through everything, hunger, cold, everything I lived, everything I saw. At home, I got home and there were bottles thrown all over, on the table there was cocaine. That's what it was like, my surroundings. And they tell you, your mom is a drunk, you're going to be like your parents. And you believe it*.

Stigma against the impoverished is not a novel phenomenon, but it is important to understand how notions of agency play a role in the creation of this stigma. Social scientists such as Dewey (1922) describe how public morality is exercised to judge acts that are within our control. Skinner (2002) reinforces this view, proposing that behavior is called right or wrong with respect to judgments that others make about the agent's freedom to control their actions. The root of the debate over the (im)moral nature of the behavior of the homeless, then, seems to stem from contradictory collective models of agency- non-homeless citizens tend to assume street youths' behaviors are manifestations of a criminal disposition, an active choice of their fate, while youth consider their behavior as contingent upon the environment of the street.

The promotion of rights within this programming is intended to convince youth of their value as rights-bearing individuals and potential agents of social change, positioning them within a narrative of agency in which they have the power to change their circumstances. However, the intervention is situated within conflicting social judgments about the agency of the youth; youth are treated as if they were responsible for their conditions, and yet are powerless to change their circumstances. *Operadores* highlight this conflict in order to help empower youth, and combat this stigma, as Paco's lecture within the Labor rights course at *La Casa* demonstrates:

> *The incapacity is not you, it's the infrastructure. We tend to think that the problem is in the person being discriminated against, but it is always the opposite. What do you think are the consequences of a person suffering discrimination? It creates a trauma for you guys. You can feel incapable or depressed. A person [who experiences] that doesn't have problems themselves, but they become aggressive. It's important to think about your self-esteem, your self-perception, and believe that you are capable, intelligent. It is the system that is incapable.*

The *operador* alludes to the framework of rights by informing the youth that their struggles are not due to personal failures, but the failure of their environment to provide their rights.

However, by teaching youth that they are entitled to certain rights, which their realities don't deliver, *operadores* present the youth with a particular interpretation of their circumstances that youth may not share. The *operador* hopes that by embedding youth within a narrative in which they are capable of directing change, they will help youth to demand the rights that have been denied to them due to the "incapable" system. The *operador* is also working to undo the negative effects that social stigma wreaks on young adolescent's already sensitive self-esteem. However, youth continue to face persistent stigma, and the intervention is ultimately focusing on changing individual's perception of their environment, rather than improving the hardships posed by the environment itself. Ultimately the constraints of youths' precarious environments forcefully direct youths' (re)actions, and it is these circumstances that shape youths' sense of contingent agency.

INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES OF EXTERNAL AGENCY

As Melina described in the opening quote[10], poor and homeless populations in Buenos Aires experience vastly different forms of quotidian existence than other citizens, and many youth feel unable to take control of their lives because they cannot access the "chain" of resources required for normative models of development. Often these youth describe their course of action as dependent upon shifting sets of contingencies; to survive, they must react to fleeting opportunities or sudden risks. Julian explains his strategy:

> *You move it around, tac, tac, looking for the right path, and you go molding. You can't be very rigid because if you're too straight the unexpected will roll right over you. So you have to be one more in society, nothing more than that, just another member of the society. And live every day like it's your last.*

It is important that youth don't let life take them by surprise, as Julian shares, so they deny expectations and live in the moment. But this can often lead to take actions that provide short-term rewards, but are detrimental in the long term. Alejo describes an incident in which "the urge to do bad" struck him:

> *I'm impulsive. I can't control myself. Today the urge to do bad struck me, I crossed paths with someone selling weed and then I went out all night. I knew what was going to happen when I was there, but I couldn't not do it. And you begin to say 'this isn't my role.' You understand that you don't want this.. But, being a kid of the street, you light a fire and say 'My errors die here', and go forward.*

Alejo characterizes his behavior as contingent upon impulses that are activated by his environment, and beyond his control. He recognizes that his actions are not strategic, but

[10] *"If I have a house and food, I can go to school, or work. But if you have nothing, what do you do? … Because society is created like that, you get it? … It's all a chain."*

narrates agency as a force embedded within his circumstances, and depicts himself as lacking the power to control his own behavior. Ultimately, he still sees himself as a kid of the street, propelled constantly forward by the action that surrounds him, rather than from his own internal motivations.

Alejo's expression of agency echoes Dewey's (1922) notion that motives do not exist prior to an act and produce it, but rather that action and the idea are imbricated completely. Dewey discusses how in extraordinary circumstances, instinctive reactions are sometimes "too intense to be woven into a smooth pattern of habits. Under ordinary circumstances they appear to be tamed to obey their master, custom. But extraordinary crises release them and they show by wild violent energy how superficial is the control of routine." (Dewey, 1922, p.22) Because routine habits are only useful where conditions recur in uniform ways, they do not fit the unpredictable circumstances that characterize the lives of street youth. Street youth instead become accustomed to responding to their environment through instinctive reactions, in order to respond to the "intense" shifts in their surroundings. This reactivity serves youth in adapting to life on the street. However, because the youth conceive of their own agency as reactive and motivated by contingencies within their environment, they find themselves unable to adopt those routine behaviors that are characteristic of more predictable environments. Thus, they feel incapable of maintaining future-oriented action, which the dominant narrative portrays as desirable for young agents of social progress.

While *operadores* in *La Casa* hope to provide a stable environment in which youth can develop new habits, without intervening into the other circumstances in youths' lives they are unable to induce significant changes that will facilitate youths' social or economic inclusion within the dominant community. But without gaining the stability that social and economic inclusion entails, street youths' extreme circumstances exert more power over the course of their lives than the individual agency of the youth themselves.

COLLIDING SENSES OF AGENCY

It has thus far been demonstrated that generally, the street youth of Buenos Aires view themselves as contingent agents that react to their environment, while the philosophy of intervention presumes a voluntaristic notion of agency. Yet these two senses of agency do not represent a simple dichotomy that actors choose between. Action emerges as agents interact with the environment and employ shifting frames of reference to navigate their world (Latour, 2005). *Operadores* are not able to subsume the dominant role that youths' precarious environment plays in directing their behavior, but by providing youth with a safe space and by presenting youth with a narrative that focuses on their potential, *operadores* can help youth feel greater agentive control in transforming specific aspects of their environment.

While the human rights intervention is not sufficient to completely transform street youths' sense of agency, the use of arts and culture as a space to develop feelings of 'potential' was effective in moderating how some young participants considered themselves as agents. In the arts workshops, all forms of expression are judged as equally valuable, and the goal of the workshop is to enable youth to express themselves. Street youth experience social recognition from peers and adults, and experience their productive capacities as agents as they create art collectively. These experiences change youths' perceptions of their own agentive ability to bring about effects, in specific contexts. Jesica shares:

> *A lot of times in life you see it's not possible, this isn't possible, you can't do this or that. When I went to class I discovered that I could do a lot of things that I never thought I could do. If you try and you don't succeed, you can try in many ways to do other things. But there's a lot of us who think they just can't, and they get mad and stay that way. They're afraid. They don't try. It's like here in the photo workshop. Before, I didn't know if I could take pictures, I had never had a real camera, but now I learned I can.*

Within the arts workshop, Jesica can narrate her self as an agent in another way. This process is apparent in Jesica's discovery of her own possibilities within the art workshop; while she never knew she was capable of taking photos, by participating in an arts workshop where others considered her capable and entrusted her with a camera, she begins to change the narrative through which she understands her own capacity to exercise agency, and bring about effects. She compares her sense of self to that of other street youth, discussing how many struggle with their inability to act as agentic citizens in the way the master narrative of their social environment demands. The arts workshop is an environment in which Jesica can take advantage of potentialities in her environment, and act as an agent by directing her behavior towards a long-term goal. These experiences can help youth to construct a narrative in which they have some ability to direct future-oriented action, though constrained by the adversity of their circumstances.

Cultural workshops can help youth begin to narrate themselves as agents with potential to direct their future, but the inclusion of concrete resources provided by the state is integral to this intervention strategy. With the network of resources *La Casa* offers, some youth come to express a greater sense of agency in shifting some of the contingencies of their environment.

> ***Alejo:*** *I want to go into one of those state centers of addiction, so they can help me.*
> ***Operador****: Are you sure? Because there's places and there's places. [Implying some are not so nice.] What about working on your desire for it?*
> ***Alejo****: No, the circumstances aren't right, it's not possible, it's not possible. In this place I can't.*

Alejo contests the *operador*'s assumption that if one realizes their behaviors has negative future consequences, that the wish of the person to act is enough to change their behavior. He does not feel capable of changing his behavior of using drugs by himself. However, with the help of the network of resources connected to *La Casa*, he seems to recognize his own potential power to adjust his context, in the hopes that this will create new potentialities in his environment that will enable him to reduce his drug use.

Another youth, Ramiro, describes how *La Casa* has helped him learn how to change his surroundings when he feels compelled to commit a delinquent act:

> *The other day I was wandering around and I was grabbed by the desire to do something bad, I wanted to do some evil things. So I thought, maybe I'll call Paco [an operador] and we'll go for a ride. So I called him, he came by with his car and we drove around here. We had a good time. It was better.*

Ramiro continues to describe his impulses as entities that seize him, narrating his desires as external forces. However, he is able to moderate these impulses by changing his social environment, calling upon the support of the *operadores*, to modify his behavior. Thus, although he maintains his sense of contingent agency, the intervention has enabled him to feel greater agentive potential by helping him adopt a narrative in which he is capable of shifting some of the circumstances that motivate his decisions.

CONCLUSION

Many scholars critique government intervention for denying the role of context in the lives of participants, and acting upon the "shaman-like hope that the projected world can be manipulated through its representation in policy artifacts" (Lea, 2008, p.24). It has been demonstrated that the implementation of human rights interventions in Buenos Aires operates within a dominant cultural framework of voluntaristic agency, which cannot control for the overpowering role of context for subjects who experience reactive forms of agency. *Operadores* strive to motivate youth to adopt regular habits that are oriented towards long-term objectives, but street youth are unable to change their habits dramatically because they see their behaviors as contingent on their environment, rather than within their control. However, for homeless youth struggling to survive on the streets of Buenos Aires, this intervention does have a concrete impact on their lives. Both *operadores* and youth highlight the role of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997) in constructing narratives about agency, though the narratives of the youth do not focus on changing "perceptions of reality" so much as taking advantage of state resources to change their environment.

The promotion of cultural activities through human rights interventions provides young people with an opportunity to become more familiar with the dominant narrative of voluntaristic agency, and to feel efficacious in certain contexts. However, sometimes the

hardships that street youth face cannot be overcome by any strategy they employ because the material conditions that impact street youths' lives have both psychological and physical consequences for youth that exceed their ability to positively cope. There must be a greater alignment between the understandings of agency that intervention programs and intervention participants employ. Within a given society there is no one uniform type of citizenship or culture, but rather many forms of agency and identity exist and experience disjointed pressures to fuse. We must not only attempt to understand the practices that emerge from the fusion of cultural narratives, but also to acknowledge that which refuses or resists hybridization; reliance upon the promises of abstract universal principles without understanding how these ideologies are interpreted and enacted in everyday life can lead to disillusionment. Human rights institutions and government intervention programs must acknowledge and understand the different ways in which agency can be articulated and understood; this increased mutual understanding would also be useful to help the state recognize the need to provide more material resources to youth, in order to solve the root causes of their marginalization. Youth can benefit from social interventions, but these social programs cannot be seen as an alternative to investing in material supports that are also integral for healthy development. Some participants within this intervention demonstrate a change in the narratives they employ to describe their lives, and with the support of state resources can exert some measure of control over their experiences. However, the challenges youth face prevent intervention programs from fully transforming youth's sense of agency to match the dominant narrative, and the intervention falls short of its hopes to foster the potential within youth to achieve all of the rights promised by the human rights movement.

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