

INTRODUCTION

PERHAPS I WAS OVERSTEPPING MY BOUNDS. It was obvious that Roberto and Carmen—two of my long-term acquaintances in Villa Topocalma, a low-income neighborhood on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile—could use the forty thousand pesos (about US \$750) I was thinking of giving them. They faced expenses they could hardly afford and obligations to extended family members that would be nearly impossible for them to meet. Two of their nephews had recently been arrested and accused of forcing supermarket cashiers to empty their registers at knifepoint. When Carmen told me about this, she had asked, with tears in her eyes, “How could they do such a thing? They’ve left their families alone, with nothing.”

Following the arrests, Carmen and Roberto had been busy, fulfilling the reciprocal ties of kinship and *compadrazgo* (“fictive kinship”) that Larissa Lomnitz (1977), in a now classic study, describes as a key social practice of the unemployed and underemployed in Latin America’s urban environment.¹ Roberto had met almost daily with three of his siblings, including the father of the two arrested young men. From what Roberto told me, their conversations were often heated, as the siblings were angry with their circumstances, frustrated by their obligations to each other, and uncertain about how to proceed. They did not trust the competence of the public defender who had been assigned to the case. But could they afford a lawyer who would make a difference?

Doing so would be a major financial strain, as the siblings would split the costs of the initial US \$2,000 that they would need to hire someone of quality. In order to pay his share, one of Roberto’s brothers, an itinerant salesman who sold fruits and vegetables, was considering selling his horse, an animal he depended on in order to cart around his merchandise. For his part, Roberto

was also going to raise money by selling off parts of his livelihood. A small storeowner, Roberto sold cigarettes, soft drinks, candy, and such staples as bread, cheese, and milk out of his home. He also earned money from two video arcade games that he owned and neighborhood children used. Roberto was planning to sell at least one of the games and buy less merchandise in the coming months. This would force Roberto and Carmen into further debt and make more difficult the care of their three children, Roberto's father, and a grandchild, all of whom lived in their home. From what I could gather, they had discussed whether or not making these sacrifices was the appropriate thing to do. In the end, however, the importance of supporting kin won the day: the extended family mobilized to help the two brothers and their families.

Carmen began to invite her nephews' families over for meals more frequently. She had already been doing this at times, helping out because the two brothers had been unemployed before their arrests, a situation that had led to considerable strain inside their homes. One of the brothers had recently lost his job, in early 2009, at a small shoe factory, a casualty of the layoffs and downsizing that had taken place in Chile in the wake of the 2008, US-centered global financial crisis. At the time, an insecure, volatile, and poorly remunerated job market for low-income, urban workers in Chile had become even bleaker.²

As part of her support for the two nephews' wives, Carmen accompanied them on their first visit to prison. What Carmen had seen there horrified her. She later told me of the bruises and lacerations that the elder brother had on his face: one eye had been swollen shut and his upper lip was cut open and puffed out. While the younger brother looked better, he had bruised ribs and had received a blow in the back of the head. In the legal proceedings, it would be an important issue to determine whether or not the guards and the police had acted improperly and perhaps illegally in detaining the two brothers. There was no doubt, however, that they had been violent, as they had beaten the brothers with batons and forced them to the ground.

For Roberto and Carmen, the beatings confirmed their sense that the *pacos*, a somewhat disparaging term for police officers, tended to be corrupt and could act with impunity, a feeling shared by many of their neighbors. Police patrols rarely came around this part of the city, part of an uneven provision of urban services. When the police did come, they tended to take part in larger-scale raids in search of drugs, stolen goods, or weapons. Residents generally indicated that such raids were intimidating and marked by petty forms of corruption. Most felt a sense of impotence in facing the criminal justice system. Such skepticism had led Roberto and Carmen to have little hope in the fate of their nephews.

For my part, giving the money to Roberto and Carmen would not be too

much of a sacrifice. I had, in fact, spent more than what I was thinking of offering them in order to come to Santiago for a six-week follow-up on my long-term research. My university was even going to reimburse me for the trip, and it paid me an annual salary equal to what Roberto (the primary breadwinner in the family) might perhaps earn in twelve years.

Still, I hesitated. As an ethnographer and historian, I took seriously the need to be engaged in the lives of those I studied. Yet I was also a professional from the outside whose offer of money would introduce potentially troubling dynamics to my relationship with Roberto and Carmen. The money could be a financial help for them in a time of family crisis, but it could also, I feared, be a slap in the face. Each had a strong sense of dignity and self-respect, both of which could be offended by an offer of money, especially if word of it got out to friends and neighbors. In attempting to act on the specific circumstances that had strained their finances and familial ties, I was intruding, to a greater or lesser degree, in the intimate, emotional, and vitally important spaces of Roberto and Carmen's private home lives. Was giving the money the appropriate thing to do?

Born from the immediacy of participant observation—one of the varied methodologies from anthropology and history that I adopted in undertaking this study—this question forced me to confront some of the central dynamics that give the themes I explore in this book their power and force. In modern urban societies such as Chile, developing the home and respecting its boundaries of privacy and propriety are ongoing tasks of enormous productivity. Such phenomena are a crucial part of everyday practices and expectations, while also unfolding in an at times uneasy relationship with labor regimes, inequitable social and spatial developments, and the citizenship dynamics of the state. Homes are often under great pressure, especially for low-income groups. Homes can be insecure and a threat to sensibilities of status, belonging, and dignity. A critical pressure point in the making of home is the extent to which its occupants can consider home and many of the relations that go into developing it secure, desirable, and socially appropriate.

While this pressure point is an ongoing, private concern, it invariably has consequences for the public sphere, if under very different circumstances and frameworks. In this book, I explore how certain practices and expectations of propriety have oriented the political field of housing since the mid-twentieth century among low-income urban citizens in Santiago (whom I'll call *pobladores*, following the Chilean nomenclature). During this period, *pobladores* have taken part in combative forms of housing activism. This includes hundreds of well-organized land seizures, the bulk of which took place during an era of reform and revolution from 1967 to 1973. Over the course of these six

years, some 350,000 pobladores—about 14 percent of the city’s population at the time—seized land in Santiago (see table 3.1). Through these seizures, residents and activists established hundreds of neighborhoods that still exist. The central government has often harshly repressed this kind of mobilization, especially during Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973–1990). At the same time, it has also attempted to implement ambitious low-income housing programs, generally in conjunction with transnational development bureaucracies. (The notable exception to this trend, however, was in the first six years of the dictatorship.)

Both these state programs and the housing activism of citizens have helped to bring about a stunning transformation in the home lives of the urban poor in Santiago from the 1950s to the 2000s. During this period, the vast majority of the city’s low-income residents have come to live in legally sanctioned homes with such infrastructure services as potable water, electricity, and plumbing. In the 1950s and 1960s, most low-income residents in Santiago lived in either ramshackle settlements without legal sanction or in run-down tenement rental units. Today they generally occupy homes with property titles in well-established neighborhoods. This transformation has helped give Chile a rate of homeownership that is relatively high internationally, especially compared to the rest of Latin America and the global South (see Angel 2000, 328 and 373; UN Habitat 2005, 66; Ronald and Elsinga 2012). Illegal housing lots and squatter settlements have declined significantly. Between 1960 and 2002, the last year for which, as of this writing, rough statistics are available, the percentage of households in Santiago that have property titles rose from 70 to more than 95 percent.³

A highly charged, public politics has made this change possible, in which citizen activism and state policies around urban housing have been front and center. This politics has taken place, however, in a dynamic, often tense interrelationship with the making of the private domain of the home, in which evolving expectations about its minimally acceptable constitution carry great weight.⁴ Yet this interrelationship is often lost within the categories and debates that frame the public politics surrounding housing programs and urban settlement. State housing policies and public debates about them generally frame questions of housing development in restricted ways.⁵ They might focus, for example, on measurements of the housing stock, the provision of housing subsidies, the role of the state in enforcing private property laws, the regulation of real estate markets, legal codes and enforcement, and the rights and responsibilities of homeowners and citizens. As important as these issues are, the manner in which they are framed misses or all too easily glosses over how, in Clara Han’s (2012) term, a “weave” of social and spatial relations has

inescapable force in the making of home.⁶ Such framings cannot adequately account for home's complexity, nor can they practically recognize home's centrality to the making of personhood and status.⁷

In an effort to foreground the multifaceted relationships, practices, and expectations that go into the making of the home, I begin this book in its often unsettled spaces. I do so even if my central empirical focus in this study is on the public, political field of housing, including its citizenship rights, forms of social activism, ideological visions, and the policies and regulations of the state. In tracking the historical evolution of the politics of low-income housing, I seek to constantly recognize how home is a central site of social reproduction and distinction. I specifically attempt to account for the troubled interrelationship between, on the one hand, the formation of the state and the public sphere and, on the other, the making of home for low-income city residents. For these residents, as with members of other socioeconomic groups, the private sphere of the home has subtle yet also potent and far-reaching boundaries. Ultimately, the issue of how to have proper respect for the integrity of the home is of paramount importance for both private lives and public policies.

In exploring the evolution of low-income housing in Santiago from the mid-twentieth century through the 2000s, I argue that expectations of a home considered appropriate have played a significant role in governance and in the evolution of low-income housing in Santiago. The question of what a proper home life is has been important in state institutions and international development organizations. It has animated the formation of social movements and claims involving the rights of citizenship. In making generally successful claims that they deserve to have a minimally acceptable home life, the urban poor in Santiago have mostly become homeowners. As I explore in this book, they have done so by working within a governing order that links property with forms of propriety. I call this crucial connection the urban politics of propriety.

This politics has been enormously productive, acting as a field of force that has given shape and meaning to struggles over housing. Within this field, the urban poor have taken part in a kind of insurgency in which they have received a right to housing, a historic achievement. In creative and courageous ways, *pobladores* have challenged dominant governing practices and transformed housing conditions. Over the long term, many of them have successfully demanded that the state legalize residential homes initially established through land seizures. As they have pursued homes they would consider appropriate, they have pushed the boundaries of acceptable forms of land tenancy, social activism, and governance. As a result, the vast majority of poor urban residents have come to live in legally sanctioned homes. In radical and defiant ways,

activists in the realm of housing have changed the sociopolitical footing and left a significant imprint on land tenure in Santiago during the first decades of the new millennium.

At the same time, they have also nevertheless helped to instantiate and extend a liberal notion of citizenship, one bound to forms of property and expectations of propriety. This is an enduring, if evolving, cornerstone upon which Chilean state making has rested and within which pobladores have been enmeshed in their struggles for housing. Ultimately, mobilization on the part of pobladores in the realm of housing presents a seeming paradox. On the one hand, such activism has expanded the boundaries of citizenship and the ways in which low-income groups have accessed homeownership. On the other hand, however, it has also reinforced the power of liberal state making and its connection to private property. In taking part in struggles over housing, low-income urban groups have taken part in a process that I refer to as insurgent ownership.

In becoming insurgent homeowners, former squatters have helped to transform the state. Yet they have also been ensnared within its web. Within state relations, specific notions of poverty reduction, crisis conditions, and minimally acceptable urban homes have shaped housing activism. Squatters, moreover, have faced powerful interests, at the same time that they have had to comply with the bureaucratic requirements of the state and prove they are deserving of the benefits of citizenship. During the dictatorship and afterwards, the legacies of state violence have left an enduring impact. The dictatorship also first implemented the technocratic and pro-free market policies that came to be known as neoliberalism. In general terms, these policies, and their continued implementation in the post-dictatorship democracy, have played a problematic role in how pobladores have come to occupy their homes and act as citizens.⁸

Without question, in forging a right to housing and establishing their own homes, pobladores can rely on a crucial buffer against the harsh effects of neoliberal restructuring. Through their activism, pobladores have helped to limit neoliberalism's extensive reach.⁹ Yet low-income urban Chileans still live in an often harsh, inequitable, and insecure environment, as Roberto and Carmen's case illustrates. Ultimately, then, this history of insurgent ownership is far from a simple narrative of a triumph of activism and rebellion in the area of housing rights for the urban poor.

The Limits of Homeownership and Housing Rights

In addition to underscoring the underlying importance of the borders of propriety in home life, Roberto and Carmen's story is also a cautionary tale about the value of homeownership and becoming propertied. In their own



Figure I.1. Villa Topocalma in 2009 (photo by author).

way, Roberto and Carmen have taken part in the great transformation in land tenure that has taken place among pobladores since the 1950s. When I first came to know the two of them in 2002, they lived in a squatter settlement, or, as Chileans refer to it, a *campamento*, literally an encampment. Along with the vast majority of their neighbors, however, they moved into Villa Topocalma not long after I met them. At the time, the complex was brand new, one of the many developments of so-called social housing subsidized by the Center-Left governments that had been in power from 1990 to 2010 following Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship. In the campamento, Roberto and Carmen had lived, like most of their neighbors, in an illegal wooden shack with dirt floors. They did not have potable water in their home (they shared a spigot with others), and they had an unauthorized connection to the electrical grid. They also did not have a legal title to their home. But all of that had changed in the villa.

When Roberto, Carmen, and their neighbors moved to the new complex, media outlets covered the event and national and local municipal politicians celebrated it. For these observers, the move was an example of how state programs that razed squatter settlements and developed subsidized housing could contribute to the “eradication of extreme poverty,” a term used to describe property titling and campamento removal programs since the early years of the dictatorship. The use of the term has had important consequences for how Chileans have debated and implemented policies in low-income housing and urban development.

Among certain powerful observers, including the influential Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto and transnational development bureaucracies

such as the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development, and the United Nations, Chile has been a model for how the provision of legally sanctioned homes is a key to better governance and poverty reduction within neoliberal policy frameworks.¹⁰ For analysts such as de Soto (1989, 2000, 2004), property titling is a way for the urban poor to have more secure forms of land tenure and to profit from the homes they have built, phenomena that will supposedly foment broader economic growth. It also permits governments to institute social housing policies cheaply, following neoliberal policy prescriptions of fiscal discipline.

As critics have pointed out, however, there are fundamental flaws in de Soto's approach. Timothy Mitchell (2005, 310) notes that de Soto's view "assumes that a world without formal property rights is anarchic, and that once the proper rules are in place, a natural spirit of self-interested endeavor will be set free." Given such problematic assumptions, studies undertaken by de Soto and his followers have suffered from both faulty methodologies and mistaken conclusions. In the Chilean case, this includes a belief that the change in property titling in Santiago is both an ultimate good and that it has occurred as a result of neoliberal policies. This perspective fails to account, however, for how past forms of housing activism have shaped present conditions, especially the role that Leftist political organizations played in sponsoring them.¹¹ Beyond these interpretive problems, de Soto does not consider the forms of dispossession, inequality, and volatility that contemporary real estate market forces entail. In furthering the spread of potentially dangerous forms of finance capital, property titling programs extend debt to the most vulnerable of populations (Elyachar 2005; Harvey 2012).

Such critiques point to important shortcomings, but they do not address how the making of home and property is also a crucial element in the formation of the state, the dynamics of citizenship, and the building of subjectivity. They also leave unexamined the extent to which social actors might aspire to own their own homes. In the Chilean case, gaining a home of one's own has also been tangled up historically with the provision of "dignified" housing, as both outside observers and beneficiaries have put it in Chile since well before the dictatorship.

Given this, it is not surprising that Roberto and Carmen had shared in the enthusiasm about moving from a squatter settlement to a subsidized apartment complex. Shortly after the move took place, Roberto indicated to me how transformative the process had been. "When I first saw the villa . . . for me it was a truly beautiful dream," he said. "I'm the proudest, most pleased man about my home; [thinking about] how we lived before, and now we have this apartment. I'm as happy as I could be with my precious house." Roberto's



Figure 1.2. “Smiles of Women,” the caption that *El Mercurio*, Chile’s newspaper of record, used to describe the above image, in which a mother and her daughters received a property title to their new apartment through a housing subsidy (*El Mercurio*, Sept. 7, 2002, c2).

pride was tied to the sense that he had earned a proper place for himself and his family, following a long struggle that included saving money and demonstrating personal discipline, both necessary steps for completing the state housing program that he and his family had been in. He had also helped to organize his neighbors, serving as the treasurer of the housing committee that represented the neighborhood to government and donor institutions. In summing up these experiences, Roberto adopted a familiar and yet very personal expression, “I have fought so hard to improve myself and my family.”

Some seven years later, after his nephews had been arrested, Roberto was still proud of having left an illegal and precarious campamento and having

moved into a well-constructed villa. He was now a homeowner, something he could not have been as a squatter. Occupying a legally sanctioned home of his own granted Roberto a certain status and greater security. He did not fear that his house might be demolished, as he had in the campamento. This gave him the confidence he needed to make longer-term plans.¹² When things had gone well, Roberto and Carmen had been able to invest in home improvements and expand their store. Yet they still lived in a context of insecurity, economic hardship, criminality, mass inequality, and social stigmatization. Developing their home was an ongoing and often precarious task. Their home could be upset by such unforeseen crises as the global recession and their nephews' arrests. Roberto and Carmen's experience thus underscores how the provision of property titles is not, by itself, a key to poverty reduction and social well-being.

Santiago's poor have come to make their homes in a generally fractured urban landscape. A dense nomenclature particular to the Chilean context has given meaning to this landscape, helping to shape identities in the city, including those of Roberto and Carmen. Not surprisingly, this nomenclature is intimately tied to the making of homes and neighborhoods. It also invariably cast a shadow over how I went about doing research and fieldwork. Before proceeding to the main narrative section of this book, in addition to a first chapter that will provide a deeper engagement with the specialized literatures that have informed my interpretations, it is crucial to have a better understanding of the terms for the places and people in the city. Foregrounding these terms further underscores the delimited ways in which governing policies and activism over urban housing have unfolded, in spite of the dramatic conflicts, rich symbolism, and sociopolitical importance that these policies and struggles have had.

Coming to Terms with Santiago's Fractured Urban Landscape

As should not be surprising for a city so integrated into the contemporary forces of global capitalism and shaped by intertwined, long-term histories of hierarchical social relations, Santiago has great divides between its wealthiest and poorest residential sectors. Chile has one of the highest rates of inequality in Latin America (itself the most inequitable region in the world). Such levels of inequality greatly increased following the implementation of neoliberal policies and have generally remained in place subsequently (see Winn 2004a and 2004c, 56). The dictatorship also implemented an aggressive slum removal program that heightened socioeconomic segregation in Santiago, a process I discuss in chapter six. Through this program, low-income populations ended up being further segregated, primarily consigned to the periphery of the city, at least to the south, north, and west.

Chileans reinforce the segregation in their cities by referring to all low-income area residents as *pobladores*. They also broadly term the neighborhoods that pobladores live in as the *poblaciones*. When used in this manner, the *poblaciones* are all of the peripheral, marginal, and low-income areas of the city. As with many labels for low-income groups generally, the term *pobladores* has at times been a source of pride, even as the weight of its negative associations is unavoidable. Throughout this book, I employ the terms *pobladores* and *poblaciones* as a general referent for the urban poor and the neighborhoods they live in, but I also attempt to show the specific, varied, and at times contested meanings that these words have had.

Yet as two terms I have already mentioned—*villa* and *campamento*—indicate, there is also a more complex lexicon at play in describing the peoples and places of low-income Santiago, in which a mosaic of socioeconomic distinctions fractures the urban landscape. Such distinctions become further refined when taking into account the historical development of these neighborhoods, in which social activism and political affiliations have provided important strands that have become interwoven in the urban tapestry. In general terms, all pobladores do share a kind of cultural identity, in which a sense of shared historical struggle, social distinction, and common experience carries weight. Yet as with any such group, this class- and place-based identity is neither entirely bounded nor devoid of internal variation and conflict. In spite of persistent myths about the singularity of a culture of poverty, urban marginality, and class identities more generally, people who live in the urban periphery are a heterogeneous group and form an integral part of broader sociospatial relations.¹³

During the thirty months' worth of research that I undertook for this book from 1999 to 2011, I sought to account for this heterogeneity. In my archival work, I cast a wide net across the entirety of Santiago in housing and urbanism, with forays into the designs, consumptive practices, and neighborhood settings of homes. These sources include media accounts, in addition to the plans, reports, debates, and legislative initiatives of government officials, from presidents, congressional representatives, ministerial bureaucrats, and mayoral representatives to social workers. I also examined hundreds of letters, requests, and applications completed by individual citizens and civic organizations seeking legal recognition, infrastructure services, and housing development for their homes and neighborhoods.

My ethnographic and oral history research was more delimited in spatial focus, even as it inevitably forced me to confront the dense network of practices and relations that constitute home in everyday life, not to mention its desires and expectations. In this research, I focused on four neighborhoods

with unique historical trajectories in Renca, a low-income municipality in the northern section of greater Santiago. (Greater Santiago is today divided into thirty-three municipalities.) This work led me into local municipal archives at the same time that I established crucial contacts with nongovernmental organizations, charities, and community organizations active in the area. My primary focus, however, was on generating a set of oral histories and on ethnographic observation. The oral histories were participatory in nature, forming the basis for a book I released in Chile in 2004, in which many, but not all, of the testimonials we produced appeared. Through multiple interviews, a process of revision, and a series of workshops, the research participants and I collaborated in developing their testimonials (see Murphy 2004a; in this book, citations of this source refer to these oral histories).

The first neighborhood in which I undertook this kind of research is Población Primero de Mayo, a neighborhood originally established through an urban land seizure on May 1, 1969, the date from which the settlement originally took its name. Residents adopted the name May Day as a deliberate statement of solidarity with international labor and the Left. The neighborhood's Leftist ties preceded even its founding, as the Chilean Communist Party provided crucial organizational support for the seizure and the subsequent establishment of the neighborhood. Following the September 11, 1973, coup that established the dictatorship, the neighborhood assumed the name Huamachuco, a reference to a pivotal 1883 battle won by Chilean military forces over their Peruvian counterparts in the War of the Pacific (1879–1883).

This abrupt name change illustrates not only the military regime's efforts to whitewash the past and celebrate the past victories of Chile's armed forces, but also how important the politics of representation has been to the urban poor and for social movements more generally. For many Leftists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, land seizures such as the one that established Primero de Mayo were a demonstration of a burgeoning "popular power." Reactionaries tended to view the seizures with a mix of disdain, fear, and opprobrium. They viewed such outbursts of activism as subversive and criminal, a danger to the existing order. No matter the interpretation, however, pobladores like the residents of Primero de Mayo who seized land formed a part of the dramatic forms of social activism that shook Chile during the Christian Democratic reformism of the late 1960s and Salvador Allende's Socialist regime from 1970 to 1973. Pobladores established hundreds of neighborhoods that are generally poblaciones today.

Beyond generally referring to a poor neighborhood, the term *población* signals a settlement that is legally established. In poblaciones, houses have property titles and such infrastructure services as potable water, electricity,



Figure 1.3. Housing in a población, 2009 (photo by author).

and plumbing. Poblaciones also have diverse forms of housing, reflective of the varied purchasing power and social resources of their residents. Such neighborhoods often have small, single-story houses that are poorly constructed and have been fashioned over the years from wood, pieces of aluminum, sheets of plastic, and perhaps cardboard or bricks. But they also have two-story houses made of cinder blocks and plaster, with patios and gardens. Most poblaciones, like Primero de Mayo, were once squatter settlements. But this is not true in every case. Many began as state-subsidized neighborhoods, usually with very small, basic forms of housing designed to be added onto.¹⁴

The second neighborhood I worked in, Población Lo Velásquez, began in this way. The neighborhood was built in the early 1980s with state-subsidized loans and funding from the Inter-American Development Bank. For some residents in Lo Velásquez, the fact that the dictatorship provided the subsidies to build their neighborhood helped cement their loyalty to Pinochet's regime. Yet other residents remained highly critical of the dictatorship, having earlier developed their solidarity with Leftist political groups. Some of this affinity for the Left, surprisingly enough, had roots in the formation of the same neighborhood. Before moving to Población Lo Velásquez, the residents of the neighborhood had lived together in a campamento that they had established through a land seizure in 1973 with the sponsorship of the Movement of the



Figure I.4. Housing in a población, 2009 (photo by author).

Revolutionary Left (the MIR), a radical socialist party formed in the 1960s. In terms of its broader political connections, Población Lo Velásquez has both radical and conservative origins, an indication of how multiple actors have supported the drive for urban property and housing, if often in conflicting and varied ways.

The third neighborhood I focus on is Campamento Lo Boza, a neighborhood that squatters established in the 1980s, but slowly over time and not through a land seizure. According to state categories since the 1950s, *campamentos* are “irregular” neighborhoods without services and property titles, a sure sign of lack of development. They are abnormal spaces that need to be cleaned up and legalized. Less technically, Chileans who don’t live in these areas often see them as places in need of assistance and charity. Many also view them warily: they are supposedly neighborhoods where violence, crime, and drug running hold sway. Historically, such visions of danger overlapped with fears of subversion and radicalism, especially in campamentos established through land seizures. In all of these conceptions, campamentos are unruly spaces in need of interdiction. They are neighborhoods without legal sanction, often with precarious housing. Chileans generally view them as inappropriate spaces for hardworking citizens, an affront to decency, fairness, and propriety.

Villas—such as Villa Topocalma, the fourth neighborhood I did fieldwork in and the only one I have given a pseudonym—are composed of apartments and row houses. Private, professional developers have built these villas and sold individual units to pobladores who have received public subsidies (a policy in place since the dictatorship). Villas have legal sanction and property titles. Most tend to have athletic fields and common spaces for children to play. In many instances, however, such spaces are of a poor quality: jungle gyms are broken down and sprayed with graffiti, concrete surfaces can be full of cracks and broken bottles, and dirt fields are often littered with rocks, uneven playing surfaces, and holes. The domestic spaces of villas can at times be quite cramped, especially when extended family members and fictive kin live there.

Yet villas are solidly built and have infrastructure services often lacking in campamentos. They thus protect residents from the elements, an important difference from campamentos and many poblaciones, where flooding and poor insulation are common. In her assessment of her home in Villa Topocalma, Carmen pointedly juxtaposed her current living conditions to the rats, mud, and leaks that she dealt with in the campamento. For many, villas also signal a higher status for their residents. When I was leaving the home of a family who lived in a villa of two-story row houses, the middle-aged mother of the family said to me as she was pointing to a población across the street, “This is a villa here. Not like over there; not like the people over there.”

On balance, then, there are hierarchical divides between campamentos, poblaciones, and villas. Yet the fact that all of these areas can be subsumed into

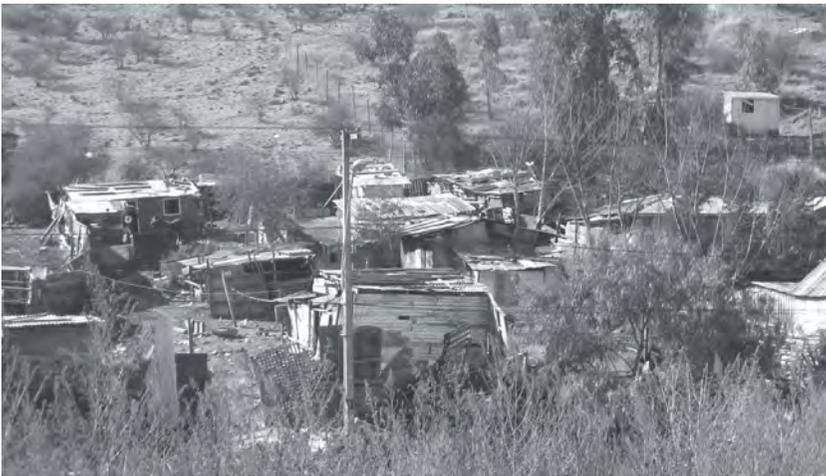


Figure 1.5. Campamento Lo Boza, 2007 (photo by author).

the general category of *poblaciones* underscores how middle- and upper-class Chileans often stigmatize all pobladores in the same way. Because of this, residents in the municipalities of Santiago where pobladores are concentrated will often lie about their addresses on job applications. It is also for this reason that it has been a challenge to market new, suburban-style middle-class housing developments in these municipalities, despite their increasing numbers. Though these developments are often at a remove from the neighborhoods of pobladores, and protected by the private security guards and the walls and gates of what Teresa Caldeira (2000) describes as “fortified enclaves,” they still suffer from stigma by association.¹⁵ Historically and into the present, outsiders have tended to condemn pobladores for living in certain areas. If this condemnation has contributed to segregation, stigmatization, and suspicion, it fuses a superficial understanding of the city’s geography with the moral worth of its residents. It has also tended to obscure political economic and class relations, assigning inherent character to surface appearance.¹⁶

Given such dynamics, villas can ultimately have a public image far removed from the promise of social integration and personal dignity that homeownership appears to offer. This has occurred despite the fact that villas have become ubiquitous in Santiago’s urban periphery, as aggressive programs to provide subsidized housing to the urban poor have, with varying degrees of intensity and success, dominated state policy since the 1960s.¹⁷ But the continued stigmatization of pobladores in villas highlights the troubling fate that can potentially await the beneficiaries of these programs.

Stigmatization and Propriety

As this review of the different categories of low-income neighborhoods and housing suggests, “territorial stigmatization”—to borrow a term from Loïc Wacquant (2007, 2008)—is an important characteristic of Santiago’s urban milieu. Such stigmatization was an ongoing source of frustration for Roberto and Carmen in their home. They ruefully expressed their disappointment at the nickname that their section of Villa Topocalma had acquired following their arrival: *la manzana podrida*, “the rotten apple.” A play on words, the term refers not only to an apple but also to a block of housing. In the assessment of many of their neighbors, Roberto and Carmen lived among a rotten group of poorly behaved and dangerous pobladores.

For Carmen and Roberto, other memories of denigration and stigmatization weighed heavily on their life histories, as they had for many pobladores whom I spoke to. Such reminiscences often related how indignities could be woven into the fabric of everyday life. In one example, a pobladora from Campamento Lo Boza described to me how the residents in her neighborhood

stained their shoes and clothes on the narrow dirt pathways of their neighborhood. In a city where concrete had long been a sign of modern urban development, having dusty and muddy attire was an embarrassment. At school, students from neighboring poblaciones and villas teased the children in the campamento about it; this had even caused fights to break out (Cecilia Castro in Murphy 2004a, 56). In another memory, Carmen and Roberto recalled that they were often ignored or met with skepticism as they and many of their neighbors organized to move out of the campamento they had lived in. Officials from the municipality of Renca were particularly harsh, often dismissing the pobladores as unorganized and suspect, treating them as “pests” (*chinches*) who were unworthy of attention.

There were also recollections of very specific instances of prejudice, ones that could add humiliation and stress to already trying circumstances. Throughout Roberto’s childhood, his father often went through long bouts of drinking during which he could be abusive. According to Roberto, if it had not been for his mother, Roberto and his siblings would have ended up on the streets as “drug addicts or criminals.” During one of her husband’s drunken spells, however, Roberto’s mother fell ill and could no longer care for the family, leaving Roberto and his six siblings to fend for themselves. In response, Roberto went out in the streets to panhandle. In Roberto’s recollections, strangers did give him money and food, sometimes with words of encouragement. But many insulted him for begging, while some threw food away that they could have given to him. Roberto also claimed that one “well-dressed man with a jacket and tie” spit in his hand as Roberto was holding it out. In assessing the experience, Roberto said simply, “he humiliated me.”

The nature of these specific memories—in addition to the broader social forces that contributed to their making—convinced me that I needed to tread carefully in offering money to Carmen and Roberto. Beyond feeling like an intrusion into an area where I did not properly belong, giving the money potentially concretized a hierarchical relationship between us and failed to recognize the sense of self-reliance and dignity that I believed Carmen and Roberto had long sought to cultivate. It would, in any case, undoubtedly change my relationship with them.

I had often listened to Roberto and Carmen as they related painful memories and circumstances. At the same time, I had socialized with them by watching television, attending family meals and gatherings, and making jokes (often about my gringo sensibilities and accent). In addressing me, Roberto tended to call me his friend. Yet I was not his *compadre*, someone who would have been counted on for discretion and help during this kind of situation. While the term *compadre* literally means “godfather,” it more generally refers to

the close bonds of trust, loyalty, and mutual dependence that tie kin together, fictive or otherwise.¹⁸ To a degree, such ties establish a basis for equality. They provide crucial buffers against the pressures and potential crises that the urban poor experience. But such relationships can also be volatile as they demand constant attention and can be strained by trying circumstances and perceived slights. In intimate, private relationships, greater obligations often accrue. I was ultimately not in a position to be Roberto's *compadre*, given that I lived a busy life in the United States, far from the circumstances in the rotten apple. Building up the reciprocal, long-term ties that are a part of *compadrazgo* was not, at that point anyway, how I could interact with Roberto.

As I continued thinking about what to do, I took my concerns to another friend of mine, a *poblador* who had originally introduced me to Carmen and Roberto and had long been a social worker and community organizer in the area. He helped me to obtain some initial, free legal advice for Roberto and Carmen. He also indicated that merely handing over money would be "very cold" and could lead to troubling ties of dependency. I had experienced this problem previously, the only other time I had explicitly helped a family financially. In that case, the family's home had been largely destroyed in a fire, a not altogether uncommon experience in *campamentos* and *poblaciones*. I had dealt mostly with the mother, who subsequently asked me on a number of occasions if she could work for my wife and me as a maid. This is a dynamic that often plays out with the numerous nannies, servants, and handymen who labor for middle- and upper-class Chileans, in which servitude, dependence, and beneficence coexist in a complicated knot.

As a way out of either creating this kind of relationship or insulting Carmen and Roberto, my friend advised me to soften the emotional impact of giving them cash by explaining that they had already helped me in my research and career. When I finally went to Roberto and Carmen's house with the money strapped around my waist in a money belt, I was ready to follow my friend's advice. Yet as I raised the possibility of giving the money to Roberto, his initial reaction surprised me. He said, "I don't want to take advantage of you." Roberto evidently had his own sense of propriety and respect, with his own concerns about how he was treating me. I told him the generosity that he and Carmen had shown me over the years had helped me to do my research, which eventually played a role in my finding an academic job. On hearing this, Roberto asked me what my salary was, a question that again caught me off guard. For Roberto's part, the answer I gave him was a surprise: American salaries are generally on an even higher scale than he had imagined.

But at least from my perspective, having this information out there made it sound less like Roberto was inappropriately taking advantage of our relation-

ship. I untucked my shirt and gave Roberto the cash I had stowed away in a money belt. It was something that I could give in order to support Roberto's familial ties and financial situation, both of which were now in crisis and had placed the development of his home in jeopardy. It was not the kind of thing I would or could do all of the time. It did not resolve the kind of debt I owe Roberto and Carmen for granting me an ethnographic window into their lives. The gift I offered them did not neatly close a tight circle of reciprocity between us in which we all benefited and came out basically even.¹⁹ Much more importantly, it was far from resolving the insecurities that Roberto, Carmen, and pobladores like them face. Upon receiving the money, Roberto quickly put it away before anyone else could see. We have not spoken of it since.

In the histories that this book explores, many residents have taken part in their own decisions—as controversial, imperfect, and as often unsatisfying as they sometimes were—to develop, protect, and maintain their families and homes. Occasionally, as in the land seizures that pobladores have taken part in, such struggles would garner a great deal of public scrutiny. At other times, these attempts formed part of mundane, daily decisions and practices that hardly seem worthy of attention at all. But whatever the case, efforts to create and maintain a minimally acceptable home would reverberate in multiple domains. Such efforts have invariably been wrapped up within the great transformations, emblematic events, and intense conflicts that characterize Chilean history and the evolution of Santiago since the 1950s.