



Appropriating “modernization” – indigenous anti-hegemonic resistance in the Argentine Chaco

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Abstract. The incorporation of indigenous territories into the Argentine Republic must be considered as a complex process of colonization which encompassed space, the word and the body. It enabled the dominant settler society to establish socioeconomic and sociocultural hegemony. The example of the Toba community in Clorinda elucidates the extent to which hegemonic worldviews have infiltrated their self-perception and produced the *barrio* (urban district) and the *campo* (rural area), as two places infiltrated with symbolisms and ideology. Through a postcolonial perspective, this article aims to examine the way the community deals with this “modernization”, as the Toba themselves call the process. It is pointed out that, by appropriating the hegemony’s logic, the Toba actively create spaces of resistance in order to maintain or regain self-determination. Discussing indigenous alternative concepts of modernity, this article advocates a greater consideration of those diverse social realities in the scope of Western development geography.

1 Introduction

The Toba are one of three indigenous ethnic groups still living in the province of Formosa, northeast Argentina. Due to strong resistance by these groups, this northern part of the Argentine Chaco was the last region to be incorporated into the Argentine Republic at the end of the 19th century. The Toba community, which this article deals with, lives in Clorinda, a town located at the Paraguayan border. Officially founded in 1899 by the *criollos* – the people of European origin – Clorinda was still a very small settlement at that time, dominated by thick forest and flood areas and only accessible via waterways. Only with the construction of Route 11 in the late 1960s was Clorinda connected to Argentina’s heartland, leading to the intensive settlement of the town and its surroundings.

Following the concept of Wright (2003a), this late but intense colonization process of the *criollo* society encompassed space, the word and the body. It enabled the *criollos* to establish hegemony and created a pervasive sociocultural transformation of the Toba community. Based on data collected during fieldwork between 2010 and 2011, this article has two central concerns.

First, it will elucidate the complex process of the infiltration of hegemonic worldviews into the Toba’s self-perception and everyday understanding. This transformation – or “modernization”, as the Toba themselves call it – has created a conflictive and seemingly contradictive perception of the past and the present which is reflected by the production of the community’s residential quarter in Clorinda (the *barrio*) and the countryside (the *campo*) with its *monte* (the thick forest where the Toba practiced the *marisca*, i.e., the hunting, fishing and gathering) as two places ascribed with meaning.

Second, the article’s goal is to understand and interpret the subtle set of resistance patterns among the Toba, which have been produced by these conflictive processes and which are argued to be their step-by-step process of appropriating “modernization”.

The interpretative research design comprised 26 semi-structured, qualitative interviews, which were conducted with 16 Toba and 4 *criollo* functionaries. The questions focused particularly on the Toba’s sociocultural patterns which structure their everyday life, regarding the present and past as either lived by themselves or told by elders. Participatory observation was a second integral component of the research. Being able to take part in everyday leisure activities or to hold

informal talks allowed for the observation of the embodiment of those sociocultural patterns in their daily practices – including the observation of hidden phenomena and ambivalences which were not revealed in the interviews, for example concerning their spiritual life or internal social dynamics. Furthermore, the combination of both research methods enabled the identification of the specific power relations which determine the Toba's everyday life and hence led to the application of a postcolonial perspective for the interpretation scheme.

By exemplifying the creation and repercussions of power structures caused by processes of internal colonialism, this article intends to enrich postcolonial discussion in geography. By addressing indigenous alternative concepts of modernity, which might seem contradictory to Western perspectives, and the resulting strategies of resistance, it further advocates a greater consideration of such diverse social realities in the scope of Western development geography.

2 Hegemony and indigenous resistance

The discourse of hegemony has been greatly reflected upon in postcolonial studies, a diverse area of research which builds upon Marxist and poststructuralist theories. It concerns the relation between elite knowledge and power and the exclusion and marginalization of “postcolonial subjects and knowledges [...] embedded in notions of cultural and racial difference” (Radcliffe, 2005:292), not only between the global north and south but also within postcolonial states. However, although a “postcolonial turn” could be observed in English-language human and, particularly, development geography in the 1990s, criticism is still directed at the lack of a postcolonial (development) geography and the prevalence of Western-centric approaches (ibid.:296; McEwan, 2009:332). In German-language geography, it was mainly political and new cultural geography which took up postcolonialistic concepts; it is only recently that such approaches have begun to enter development geography (cf. Neuburger and Schmitt, 2012:121).

Addressing matters like identity and ethnicity, and concerning processes of “systematic exploitation and Othering of ethnically or spatially distinct populations in postcolonial states” (Radcliffe, 2005:295) – which Scott (2009:3) refers to as “internal colonialism” – postcolonialism presents a useful approach for indigenous studies. In most Latin American countries, a majority population of European origin has been able to impose its sociocultural system on a subjugated indigenous population. According to Gramsci (2000b), the respective elite implemented hegemony on both the basis of “spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life” and the state’s “coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’” (ibid.:306–307). Thus, it was possible to “shape, directly or indirectly, the

cognitive and effective structures whereby men perceive and evaluate problematic social reality” (Femia, 1975:31, cited in Arnold, 1993:242), particularly through the institutions of civil society.

Scott (1985), however, argues that subordinate classes are by no means completely controlled by the elite ideology but that they are very well able to perceive the existing social order as unjust (ibid.:318–322). Based on Williams (1977), Gordillo (2002) similarly states that a hegemonic order is highly contested and unstable, and therefore has to be constantly reproduced. Yet it is the “fields of ideological and cultural domination” (ibid.:264) where resistance takes place, thus determining the constraints which shape the diverse forms of struggle. This struggle for and against hegemony is always located in space, thereby contributing to the production of “localities as unstable political arenas” (ibid.). Corresponding to Pile (1997), as power is everywhere, geographies of resistance, its origins and demands are accordingly multifaceted. At the same time, resistance is also about facing tensions and opposition among the subordinated; it is about engaging “the colonized spaces of people’s inner worlds” (ibid.:17).

Based on his research among Malayan peasants, Scott (1985) emphasizes the role of everyday resistance to hegemony, referring to behavioral patterns such as “dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander” (ibid.:29). Oppressive power structures or the scarcity of resources often makes these more covert forms of resistance appear to be the most promising. In his study about indigenous identity processes in Argentina, Vázquez (2000) similarly highlights this struggle in everyday life. What he calls “ethnic resistance” is not an entire rejection of hegemonic elements, but also comprises adaptation as a means to assure the continuing functionality of indigenous cultural elements. Through this maintenance of difference, “spaces of resistance” can be created (ibid.:164–166). Yet those patterns of everyday resistance are not directed toward abstract aims such as a counter-hegemonic project – a term which comprises consensus building across diverse social groups with the strategic aim of subverting the hegemonic historic bloc and establishing a new order (Mouffe, 2007:27; Carroll, 2006:19–20). A different concept, termed anti-hegemony, seems to be better suited, as it is skeptical toward the possibility of forming a comprehensive counter-hegemonic unity and rejects the idea of hegemony as a whole (cf. Day, 2005). Rather, anti-hegemonic actions are more specifically addressed toward “the needs of those in the immediate community” and intend to create “an autonomous yet inherently dynamic and self-referential cultural environment” (Rowe, 2008:6).

As Sissons (2005) points out, for indigenous people, the constant struggle for social and cultural persistence against the hegemonic other forms an integral part of their self-conception (ibid.:13). According to Clifford (2006), this struggle is essentially political:

Communities can and must reconfigure themselves, drawing selectively on remembered pasts. [...] They are about finding ways to exist in a multiplex modernity, but with a difference, a difference derived from cultural tradition, from landedness, and from ongoing histories of displacement (ibid.:182–183).

In Argentina, indigenous public resistance has increased especially over the last two decades as a response to a history of politics which, according to Gordillo and Hirsch (2010), have largely aimed at their invisibilization. Demanding their rights or territories, they emphasize an indigenous identity and thus challenge the image of a white Argentina of European decent (ibid.:16, 32). Due to the late, yet intense, implementation of *criollo* hegemony, the situation of indigenous people in the Argentine Chaco has always been a special one. The consequential sociocultural transformation of Toba communities attracted great anthropological interest, notably since the second half of the 20th century. Recent literature addresses the emergence of a complex system of leadership among the Toba (cf. Miller, 2008; Wright, 2008b) or the production of places due to Toba subjectivities – e.g., the *monte* as a space of resilience and autonomy (Gordillo, 2002) or as a source of indigeneity (Vivaldi, 2010) – which constitute a significant role regarding subtle forms of indigenous resistance.

3 The “modernization” of the community

The colonization of the Argentine Chaco, which took place from about the late 19th century and, in the case of Clorinda, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, cannot merely be considered as a colonization of space. Instead, and according to Wright (2003a), a rather subtle mechanism enabled the incorporation into the capitalistic system and the implementation of *criollo* hegemony, namely the colonization of the word and the body. According to the principles of internal colonialism (cf. Scott, 2009:12–13), this complex process was promoted by *criollo* political authorities and missionaries and comprised “all areas of indigenous sociocultural expression [...] for directing them to the correct world order according to the European and mercantilist vision of the things” (Wright, 2003a:139). Using the example of the Toba community in Clorinda, this chapter seeks to explain and analyze this multilayered process and its direct implications on the Toba’s self-perception and everyday understanding.

The eastern Argentine Chaco is a very fertile region and therefore very well suited for the promotion of agricultural exploitation, which should secure the expansion of national capitalism (Iñigo Carrera, 1983:10). Densely covered by forest, from the colonizers’ perspective these were “savage” areas characterized by the “absence of state control, capitalism and civilization” (Gordillo and Hirsch, 2010:15). It was

a “desert”, the “final frontier”, which had to be expanded (Wright, 2008a:83). Hence, the privatization and titling of the territory effectively was a “domestication of the space” (ibid.:145), a creation of “a landscape and demography most suitable for state-making” (Scott, 2009:336). In Clorinda, it was the construction of Route 11 which constituted the final step toward the ultimate opening and titling of the region. It was foreseen to cross the Toba settlement of that time on elevated ground. Since they had no documents which proved their possession of the land, they constituted a mere obstacle which could be removed. Their resettlement to the lower and flood-prone present quarter at the outskirts of the city was virtually a process of invisibilization. Though located next to the busy Route 11, there was never a sign erected to indicate the existence of a *barrio toba*. The Toba’s existence was supposed to stay beyond the national consciousness (cf. Gordillo and Hirsch, 2010:15–16). Furthermore, the creation of a *barrio toba* represented a way to control them by limiting their space and regularizing their property situation, thus making the continuation of the *marisca* impossible.

The resettlement involved another process, namely the colonization of the word. In the new system, the oral tradition of the Toba had lost its validity. Instead, the Toba realized the value of the written word and the necessity of possessing valid documents in order to be “well legalized” (J. Gz., 09/2011¹). In the 1970s, a school was built which conveyed Western rationalist and supposedly objectivist knowledge and taught Spanish as the valid – and comprehensible – language. Once more demonstrating to the Toba their alleged backwardness in all areas of civilization, it was set against the orally conveyed educational system of the Toba, which was practice-oriented toward everyday duties and rooted in spirituality in the sense that knowledge acquisition was ascribed to dreams and spiritual contact. Indeed, the introduction of the Western educational system constitutes “one major instrument of the conquest of western cultural hegemony” (Bishop, 2006:81). As language and education are decisive carriers of culture and crucial in the process of meaning construction, their promotion through public institutions or the media enables the elite to shape the way the people “think about and make sense of the world” (Ives, 2004:5).

In the mid-20th century, North American Pentecostal missionaries began their work among the Toba communities in north Argentina. As the Pentecostal faith contains similarly strong spiritual elements to the old Toba faith – for example direct relations with spiritual powers or healing processions with conditions of ecstatic trance (Miller, 1979:116) – and as the missionaries helped the Toba to get identity cards and provided protection from the authorities, they were met with quite a positive response. The missionaries even initiated the foundation of the Toba’s own church, the Iglesia Evangélica Unida (IEU), and in the early 1960s they translated the Bible

¹For reasons of anonymization all interviewees are cited with their initials. All interviews were conducted by the author.

into the Toba language (Miller, 2008:161). The official permission the Toba received for the foundation of the IEU, together with the written Bible in their own language, contrasted with the old times of oral conveyance, so that it is even stated by Toba that “there was no religion” in those days (L. G., 02/2010).

The great success in converting the Toba enabled the Pentecostals to exercise influence over the Toba’s sociocultural system. As the indigenous faith and all customs connected with it were regarded as primitive and sinful and an obstacle to civilization and Christianity – especially those containing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco or “extramarital” sexual contacts like the important, wedding-like Nmi dance (Citro, 2010:370–372) – they were consequently forbidden. Nowadays, such practices no longer seem to exist in the *barrio*: “It stays there in the *campo*” (S. C., 10/2011). Hence, the Christian doctrine conveyed by the missionaries was not merely spiritual but was directed toward the “domestication” of the indigenous body. The “renewal”, as some Toba described the conversion to the *evangelio* – the common term used for the religion practiced within the IEU – is for the Toba thus primarily associated with a physical change: the person concerned would “already quit smoking, drinking, all this” (D. N., 10/2011). Along with the implementation of Western medicine, a new concept of the body was thus implemented and constituted a basis upon which the colonizers could build their authority, legitimacy and control (cf. Arnold, 1993:291). It was set against indigenous concepts epitomized by shamanism – a practice resolutely fought against by the missionaries (Miller, 1979:115–116). However, as will be shown later, Western medicine and the fight against shamanism have been met with a somewhat lower level of acceptance by the Toba.

Conducted by political authorities and those of civil society – including missionaries, teachers, doctors, etc. – and rooted in both coercion and consent, this complex colonization process corresponds to Gramsci’s (2000b) idea of a successful implementation of hegemony (ibid.:306–307). Among the Toba, this process provoked a “reinterpretation of the own history in terms of privation” (Wright, 2008b:142). This becomes obvious in interviewee statements like “at this time we had nothing” or “in the past it was savage”. With no houses, no clothes and no shoes they were exposed to wild nature. Both the older interviewees who had once relied on it and the younger interviewees described the *marisca* as a difficult and dangerous undertaking. Furthermore, many considered it as inferior to modern paid work under a *criollo* patron: “Previously they didn’t know how to work. Only hunting, nothing more” (A. C., 10/2011). Accordingly, Toba interviewees frequently stated that “with the *criollos* it improved”. Today they have institutions like a school and a health center and houses which keep the rain out. They have been converted to “human beings” with legal rights and identity cards. They are “modernized”. This frequently mentioned “modern life” is directly associated with the *barrio*. Indeed, the *criollo*

ideologies have clearly shaped the Toba’s perception of *barrio* and *campo* as two opposing spaces. *Barrio* is not just the quarter they live in but a symbol for this “modernity” and “civilization”, for the present and the future. It is set against the *campo*, where people’s lives still rely on the *marisca* and where there is often a lack of medical care and connections to gas, electricity or main water supply. The *campo* thus represents the past and is accordingly associated with backwardness and poor, dangerous and even primitive living conditions (own interviews 2010/2011).

4 The drawback of “modernization”

Contradictions and conflicts appear strongly if one takes a closer look at the situation of the Toba in the *barrio*. The Toba put their confidence in the new authorities and institutions who pronounced their traditional methods invalid and worthless. The *criollo* authorities took on responsibility for and control over the Toba in respect of political leadership, education and health care – all crucial areas regarding self-determination. The resulting heteronomy can be found to a varying extent on different levels of the Toba’s life and is manifested in a number of conflicts.

The original system of leadership among the Toba was not based on authority in the sense of exercising power but on successful deeds which produced benefits for the community and increased the prestige of the respective leader (Braunstein, 2008:22–24). Consequently, if the leader could not legitimize his position, he would no longer be accepted (Miller, 1979:27–28). The correspondingly high expectations the Toba had of the new system and the new authorities were in many respects not fulfilled. This is shown by numerous accusations directed mainly toward the political authorities. As they do not really “know” the community in the sense of going from door to door and talking to the people, they do not “care” about them. Instead, the authorities “handle” them, denying them any access to the *monte* and thus locking them in. For an indigenous person the municipality shows “closed doors”, not admitting them to talk to the mayor. Many interviewees mentioned that the abstract school education in Spanish would be incomprehensible for many pupils, thus leading to the high school-dropout rate. Moreover, the politicians have offered them no help regarding the financing of their education, with the aim of keeping them uninfluential: “They are afraid that an aborigine would be a principal at the school, that we get to that height” (J. G., 09/2011). Finally, politicians have failed to give them jobs. Promises frequently made by the politicians during election campaigns, particularly concerning infrastructural improvements, have for the most part never been fulfilled (own interviews 2010, 2011). These crucial experiences fostered the Toba’s opinion of politicians’ behavior toward them as despising and explicitly discriminating. Accordingly, politicians are equated with

liars: “So the politics came and I began to put confidence in the politics. But it’s all lies what they say” (S. Cr., 02/2010).

Those tensions mentioned by every Toba interviewee are reproduced inside the community in terms of political and intergenerational conflicts. According to the statement that politics entering the *barrio* immediately “sow bad seed” (J. Gz., 09/2011), the attempts of the different candidates to attract indigenous voters gradually created a political division within the community, thus significantly changing its social structure. The *cacique* is the community’s official political representative – a political category originally used by Caribbean indigenous groups and later imposed on the entire Latin American autochthonous population by the Europeans, thus radically simplifying the once very complex social system of the respective communities (Braunstein, 2008:5). According to several interviewees, the present *cacique* fails to accomplish his role. As he simultaneously works for a Peronist political movement in the municipality, he has been “bought” by the politicians. Thus, many Toba complained that he only takes care of his political friends and distributes the benefits he gets exclusively among them. Contradicting traditional values of social solidarity, there are nowadays Toba of opposing political camps who do not talk to or greet one another and even clash in violent confrontations, which was observed several times. Older interviewees complained about the younger generations who began to turn their back on the Toba culture, favoring modern paid work over Toba handicraft, or simply adopting individualistic behavior. Furthermore, the younger generations were several times accused of having lost their respect toward the elders: they no longer listen, they hide from their parents and they are beginning to consume alcohol, tobacco or marijuana at the age of eight or nine (own interviews 2010, 2011).

5 Appropriating “modernization”

The sociocultural transformation of the Toba community created a seemingly contradictory conception of modernity. This is reflected in an ambivalent relation toward the *barrio* and the *campo* – symbolizing the present and the past – which was similarly detected in other studies among Toba communities (cf. Gordillo, 2002; Wright, 2008b; Vivaldi, 2010). Indeed, the capitalist hegemonic system infiltrated these spaces and the Toba’s perception of them with a certain ideology, thus facilitating their acceptance of the new situation and hence the consolidation of the uneven power relations, as analyzed in Sect. 3. According to this Western ideology, living in houses, buying food from the supermarket, doing some modern paid work, sending their children to school, et cetera, might be perceived as the good, “modern” life. However, gaps between these promises and a deeply conflictive reality have, among many Toba, brought to light the desire for a social situation as it existed in the past or still does in many communities at the *campo*. These contradictions have all

along triggered different forms of resistance among the Toba, which can be characterized as efforts to create a difference to the hegemonic “other” and thus regain self-determination.

Resistance does not need to express itself in an open, public form. In fact, most resistance patterns of the Toba can be found in their everyday behavior. Indeed, the very refusal to participate in the community’s political life or undertake “modern” paid work, the dedication to artisan craftwork, and the high rate of school dropouts or class absences constitute a form of resistance to ideological foundations of Western culture that has to be taken into account. In several interviews and in everyday conversations, verbal resistance was expressed against the “white liars” – the *criollo* politicians – and “the politics” in general (cf. Sect. 4). These resistance discourses sometimes turn into open confrontation. During the 2011 elections, for example, political representatives, who visited the *barrio* and made promises about infrastructural projects, were met with open rejection by some Toba, expressed by words or mere body language. Verbal resistance might be expressed in their indigenous language, which possesses a practical protective function as there are virtually no *criollos* who are able to understand it (S. C., 10/2011). It is not just used as a manner of communication but has a significant symbolic and identifying role: “It means not losing the customs. It means not totally losing the identity or not to ... to kill everything that we still continue to be” (L. G., 09/2011). The sociocultural transformation led to a break with the Toba’s traditional cognitive schemes and created new linguistic challenges. To assure the continuing functionality and existence of the language, the Toba had to modify their linguistic reference system by including semantic extensions and also accepting Spanish elements. This “linguistic resistance” (Vázquez, 2000:165–166) against the consequential implementation of Spanish as the official language creates a “space of resistance” (ibid.:125) to the *criollo* society.

The IEU epitomizes a decisive frame for the Toba’s resistance. The church is usually an important pillar of the “‘ideological sector’ of society” controlled by the hegemonic elite (Scott, 1985:39). However, by achieving the legal basis for their church through the use of hegemonic instruments, the Toba now possess the ability to shape their proper version of Christianity. This important spiritual and sociocultural center thus serves as a crucial space of self-determination and of resistance to the hegemonic other. Typical healing processions show obvious parallels to shamanic practices (cf. Citro, 2010:369). Old indigenous circular dances seem to reappear during dancing ceremonies, although performed with Spanish texts (Y. D., 10/2011). In a syncretic process, spiritual indigenous and Christian elements have created the *evangelio*. Indeed, it is difficult to assess whether this *evangelio* is an indigenous reinterpretation of Pentecostalism or rather “an ideological-conceptual redefinition of indigenous religion using formal Christian traits” (Wright, 2003b:258; cf. Miller, 1979:116).

This fusion of indigenous and Christian elements is reproduced within their perception of the body. It could be observed that a family, after having consulted a Western doctor, turns to a *señora* in the *campo* with their seriously sick relative because “sometimes the medicine is not sufficient and there is need of a person who can really heal” (L. G., 10/2011). As other conversations with Toba revealed, even among the most faithful churchgoers, the consultation of a shaman is not a rarity. Indeed, the Toba have always been reluctant to adopt Western medicine. Instead of making use of several free services offered by the quarter’s health center – which the director of the health center interpreted as “a lack of consciousness” and “a very different ideology” (D. D., 03/2010) – several Toba interviewees who had expressed negative associations toward the *marisca* in other parts of the interviews discussed their preference for the healing effects of various types of wild animal fat or medicinal herbs, although the emblematic “wire fence” around the *monte* makes those products difficult to access. Not without pride, a 60-year-old man talked about how he fell ill with diabetes and cured himself, not with the help of the medicine the doctor had prescribed him, but with the help of a particular herb his father once told him to use for blood diseases. Yet, in order to keep the story quiet, he told the doctor that he had taken the medicine (S. C., 10/2011). In this sense, many former indigenous elements continue to exist under the guise of the IEU or the use of Western medicine. Contradicting the frequent statement “the old has finished”, this constitutes a crucial form of resistance to the Western perception of the body.

Agreeing with Scott (1985), those acts of everyday resistance do not explicitly question the existing hegemonic order. Though challenging *criollo* ideologies, the existence of the political system, a school or even *criollo* authorities is taken for granted. Yet, as a response to social wrongs inside this order (cf. *ibid.*:336), resistance plays a crucial role in shaping an identity based on differences to the hegemonic “other”. Unlike Scott’s case study of Malayan peasants directly dominated by landlords, the Toba, however, do not have a concrete opponent who represents the hegemon, but a rather abstract target. Accordingly, their anger is directed against “the politicians” or even against parts of the younger generations which are beginning to identify increasingly with hegemonic ideologies. Yet those intergenerational or political conflicts inside the community bring about consequences for the efficacy of resistance. Concerning the IEU, for example, effects of resistance are strongly diminished due to the existence of two churches according to the Toba’s political separation. It only seems logical that there are two quarter’s commissions, representing two political voices. However, the following example shows how a successful act of public resistance – though weakening the opposed political fraction – constitutes an important step to motivate and unite the community in joint efforts of resistance.

In July and August 2010, parallel to similar actions by the nearby Primavera community and the *barrio toba* of Ciudad de Formosa, a large part of the Toba community of Clorinda organized a roadblock of the important Route 11. It lasted for 16 days and nights and in the end turned out to be successful. The Toba demanded the fulfillment of a promise made by the election candidate and later mayor of 2003 concerning the construction of 80 houses, 55 of which had yet to be built. Furthermore, the demands comprised the rebuilding of the derelict *barrio*’s school and their own employment in these construction works. It was a response to the regular breach of promises or, in other words, “abandonment” by the politicians (A. C., 10/2010). The success of the roadblock can be traced back to the careful preparation with the other communities, to the foundation of a quarter’s commission, which – though opposed to the *cacique*’s commission – ensured them political attention, and finally to the compilation of a written catalogue of demands. These local actions were intertwined with two former important occasions: first, a journey made by A. C. and other Toba representatives to Buenos Aires in April 2010 to meet with the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs and governmental representatives and, second, his participation in a giant march to Buenos Aires of 60 000 indigenous people of different ethnic groups from all over the country, which was organized due to the celebrations of the national bicentenary and demanded the fulfillment of legally attributed indigenous rights (Página 12, 13 May 2010). During the roadblock, the Toba used self-designations like “sons of the earth” or “natives”, thus reinforcing their demands by making use of a postcolonial vocabulary which has become popular among *criollo* politicians but, according to several interviewees, never entails corresponding action. Finally, after receiving a positive response, they insisted on a written document recording the assurances.

The entire roadblock is a perfect example of public, symbolic resistance which succeeded by making use of hegemonic instruments. As everyday forms of resistance, as well as constant attempts to address politicians at the municipality in regard to this open promise, did not lead to corresponding reactions, they had to enter the public stage (cf. Scott, 1985:37). This step, in turn, appeared to be more promising by then due to the careful preparation and the preceding occurrences in Buenos Aires. They applied a strategy which, as Griffiths (2006) expresses it, “menace[s] the authority of the dominant culture precisely in so far as it ‘mimics’ and subverts it” (*ibid.*:168). According to Ashcroft (2006), it was an “act of self-assertion involved in using the language of the colonizer” (*ibid.*:278) for their own means. It was a late but radical response to the resettlement about 40 years ago, which had signified their invisibilization. This time equipped with legal passports and written demands and insisting on their legal rights, they returned to the location of their original settlement. It was an act of visibilization:

They say that we are *indios*, that we are shy. But now everything has changed. With the roadblock our image appeared. That there are aboriginals here, at our border of our Argentine Republic (A. C., 10/2011).

Demonstrating their existence through this highly symbolic return, the Toba made use of their body as a political resource. Knowing how to employ political and bureaucratic instruments in order to articulate and to be understood publicly, they could not simply be relocated and ignored this time. The political and media attention which was granted to them (e.g., *Diario La Mañana*, 29 July 2010) was an important step toward obtaining space in the public sphere, space in the sense of public awareness of their existence and in the sense of political participation. In order to gain this publicity, they furthermore made use of the strategically important location of Clorinda at the international border with Paraguay and of Route 11 as an important inter-American transport axis. Thus, they inverted their peripheral and marginal location from a national perspective into political capital. Moreover, their border location gained symbolical value from the inter-American indigenous movement – an important aspect repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees. To underline their newly gained place on the map (cf. Pile, 1997:30), they planned to rename the *barrio toba* to *barrio de los Qom-Pi* – *Qom* being their native name and *Qom-Pi* signifying roughly “there are a lot of aboriginals”. Accordingly, the school shall be renamed *Escuela Qom*. Another idea was the installation of a road sign at the point where Route 11 passes the barrio:

The tourists who pass here day by day [...]. They will realize that we are here. Let's say that we are alive, still alive (A. C., 10/2011).

In fact, the success made them “seem recently to be born again” (ibid.).

6 Conclusions

Through a complex process of internal colonization, the *criollo* society was able to implement hegemony and consolidate it by a mixture of consensus and constraint (cf. Gramsci, 1971). In order to understand this process and its implications, the article has adopted a postcolonial perspective, drawing on the concept of the colonization of space, the word and the body (Wright, 2003a; cf. Arnold, 1993). This framework helped to reveal the extent to which hegemonic worldviews have infiltrated into the Toba's self-perception and their everyday understanding. Thus, the study slightly contradicts Scott's (1985) analysis of peasant resistance as it indeed shows the penetration of *criollo* ideology among the Toba (cf. ibid.:318–322). However, in contrast to Gramsci's assumption of total ideological control by the elite (cf.

ibid.; Gramsci, 2000a:196–199), this hegemony is not incontestable and the Toba are by no means passively subjugated to it. Contradictions and conflicts which result from the gaps between the hegemony's promises and the Toba's perceived reality have created a concept of modernity which is epitomized by an ambivalent construction of *barrio* and *campo*. It is both a product of the colonization process and a basis for a complex and manifold story of visible and covert resistance by the Toba.

Indeed, the Toba consciously utilize hegemonic mechanisms to direct them against its promoters, be that the political class or institutions of civil society, thus subverting hegemonic principles with its own weapons. Through this process of appropriating “modernization” and internalizing its logic, the Toba seek “to create new meanings out of imposed meanings, to re-work and divert space to other ends” (Pile, 1997:16) and constantly attempt to reclaim parts of their colonized space, bodies and words. From a micro-perspective, this process can be interpreted as an ensemble of anti-hegemonic actions, as they – besides addressing everyday needs – show at first glance more parallels to an identity project in terms of the “articulation of difference” (Escobar, 2008:208) than to a counter-hegemonic project which aims to transform the system by consensus building across diverse social groups (Mouffe, 2007:27; Carroll, 2006:19–20).

However, with the recent political activities the story of resistance may have taken a new path. The tangible fruits of success of the roadblock reveal the possibilities of joint resistance. Indeed, the statement that the Toba “seem recently to be born again” hints not only at the highly increased public and media awareness but also at the advance of the decolonization process up to the Toba's minds and the community's “inner worlds” (Pile, 1997:17) characterized by conflicts. From a macro-perspective, the anti-hegemonic actions of the Toba community of Clorinda – whether everyday and more covert resistance or open, symbolic resistance like the roadblock – constitute one piece of a puzzle which forms a nationwide indigenous movement, and which is in turn intertwined with the inter-American indigenous movement. It remains to be seen whether this anti-hegemonic struggle of the Toba, along with that of other communities, will shift them from the Argentine Republic's margins into the center of an international counter-hegemonic project.

This case study of an indigenous community demonstrates the multiplicity of understandings of social reality and resistance, which are often a product of deep-rooted colonial and uneven power structures in the society and clearly at odds with Western dichotomies of traditional spirituality and Christian enlightenment or cultural continuity and cultural change (cf. Moran, 2011:363). These alternative modernities have begun to enter and infiltrate civil society and to exert a growing influence on the politics of many countries of the global south, especially those with indigenous populations. Indeed, it seems crucial that those perspectives and the increasing influence of the diverse movements and actions

which gradually challenge and subvert hegemonic perspectives should be further integrated into the scope of development geography.

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